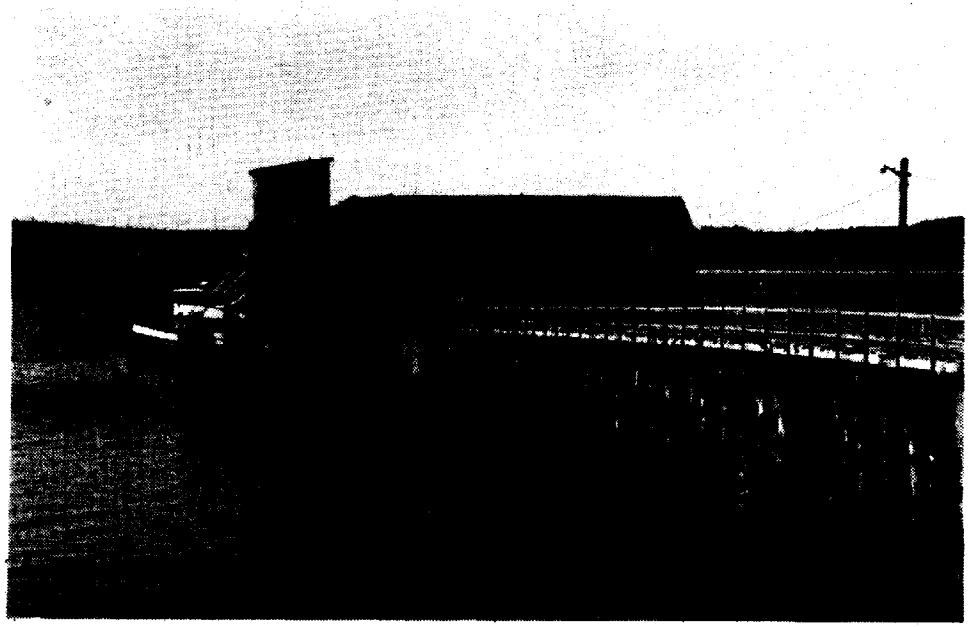

COUPEVILLE WATERFRONT STUDY

Dearborn/Smith Associates, Inc.

with Rich Untermann, Landscape Architect **Susan Heikkala, Urban Planner**

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A REPORT TO THE

TOWN OF COUPEVILLE

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I. INTRODUCTION

Situated on the south shore of Penn Cove on Whidbey Island, the Town of Coupeville is the hub of community activity on Central Whidbey, a role it has played since the late nineteenth century. (See Figure 1) With easy access both by water and the main highway, the small town had its beginning serving the needs of nearby farms, and today it continues to serve that function. Coupeville's growth has historically been linked to its waterfront. In addition to attracting residential and business development, the spectacular views and recreational opportunities of the shoreline act as a natural attraction for tourism. At the same time, eroding bluffs and unstable slopes which are characteristic of Whidbey Island's shoreline pose significant problems for the town.

Recognizing the special opportunities and constraints associated with its shoreline, the Town of Coupeville initiated the Coupeville Waterfront Study. The study was designed to address a range of objectives: economic development, resource protection, historic preservation, public access and recreation. As such, the recommendations presented in this report are designed to serve more than one purpose. They are aimed at preserving valuable shoreline resources, while at the same time promoting use and development which is in keeping with the goals and scale of the town.

The Waterfront Study was undertaken in conjunction with a similar study for the City of Langley, with funding by the federal Coastal Zone Management Program. It was completed in three phases: (1) Inventory and Analysis; (2) Preliminary Recommendations; and (3) Final Report and Recommendations. During the inventory phase, background information was collected and assessed, and several public meetings were held to identify significant issues. Preliminary recommendations to address the key issues were then prepared in draft form, allowing for public review and comment. In the third phase, this final report was prepared, incorporating revisions to the preliminary recommendations based on the input received.

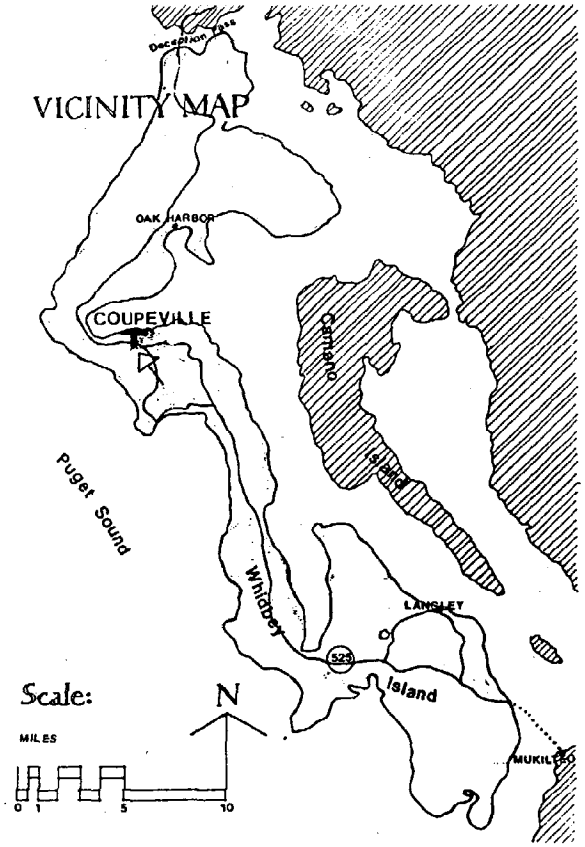


FIGURE 1

II. OVERVIEW OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

Existing shoreline conditions were assessed during the first phase of the waterfront study. The inventory focused on those features having the greatest bearing on waterfront use and development, highlighting assets and potential problems. Three working maps were prepared to illustrate these features: Generalized Land Use, Resource Assessment, and Shoreline Characteristics. In addition to conducting extensive field investigation and literature review, the project team met with elected officials, business leaders, and residents to gain an understanding of critical issues affecting the town's shoreline. These meetings revealed an active interest and a high level of community concern relating to future use and development of the shoreline.

During these initial visits to Coupeville, it became clear that the town has already taken significant steps toward preserving and capitalizing on its shoreline resources. An historic district and a design review process have been established to insure that new development is compatible with the town's historic character. The Festival Association has made a substantial contribution to the attractiveness of the downtown waterfront through its urban design and improvement program, which is being successfully implemented over time. In recognition of its shoreline erosion problems, the town has completed preliminary geologic maps of the shoreline and prepared a set of draft regulations to manage shoreline development. Rather than duplicate these efforts, this study was designed to build upon and add to these ongoing programs.

Waterfront Character

A variety of commercial, residential and recreational activities take place along Coupeville's shoreline, but the historic district is the town's focal point. Here, the old buildings which line Front Street were once the heart of a bustling trade center; now they house businesses serving an active tourist trade with antique stores, gift shops, restaurants, a tavern, a candy store, and the historical museum. A combination of transportation and economic factors led the commercial focus to shift from Front Street to Main Street. Today, many resident-oriented business uses -- grocery store, drug store, gas station, bank, post office, and the municipal and County offices -- are located along Main Street, which is also the entry route into Coupeville from Highway 20.

Outside the historic business district, Coupeville's shoreline is primarily residential, mixed with a few scattered farms. Near town, the lots are small and the homes are old, lending a turn-of-the century charm to the neighborhood. Further to the east and west, the homes are more dispersed and the shoreline takes on a rural, agricultural flavor. Unlike other shoreline towns where the waterfront acts as a magnet for all development activity, Coupeville's shore is not densely developed and many residences are centered around the Main Street business area and across Highway 20 in Prairie Center, rather than oriented toward the water. The location of the town park and the boat launch at either end of the downtown contribute to the open character of the shoreline, as do the narrow, undeveloped bluff edges next to the road along much of the shore.

Coupeville's quiet town character derives from its primary economic function as a service center, historically serving the surrounding farms of central Whidbey Island, and now serving residents and visitors who are attracted by these qualities. The rural Puget Sound setting, within reasonable proximity to Seattle, makes Coupeville ideal for tourists and others who are looking for recreation opportunities close to home. Also the town is becoming home to many

retirees who are drawn by the town's natural amenities and historic character.

Town Amenities

For the present, Coupeville's strongest assets are the natural amenities of a rural waterfront setting and a town center with a distinctive, architectural heritage. Any additional development in Coupeville should build upon and enhance these strengths:

- Water Orientation

  The downtown historic core and the residences along Front Street are oriented toward Penn Cove and the expansive vistas of Camano Island, the Cascades and Mt. Baker. Together, the gently sloping topography and a street grid that is perpendicular to the waterfront adds to the drama of the panorama. Open fields dotted by residences and farms and rimmed by forested ridges surround Coupeville to the south, west and east. The combination of fields, water and forest, create a pastoral setting for the small community.

  Coupeville's Festival Association has been active in promoting tourism and enhancing the link between the town and its waterfront. They have constructed viewing platforms and seating areas at several locations along Front Street as well as a view deck off Grace Street between Front and Coveland. In addition, they are working with the Port and the National Park Service to develop a distinctive entrance to the old Town Dock.

- Historic Character

  The old Town Dock is a striking feature of Coupeville's waterfront, and is a landmark that draws attention to Front Street. There, the concentration of the well maintained, older buildings gives Coupeville a special identity and is a major attraction for visitors. Like other towns that had their major growth spurt in the late 1800's, Coupeville has a wealth of old commercial buildings and residences in the variety of architectural styles that were prevalent during this era. Within this variety, there is a pleasing unity of scale and form. Most buildings have false fronts or pitched roofs and are similar in height and bulk, and most are built of wood and painted in shades of brown, red, yellow, blue or pink. Recognizing this valuable heritage, the town first established a historic waterfront district in 1965, and later, in 1978, established an Historic Review Board to review applications for changes to specific buildings or the character of the area based upon an adopted set of guidelines and design criteria. In 1981, the town revised the boundaries of the historic district, and replaced the Historic Review Board with a newly created Historic Advisory Committee.

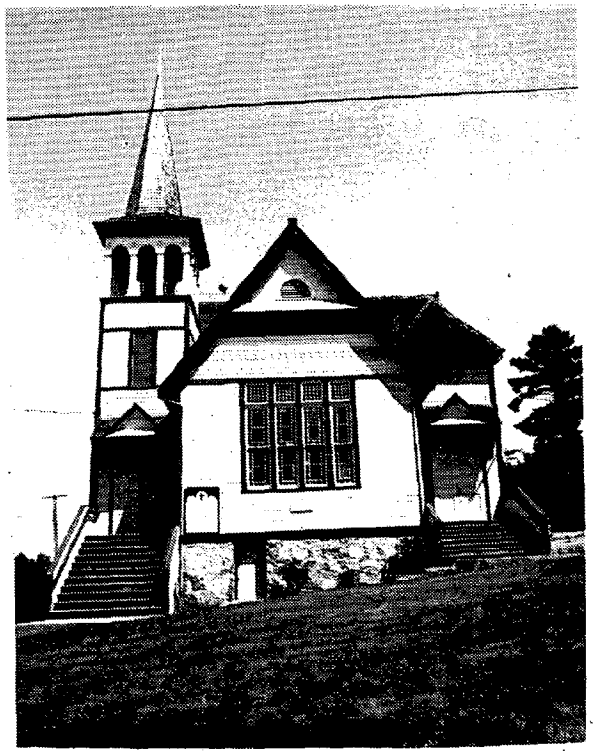
- Shoreline Access

  The Penn Cove shoreline is attractive for public use, but there are few places for public access since most waterfront land is privately owned. However, two public recreation areas are located at either end of Coupeville's downtown waterfront. On the west, the town park lies on a high bluff above the water, and the public boat launch adjoins the sewage treatment plant at the other end of Front Street.

Both areas are minimally developed but could be improved to promote more public use. Views are also important, and the bluffs provide opportunities for walks and drives overlooking the water.

Clearly Coupeville has the opportunity to actively promote its waterfront recreation potential, especially at the town park, boat launch and also at the town dock where the Port has recently installed four buoy moorages. Given its shoreline assets, Coupeville would do well to continue to develop its tourism and recreation potential and perhaps promote the town as a desirable retirement community.

Characteristic Architecture on Front Street



Saint Mary's Church

Features Limiting Shoreline Development

One of the major factors constraining development along Coupeville's waterfront is the instability of the shoreline. Much of the town lines the shore on medium to high bluffs (15' or over), and the Washington Shoreline Atlas designates the high bluff areas at either end of town as unstable. Sloughing and erosion problems plague most of the town's shoreline.

Over the years, Coupeville has had serious problems with bluff failure. Slides are apparent from the beach, old roads have disappeared in several locations, and Front Street between Main and Gould is also threatened. In some areas, private landowners have bulkheaded the toe of the slope which has apparently arrested shoreline retreat. In other areas this has not been effective, indicating other processes may be at work. Various studies have been completed examining causes of the problem, and a range of opinions have been expressed. It was beyond the scope of this study to provide the answer to this problem, which is critical to future use of the waterfront. However, previous work was examined, and the issue was discussed with geology and engineering experts to develop a better definition of the problem and determine the next steps appropriate for Coupeville.

The limited capacities of the town's water and sewer systems have limited growth in Coupeville. Inadequate capacity, stormwater infiltration, and inadequate treatment have resulted in dumping raw or inadequately treated sewage into Penn Cove. A moratorium was subsequently placed on new sewer connections and utility rates were raised to assist in making system improvements. Plans are now well underway for constructing an expanded sewage treatment plant, and it is expected to be underway late in the summer of 1982.

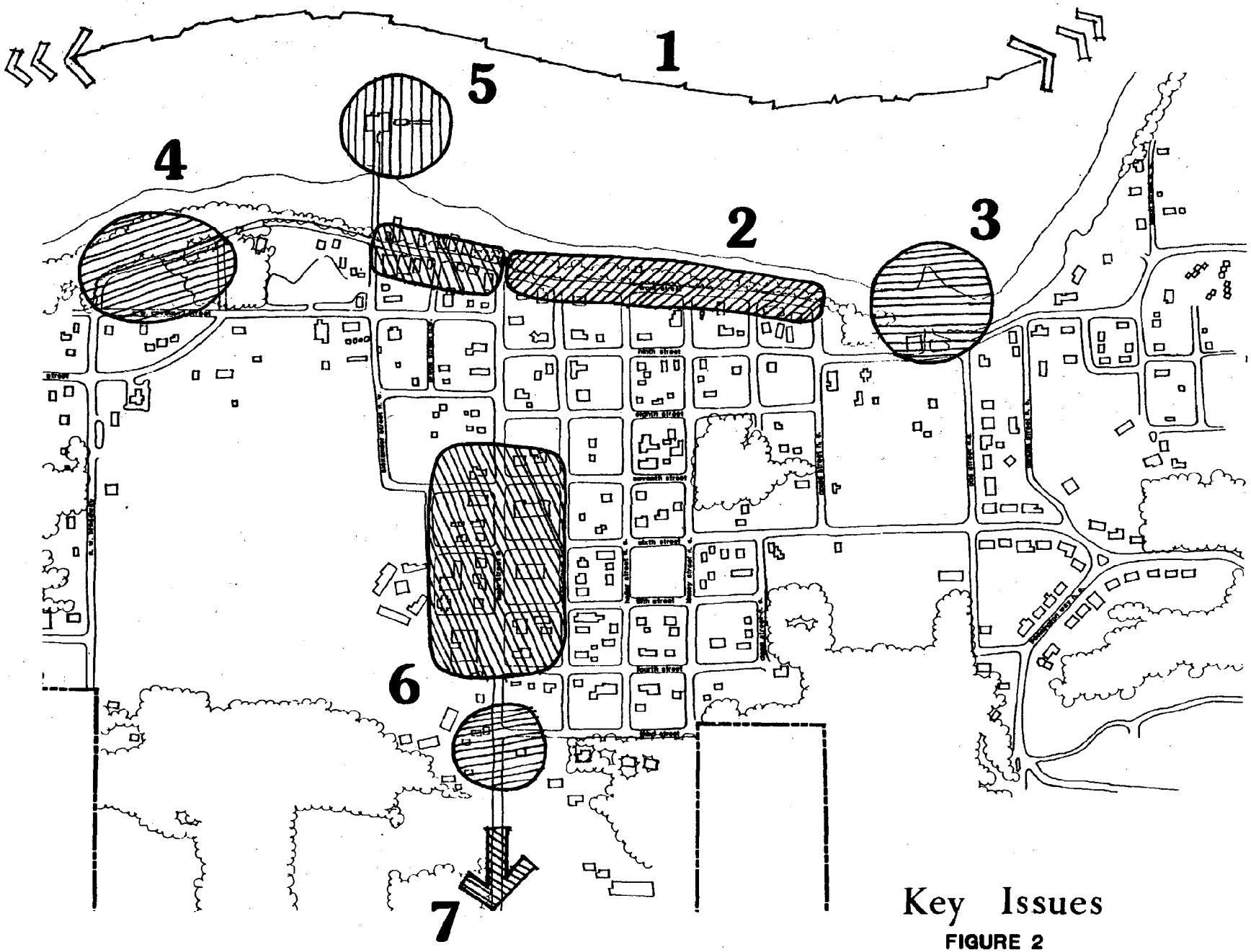
Other factors affecting development are primarily economic. Coupeville is a small town with limited public financial resources at a time when state and federal funds are also in extremely short supply. Thus, waterfront improvements and other developments need to be tailored to the expected availability of local resources and private initiative.

III. ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The preliminary analysis and meetings with town officials, residents, and businessmen identified eight issues of primary concern relating to the Coupeville waterfront, as illustrated in Figure 2. The issues include:

1. SHORELINE EROSION AND BLUFF INSTABILITY
2. FRONT STREET SLIPPAGE
3. BOAT LAUNCH AND SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT EXPANSION
4. TOWN PARK
5. TOWN DOCK
6. TOWN ENTRY AND MAIN STREET
7. LINK TO EBEY'S LANDING AND THE KEYSTONE FERRY
8. TOWN AND HISTORIC COMMERCIAL CENTERS

In the following sections, each issue is discussed and recommendations are made. Implementation and funding strategies are discussed in the final chapter.



Key Issues

FIGURE 2

1 Shoreline Erosion and Bluff Instability

Landslide Below Front Street

Background

Shoreline erosion and bluff instability were identified as significant community concerns relating to both existing and future waterfront development. Although reliable bluff retreat rates have not been calculated, historical evidence of the problem includes the loss of a portion of Front Street (in the vicinity of the boat launch) and extensive landslide/slumpage debris visible in many locations along the shoreline. While there are no simple solutions, a better understanding of the causes and extent of the hazard is critical to properly managing future shoreline development and taking corrective actions to protect existing development.

There are three basic factors contributing to shoreline erosion and sloughing in Coupeville:

- Bluffs comprised of older, cracked sediments which have been weakened by vertical fracturing;
- Wave action undercutting the toe of the slope leading to slippage of the sediments above, and removing collapsed materials from the toe of the slope; and
- Surface water flowing over the edge of bluffs, causing erosion and superficial slides.

Some basic geologic mapping of the Coupeville shoreline, describing subsurface materials, and evidence of slides or instability problems has been completed by a geology graduate student (Milliken report). However, this data has not been analyzed to determine the specific causes, and

relative importance of the various causes, of instability along the shoreline or to identify corrective and protective measures. Although the Milliken report concludes that groundwater drainage through the fractured sediments is more significant than other factors, Soil Conservation District and Department of Natural Resources staff believe that wave action is the dominant factor. It is agreed that the specific causes of erosion and instability are not uniform along the shoreline, but rather vary by location.

While Island County has a review procedure for development in flood and landslide areas, Coupeville's development codes do not include standards relating to unstable and actively eroding shoreline areas. This will be of concern to the town since communities can be considered liable for damages suffered by private property owners where hazards are known to exist and appropriate government action has not been taken. Reasonable regulations developed with expert advice have generally been considered adequate to serve this purpose.

Recommendations

A two pronged approach is recommended in which: (1) the town undertakes additional studies to better define the shoreline hazard; and then (2) in hazardous areas, individual property owners are required to complete site-specific studies and incorporate setbacks, drainage controls, and other conditions needed to insure safe development.

1. The following studies are suggested to better define the shoreline problem and assess corrective measures:

(A) Evaluation and field verification of existing geologic data by an engineering geologist knowledgable in shoreline processes. The analysis should indicate specific causes of erosion and instability along the shoreline and should identify the actively eroding shoreline areas. It should also identify a range of structural and non-structural measures for development in areas having these conditions. This information would be useful in preparing shoreline development regulations, alerting prospective builders to such shoreline conditions, and would also provide a basis for Coupeville to evaluate development proposals on the shoreline. State resource agency staff may be able to help in this effort.

(B) If there are shoreline areas where instability is determined to be drainage-related, it may be necessary to complete a study of upland drainage. The study would examine upland drainage characteristics such as existing drainage channels, surface water patterns, groundwater flow, and underground springs draining into the identified problem areas. Appropriate corrective measures could then be identified to address these problems.

2. Coupeville should adopt an ordinance establishing development standards and a review process for those areas identified as potentially hazardous. At a minimum, setbacks from the edge of the bluff, bulkheading standards, and drainage controls to mitigate erosion and landslide impacts should be included. Because it is difficult to establish a uniform setback appropriate for all portions of the shoreline, Coupeville may want to provide for variances from the adopted standard based on detailed, site-specific engineering studies. Such studies should be the responsibility of the property owner seeking a variance.

Several local efforts are now underway to determine an appropriate setback standard. The State Department of Natural Resources is working with Island County and several other counties to develop a reasonable formula. Options being considered would base the setback on the height of the bluff, or a percentage of the height plus a standard margin of safety. The town can benefit from the state and county work in developing its standards.

The recommended approach is intended to provide flexibility to respond to variable conditions along the shoreline, while insuring that critical bluff stabilization and human safety issues are addressed. Developers would be alerted to potentially unstable conditions and could choose to either locate buildings outside the potentially hazardous area, or employ professional expertise needed to build safely close to the shore. In some cases it might be efficient for property owners to arrange for joint studies addressing a number of neighboring sites subject to similar conditions to develop engineering specifications for one stretch of shoreline. After further geologic analysis of the areawide problems (Recommendation #1 above) is completed, the town should re-evaluate and revise, if necessary, the size of the shoreline area affected by its development regulation and consider adoption of more specific development standards.

Front Street Slippage 2

Background

The downtown shoreline from Alexander to Main Street, along Front Street, appears to be stabilized by existing structures and is secure at present. However, the bluff along Front Street from Main Street to Gould Street is a problem area. The bluff has retreated to within several feet of the road in places, and there is evidence of continuing slippage and erosion. The road itself shows signs of settling, especially above two drainage outfalls which carry surface water to the beach. These outfall facilities are undersized and the slopes behind the pipes have therefore been eroded. Sewer and water facilities under the road may be threatened if corrective actions are not taken.

As discussed above, there is no clear consensus on the cause of this slippage -- wave action at the toe of the bank, tidal saturation of the toe of the bank, subsurface drainage surfacing on the bank, aggravated by vibrations from passing vehicles, or surface runoff eroding the bank. There is evidence in places of all causes, but it appears that the most significant factor is wave erosion of the toe of the bank, causing undermining and slippage of the overlying glacial sediments. Pinpointing the cause and appropriate solutions to the problem is complicated by the variation in severity of storms and tidal action from year to year. However, the significance of wave action is demonstrated by the one cottage constructed behind a small bulkhead on the beach at the base of the bluff, which is retaining the bank nicely.

The shoreline from Main to Gould is in need of immediate attention. Several alternatives are open to Coupeville. First, as a means of bank stabilization, the town could construct a large concrete bulkhead all along the toe of the slope. The City of Langley took this approach with the development of Seawall Park, which has succeeded in arresting much of the shoreline erosion. However, major bulkheading is likely to be expensive, controversial, unattractive, and out of scale with a small town such as Coupeville.

Another alternative is to protect the toe of the slope using more modest means. Rip-rapping has been shown to be effective at certain locations in the Coupeville area. Other low-cost devices are being evaluated as part of the Shoreline Erosion Control Demonstration Project at Oak Harbor. Both sand-cement bag revetments and gabion mat revetments appear to be effective in reducing erosion with minimal structural damages. These devices still require public expenditure, are unattractive and do not enhance the use of the shoreline.

Recommendations

Two features are likely to characterize any solution to this problem: (1) Protection of the toe of the slope, and (2) minimizing surface water erosion or other destabilizing factors at the top of the bluff. Several options should be considered:

1. A small scale solution in keeping with the town's character would be to encourage land owners to build small cottages at the back of the beach, constructed on or behind small retaining walls, similar to the cottage that already exists. (See Figure 3) Assuming that geologic evaluation does not reveal any major problems which would restrict

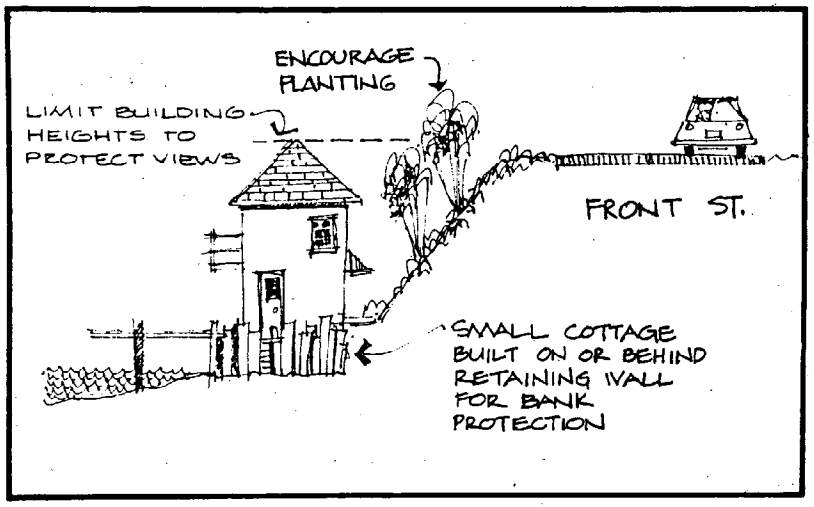


FIGURE 3. Beach Housing to Reduce Bank Slippage

this type of development, Coupeville could encourage housing on these prime beach sites. This action would require a change in the zoning code to allow construction on a substandard lot size. Construction standards would need to be developed for the bulkheads. Adequate provision for surface drainage and maintenance of slope vegetation would also be required to help stabilize the bank. Design guidelines would be included to limit building height in order to preserve views from the street, and to address parking needs atop the bluff. In exchange for the code exception to construct on a substandard lot, the town could obtain public access along the beach in front of the cottages.

It is recognized that this option would represent a change in policy for the town, not only to allow but to encourage housing on the beach. While this type of development would not be appropriate or necessary in most shoreline locations, in this particular area it could offer significant benefits to the town. Given the investments already made by the town in road improvements and utilities atop the bluff, some corrective action is needed. This option involves private property owners in the solution to the problem, offering them development potential at a scenic shoreline location, but at the same time preserving views from above. Another indirect benefit to the town would be to increase residential population near the historic waterfront core, strengthening the economic base for community-oriented businesses and service in this area.

This option would require close cooperation between the town and the affected property owners. If all the property owners were not interested in building on their beach lots in the near future, shoreline protection would be incomplete. To address this concern and provide for bluff stabilization, the town and property owners could consider forming a Local Improvement District (L.I.D.). Both town and private money could be contributed. Waterfront property owners would be given a set time of, perhaps, five years in which to build on the beach. If within that time they construct a beach cottage, a portion of L.I.D. funds would be used toward their bulkhead. If they chose not to build, the City would use the funds to stabilize the toe of the slope with rip-rap. If at a later date these owners decide to build, they would need to absorb the entire cost of bulkhead construction.

It may also be possible to vacate, sell or lease street ends at Center, Haller, Kinney and Clapp to provide additional land and incentive for private development as well as additional funds to support the L.I.D.* In order to maintain public access to the beach, at least one of the street ends should be retained for public use and developed as a beach access.

2. If it is determined to be a significant problem, surface water erosion of the bluff faces could be minimized and vehicle weight and vibration reduced by changing Front Street to one way in the eastbound direction from Main Street east to Gould. Residents of the neighborhood could access their houses from Main Street to Front Street, with a return via Ninth Street. Traffic to and from the boat launch could be encouraged to use Ninth Street, which would remain two way, by placing a directional sign at the corner of Main and Ninth Street. This would help reduce heavy traffic on Front Street. Closing the west-bound lane would eliminate the most damaging vibrations and vehicle weight, and would also allow construction of a simple view walk and sitting area along the top of the bluff (Recommendation #3 below). Parking pockets to serve the beach cottages could be developed. Construction of a curb on the north side could direct water to catchment areas for proper overbank disposal.

3. The stretch of Front Street between Main and Gould Streets could also be improved for pedestrian use, creating a more inviting link between downtown and the boat launch. The least expensive approach would be to paint a stripe designating the northern half of the existing street for pedestrian use. An alternative would be to construct a modest, raised concrete sidewalk, with several benches and small trees (placed to minimize view blockage, while framing the view) to make the street more attractive for tourists viewing the Cove and beyond.

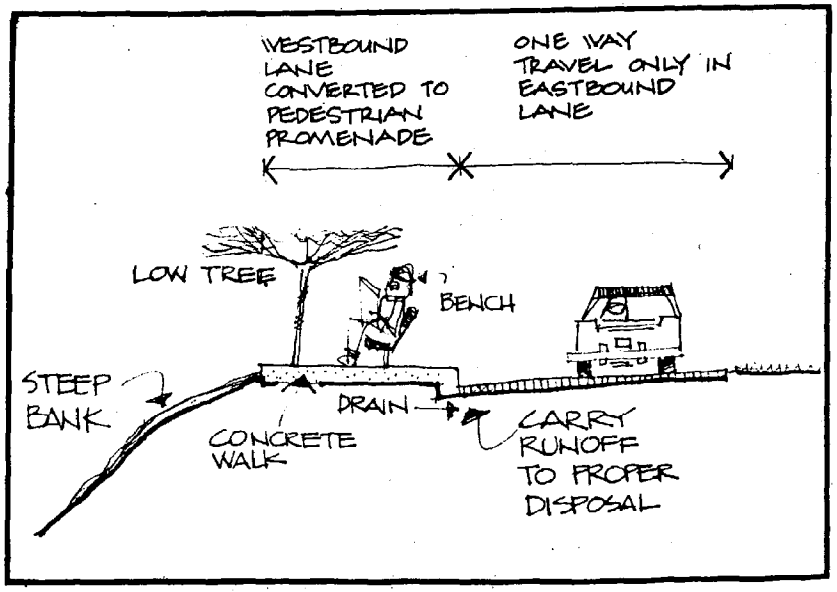


FIGURE 4. Front Street Promenade

* The sale of street ends may be restricted by RCW 35.79.039 which limits a town's ability to vacate streets which abut a body of salt or fresh water unless it is for a public purpose (including viewpoint or recreational), or the land is zoned industrial. It still may be possible to vacate and sell the properties as long as views are maintained, access is developed at one or more points, and access is maintained along the beach. If not, the town may still be able to offer a long-term (100-year) lease on these properties. The town must examine these legal questions prior to taking any action on the street ends.

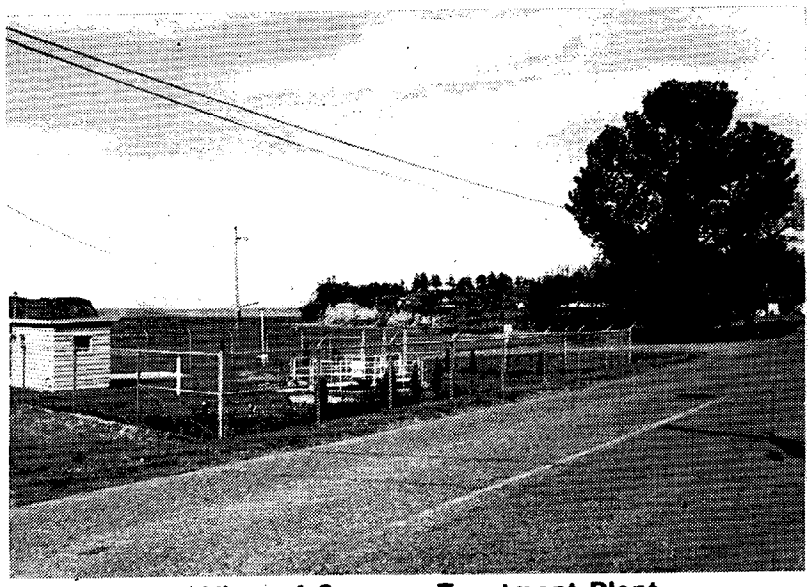
A pedestrian promenade like that illustrated in Figure 4, would be of a more urban scale and character than the town's existing improvements, but it would create an inviting and more clearly defined walkway, which could become a strong tourist attraction. A sign at the corner of Main and Front Streets could encourage people to stroll on the promenade. In addition, by banking the sidewalk toward the street, additional surface water control could be realized if this is determined to be a significant factor in bluff slippage. The promenade would also be an attraction to encourage beach housing below. Selling the street end lots may afford funds for this project.

4. The drainage outfall pipes which are currently causing erosion on the surface of the bank and road settling, particularly at Gould and Clapp Streets, should be redesigned and properly re-installed to correct these localized erosion problems.

Boat Launch and Sewage Treatment Plant Expansion 3

Background

Water access is a key to enhancing tourism, and presently most of the Coupeville shoreline is privately owned. The boat launch is one of the few existing points of public access to the water. As such, it could play an important role in providing both access to the waters of Penn Cove and a recreational beach. In addition, it offers views of Mount Baker, Camano Island and the rural countryside around Coupeville, and is a short walk from the center of town. However, the area is in need of improvement. Vehicular traffic needs to be separated from recreation use, and some beach development and landscaping would help make the area more attractive for picnicking and lounging. Expansion of the sewage treatment plant next door will consume some of the boat launch area, and should be closely monitored to minimize the plant's visual and olfactory impact on the park. The town has recently established a committee to coordinate boat launch improvements with the sewage treatment plant expansion. This committee should provide guidance so the boat launch will benefit from the improvements to the site.



View of Sewage Treatment Plant Looking Toward Boat Launch

Recommendations

Several actions are suggested to improve the boat launch, as illustrated in Figure 5, and described below:

1. Define auto maneuvering and parking areas with curbs or anchored logs. The present driving area is excessively large and limits pedestrian/recreation use, while curbing could still allow sufficient automobile maneuvering and parking area. Presently, plans for the sewage treatment plant expansion include a paved access driveway to the plant. If this were eliminated, these funds could be diverted towards developing and grading a gravel pad as a development staging site which, when the sewage treatment plant is completed, could be used for the boat launching and parking area. The new coordinating committee should work with the contractor as construction gets underway this summer.

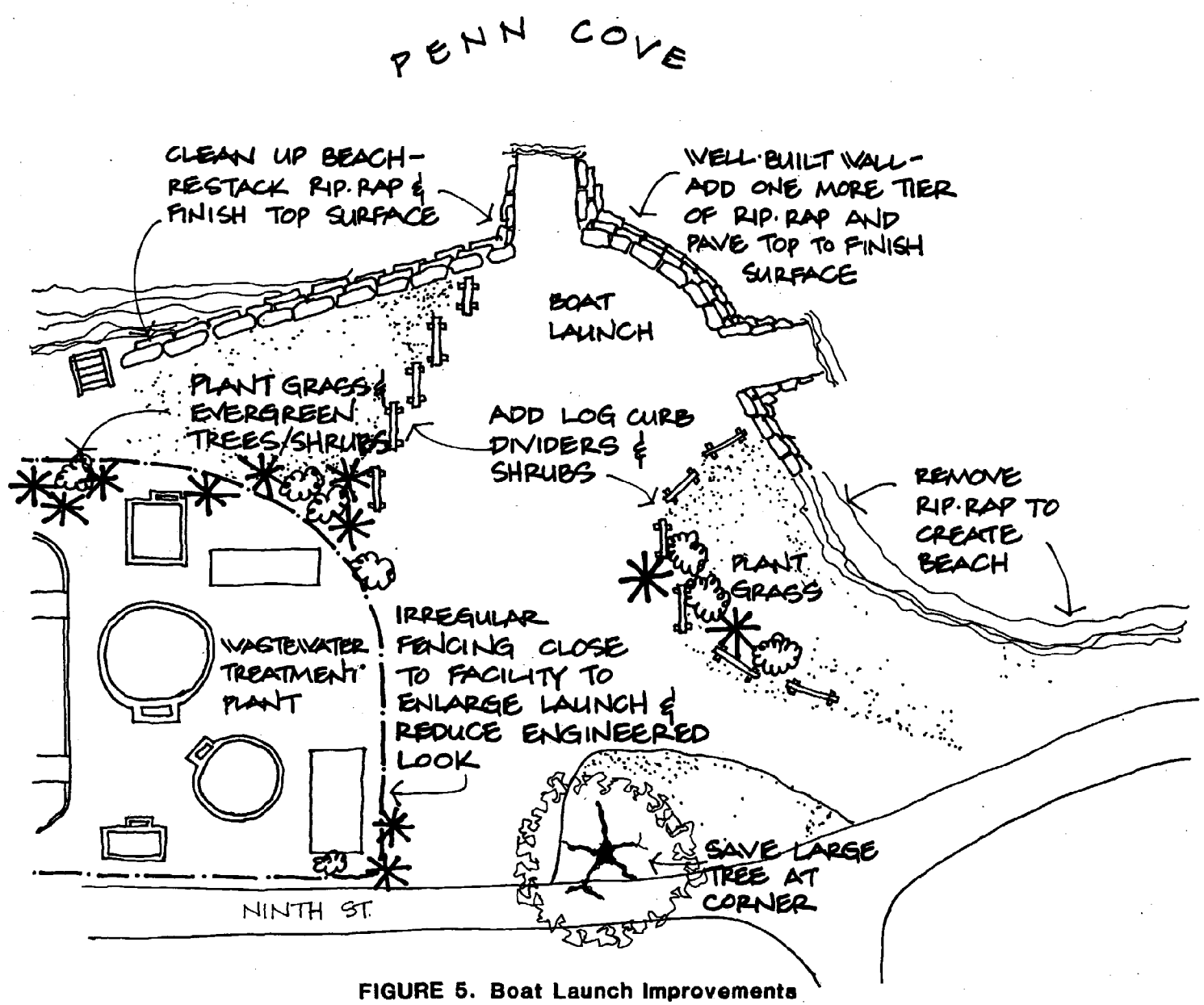


FIGURE 5. Boat Launch Improvements

2. Encourage development of a beach on the east side of the spit. The existing lawn sloping towards the water is pleasant, and could be improved by removing the concrete rip rap and allowing a natural beach to develop. Some sand/small gravel fill may also be required to improve beach quality. Wind patterns and land configuration suggest that beach erosion is not a serious problem at this point, and that the concrete/rock rip rap could be selectively removed and added to the launch area to the north. This would result in a smoother transition between lawn and beach. Enlarging the lawn and planting a row of shrubs next to the drive area would screen that area, and give the beach some enclosure and shelter from the west wind.

3. The west side of the spit has the best beach, good views of the town dock, and afternoon sun, but is subject to direct wind and potential wave damages. Pulling back the fence at the northeast corner of the sewage treatment plant and rounding the edges, along with the overall reorganization of parking at the launch, will provide room to plant grass and shrubs and to make an additional lawn area. The rip rap that is now scattered haphazardly on the beach could be restacked neatly, and perhaps moved out an additional 10 feet from shore. This would provide additional lawn space and easier, more convenient beach access. A backhoe and some community effort could accomplish this with little difficulty.

4. The shoreline edges of the vehicular manuevering space should be squared and finished. The space between the two ramps demonstrates an attractive way to protect and finish the shore edge. There, the rubble is stacked vertically and straight, and cemented with surplus concrete. All the edges of the area should be finished in the same manner, and the top surface paved so it is smooth and uniform. The Port might seek state funds to complete this area properly.

5. Adjust the fence around the treatment plant to reduce the fenced area, minimize the regularity of fencing, and integrate it with the existing land forms. Curved fence sections would help to soften the edge. Other fencing materials might also be considered while recognizing the need for plant security. A brown, vinyl clad chain link fence would be an improvement over steel, but a wooden fence might also work as an option. The sewage treatment plant landscaping will be handled separately from project construction and can be coordinated with the boat launch improvements. Initial contacts have been made with the landscape architect for the sewage treatment plant indicate that a cooperative plan can be developed. Native vegetation including evergreens, wild rose, and snowberry, should be used to create a more natural and less manicured look. They should be planted in informal massings to blend in with the surroundings. Even blackberry vines might be allowed to "take over" the northwest or southwest corners which would screen the plant and provide a source of fruit in the summer.

4 Town Park

Background

The town park is an important community asset, serving as a major public open space in close proximity to downtown. However, visitors to Coupeville who are not familiar with the town would not know the park exists, since the only pedestrian access from downtown is along an unmarked gravel road.

The park contains a playfield with good sun exposure, tennis court, a picnic area, cookhouse, and an unmarked trail to the beach. In order to make better use of these resources, there is a need to enhance the connection between the park and downtown. Also, some minor site improvements in the park would help to make this public space more attractive and better exploit the park's shoreline location.

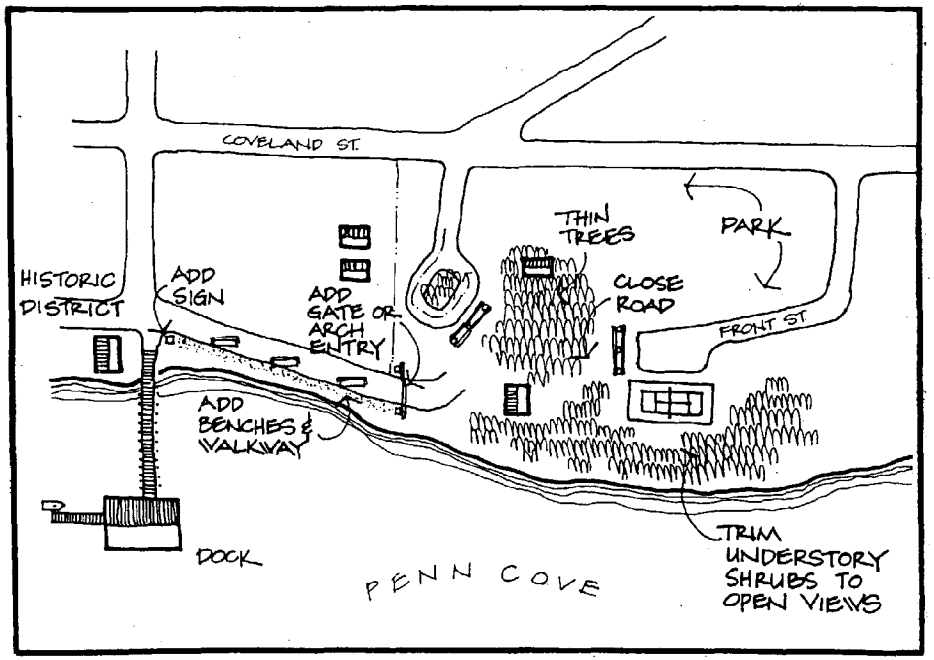


FIGURE 6. Town Park Improvements

Recommendations

1. Several actions would help enhance pedestrian access to the park from downtown. (See Figure 6)

(A) A sign directing visitors to the park should be added at the intersection of Alexander and Front Streets. Directions to the park might also be included in the informational display at the pocket park planned for the foot of the public dock. Constructing a log gate, or archway near the park boundary atop the hill would create a clear park entrance and could tie in with the log architecture of the Indian Canoe Shed, the blockhouse, and wharf entry improvements.

(B) Improving the walk along Front Street would enhance public access into the park. Several benches and, possibly, a walkway could be added along the road, creating a sense of continuity along the route and capitalizing on the spectacular views which are already a town attraction. This action would require obtaining an easement across private property, since a portion of the street is not dedicated public right-of-way. An easement could be negotiated with the property owner, purchased, or required as a condition of future development approval. (The property is currently zoned commercial.)

2. Several actions illustrated in Figure 6 could be taken to enhance the attractiveness of the park itself, including:

(A) Some understory brush between the road and bank should be trimmed or removed to open the view of Penn Cove from the park. The lower limbs of the trees have been removed, but the shrubs block the view. Shrubs on the edge of the bluff should be trimmed rather than removed in order to open the view without increasing bluff erosion problems.

(B) Through use of the park loop road should be blocked. The road provides access into the park, but it is not necessary that it run through the park. Several anchored log curbs could be used to restrict traffic, and the old road would soon return to grass, uniting the two sides of the park. A small parking area could be provided near the tennis courts and a turn-around developed near the cookhouse. This action would open up more area for recreational use and would help tie together areas of the park which are now split and disrupted by the road.

(C) Consideration should be given to thinning the tall trees in the vicinity of the cookhouse. The tall evergreen trees are very attractive but make this part of the park dark and damp; some sensitive thinning would retain the forested feeling while making the area lighter and warmer. (The deed conveying the park is the town may contain certain restrictions on tree removal and this should be clarified prior to any cutting.)

(D) The trail connecting the park and the beach should be marked. This is one of the few developed public access points along the Coupeville shoreline, but is "lost" in the dense vegetation on the bluff. Some distinctive signing, both on the beach and in the park, will enhance the relationship between the park and beach, and also create a pleasant loop walk up Front Street into the park with a return downtown via the beach. Use of this trail should be monitored to insure that it does not contribute to bank erosion, and that the trail is adequately maintained.

5 Town Dock

Background

The town dock is an important historic landmark in Coupeville and a prominent symbol of the town's identity. It is the last remaining steamer facility of its kind in the Puget Sound region. In recognition of its significance, the Port, the National Park Service and the Festival Association are currently working on major improvements to the wharf's entry. Improvements to the dock itself are also needed to restore and maintain it.

Recommendations

The more economic uses which can be made of the wharf and harbor area, the more feasible will be its maintenance and preservation. Suggested options include:

1. Promote the use of the buoy moorages anchored off the dock. Last year, the Port installed four buoy moorages to encourage use of the dock and harbor. Their success is untested because the new facilities have not been publicized and this year's boating season is just getting underway. The Port should advertise the moorages in sailing magazines and local boating information clearinghouses. If the moorages prove to be popular, others can be added for a modest cost.* Also, buoys do not have the same intrusive visual impact as a fixed slip marina. The moorages would help attract additional tourists into Coupeville -- which is a pleasant day's sail from Seattle. The fees collected for the moorage would help offset dock maintenance costs or be directed towards the dock restoration.

2. Add support services for boaters, such as a small marine supply store or grocery on the dock. (This might also be provided on shore to attract town residents as well as transients).

3. Encourage the development of small scale commercial uses such as a small restaurant or museum on the wharf. Currently, the Port is investigating the possibility of mooring the Preston, an old mosquito fleet steamer, at the foot of the wharf and converting her into a small museum. Projects such as this require both financial resources and dedicated community supporters. Coupeville could take on the dock restoration as a major community effort, sponsoring events or projects to benefit the restoration as well as seeking sources of grant funds. The Festival Association could spearhead these activities, in cooperation with the Historic Society and Park Service. Close coordination with the Fire Marshall will be needed to insure that any proposed development will not exceed the fire exit capacity of the dock ramp.

4. Encourage the maintenance of the dock's architectural integrity. Any alterations to the exterior of the wharf structure, such as adding windows, should be limited to the northern facade, out of view from the town to preserve the historic character of the building. In addition, proposed improvements to the dock entry should be sensitive to the existing dock design, using similar building lines, simple post and rail fencing, wood construction, and a compatible color scheme.

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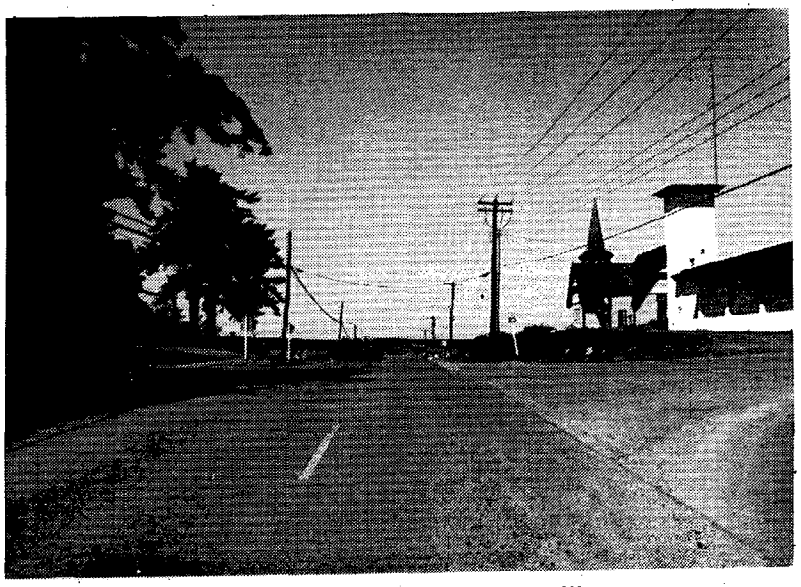
* The four buoys were installed for approximately $3,000.00.

Town Entry and Main Street 6

Background

The principal access route into Coupeville, down Main Street from Highway 20, is important because, as the first introduction to the town, it sets a tone for visitors heading to the waterfront. However, this entry is not as attractive as other parts of the historic town, and could be improved. Block-like public buildings such as the County Courthouse and Annex are out of scale with the traditional small pitched-roof building forms. Large off-street parking lots are inconsistent with the traditional streetscape that consists of sidewalk, lawn, and building with parking behind, and the lack of sidewalks along several stretches makes walking unsafe and uncomfortable. A street that invites walking will be more attractive to tourists and more convenient for Coupeville's growing retiree population. It will also foster a better connection between the waterfront historic area and the commercial activities on Main Street.



Main Street at Crest of Hill

Recommendations

The suggested improvements for Main Street, as shown in Figure 7, attempt to improve the visual entrance to Coupeville and improve conditions for pedestrians along Main Street. They include:

1. Develop a "Town Entry" between the Fire Station and St. Mary's Church. Six to ten large fir trees could be nestled in the juniper bank to the west of the Fire Station. The fir trees would enclose the view driving north on Main Street just before it dramatically opened at the crest of the hill by the historic church, revealing an expansive, surprise view of the town, Penn Cove and beyond.

2. Construct a sidewalk with deciduous street trees on the west side of Main Street from 6th Avenue southward. This would define the street edge and help organize street and parking space, and also increase on-street parking. The sidewalk would separate the existing parking areas from Main Street, necessitating an entrance/exit from the cross streets, and/or a break in the sidewalk to allow one defined entrance from Main Street. There is ample room for such a walkway, and it is a traditional design form in small towns to have a sidewalk and plantings which separate parking lots from the street. This would also create a physical and visual link with the existing sidewalk and residential landscaping along Main Street between Coveland and Sixth.

3. Encourage construction of a walk along Main Street in front of the County Courthouse and the Post Office. The Courthouse sidewalk would be relatively simple to design because it would not cut through an existing parking lot. A walk in front of the Post Office would necessitate loss of several parking spaces from the existing parking lot; however, most of the spaces could be recovered as parallel on-street parking. If these walks are constructed, 7th Avenue should be narrowed at the intersection with Main Street by extending the walkways into 7th Avenue. This would increase the sidewalk's continuity and give better definition to the parking areas on 7th Avenue, which now appear to be an extension of the street. Sidewalks on the east side of the street have second priority over those on the west. However, in any case, large deciduous trees should be planted along the street facade of the public office buildings to help soften their large and imposing bulk.

4. Coming into town from the west, the "Welcome to Historic Coupeville" sign on Coveland Street is often hidden by parked cars on the street. A simple measure to better mark this entrance would be to move the sign about 30 feet to the west, just to the west of the telephone pole. This site would provide for better visibility.

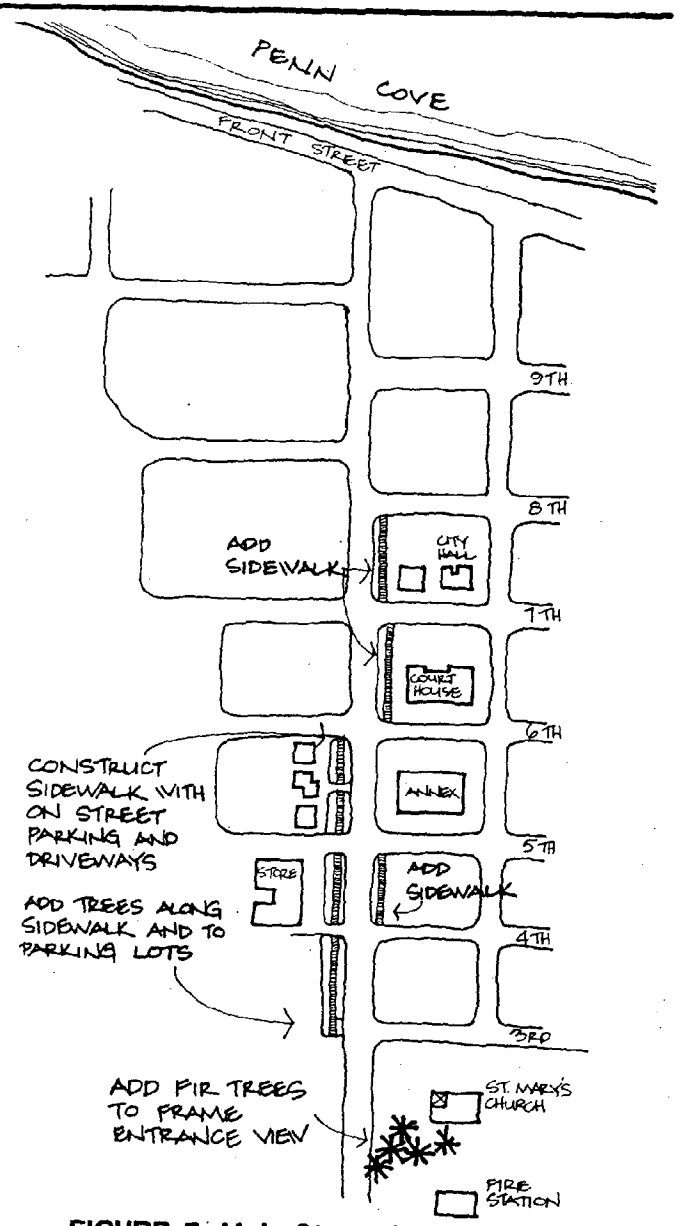


FIGURE 7. Main Street Improvements

Link to Ebey's Landing and the Keystone Ferry

7

Background

Coupeville's proximity to Ebey's Landing and its inclusion in the National Historical Reserve represent a significant asset and an opportunity for expanding tourism in the town. By enhancing this linkage, Coupeville could take better advantage of the area's historical, scenic, educational, and natural resources.

Recommendations

The following measures are suggested:

1. Support the National Park Service efforts to improve the identified scenic route and between Coupeville and Ebey's Landing. Specially designed signs to direct pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists along the route would be helpful. Consideration should be given to road improvements which would make the route safer for bicycles and pedestrians, including signs warning drivers of bicycle use.

2. Link the Keystone Ferry, Ebey's Landing and Coupeville with bus service. On the ballot this fall will be a bond issue to support the Island County Public Transportation Board Authority. If approved, funds could perhaps be earmarked for service between these three locations,which would expand the tourism possibilities in the area. A link to historic Port Townsend via the ferry could also be promoted.

3. Encourage the operation of a bicycle rental business near the entry to the town's wharf. This enterprise could be undertaken as a private concession, or possibly by the Chamber of Commerce or Festival Association as a measure to promote tourism.

4. Support the publication of informational/promotional brochures describing the attractions between Coupeville and Ebey's Landing, now being prepared by the National Park Service. The brochure could be designed as a self-guided tour and include a map of alternative routes to Ebey's Landing, indicate points of interest along the way, and provide historical background on the development of Coupeville in relation to Ebey's Landing and Whidbey Island. Points of interest could include information about local farming (e.g., outstanding agricultural land or where to sample local produce) and natural processes (shoreline features) as well as designated historical structures and sites. Other schemes might include driving or biking historical tours connecting Coupeville with Port Townsend or making a tour of Whidbey Island.

8 Town and Historic Commercial Centers

Background

Although it was not the specific focus of this study, some general characteristics of land use in downtown Coupeville were noted because of their potential effect on the waterfront activity and development. A striking characteristic of the existing development pattern is the separation between the tourist-oriented historic district on the waterfront, and the commercial strip along Main Street which provides goods and services for the townspeople. The shift in dominance between the two commercial areas reflects historic changes in transportation patterns and local economic factors. Coupeville has always relied upon both access to waterborne transportation and a road connecting the town to Ebey's Landing for the movement of goods and people. In the early years, town development focused on the waterfront, but later, the car replaced steamers as the main mode of transportation and some of the small waterfront buildings and lots could no longer accommodate business needs. The center of commercial activity thus began to shift to Main Street where accessible land was readily available.

Today, this separation poses a potential threat to the waterfront, as evidenced by the historic area's quiet, empty streets during the off-season and off-hours of the day and several vacant lots and businesses. Better integration of tourist and town commercial activities on the waterfront is needed to ensure the area's long-term economic health and vitality.

Recommendations

Toward this end, the following measures are suggested:

1. Encourage town-oriented services and businesses to develop on vacant lots in downtown. Grocery stores, drug stores and movie theaters are good examples of uses which would attract more townspeople to the waterfront and could be designed to fit in with the other historic buildings. While the town cannot dictate the character of commercial uses, it can promote new uses and help to set a tone for future development. The Chamber of Commerce could potentially assist the town by seeking out appropriate businesses. Additional infilling on vacant lots near the waterfront would both add to the economic vitality of the area and enhance the area's sense of community.

2. Encourage some residential development near the waterfront. The vacant lots currently for sale on either end of downtown are particularly critical to the future of the historic waterfront. While currently zoned commercial, the town may want to consider encouraging multi-family housing or a mixed use development on these lots to bring more people, and therefore more economic activity, close to the waterfront. This could be done so that the new buildings were compatible with the scale, form and material of the existing buildings in the area. Multi-family housing could also take advantage of the town's strong attraction for retired people. Another option for increasing residential development near the waterfront is to encourage housing on the beach below Front Street, as discussed earlier.

3. Encourage the dispersal of public offices. A number of public offices are currently concentrated in several adjoining blocks on the east side of Main Street. This concentration is uninviting for pedestrians because of its scale and the lack of pedestrian improvements. (Suggested improvements are discussed above). Any future expansion or relocation of public offices could be encouraged to occur in the historic waterfront area. The Post Office is, for example, ready for expansion, offering the opportunity to change location. This relocation would help to break up the existing complex of public offices and bring more daily and resident activity to the waterfront. Downtown parking improvements planned by the Festival Association should help to resolve any parking problems which would hamper such a move.

4. Add some finishing touches to the existing viewpoints. The Festival Association is doing an admirable job of adding design improvements to the waterfront. One minor suggestion for "improving the improvements" is to paint the wooden fences of the existing viewpoints white, and add some flowering vines. These actions would make the viewpoints even more inviting and create some continuity between them.

IV. FUNDING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the recommendations contained in this report will involve public agency participation at the local, state, and federal levels. Because government funding is extremely limited at present, a spirit of public/private cooperation will be critical to the success of the projects. The Festival Association has demonstrated the significant role which community organizations can play in accomplishing public improvements in Coupeville. The proposed actions generally involve low-cost, small scale improvements, many of which could be spear-headed by individuals or community organizations with minimal public funding. The proposed improvements will likely need to be staged over a number of years as funding becomes available and the public versus private costs are shared and adjusted accordingly.

Capital Improvements

Given the limited resources available today for public improvement projects, funding priorities must be carefully evaluated. It is recommended that improvements to address the Front Street erosion problem between Gould and Main Streets receive the highest priority. This problem is fast becoming a critical threat to Front Street and, if not corrected, could jeopardize the town's utilities, vehicular access to local residences, and the opportunity to enhance this route as a pedestrian link to the boat launch.

Although funds are limited, there continue to be several sources of grant funds or loans available. Competition for these funds will be stiff, and careful documentation of need is required. It is also important that each application demonstrate "project readiness", or the town's ability to proceed quickly with a project. Potential funding sources for proposed improvements are summarized below:

- The federal Community Development Block Grant program continues to be the main source of funds available to local governments for financing public improvements. It is recommended that Coupeville include in its 1983 or subsequent Block Grant applications measures to address critical erosion and bluff instability problems. Both the area-wide geologic analysis and initial steps toward solving the specific Front Street problem could be included. A special Block Grant fund allocated for "Imminent Threats", or emergency improvements, should be investigated in light of the critical nature of the Front Street landslide problem. In the future, Block Grant funds might be requested for the pedestrian promenade along Front Street or Main Street improvements.

- The Economic Development Administration (EDA) has grant funds available for projects which will create new jobs or prevent the loss of existing jobs. Since tourism is a key to economic development in Coupeville, a strong case could be made for funding any of the proposed projects which would enhance tourist use and enjoyment of Coupeville's shoreline. In order to be able to compete for these funds, it is important for the town to adopt an economic development strategy documenting the job potential associated with tourist growth in the town.

- The State IAC (Inter-Agency Committee) has traditionally been a prime source of funds for park and recreation improvements. Although currently funding is at a reduced level, some grant funds are still available. The proposed improvements to the boat launch and the town park access would be eligible for consideration.

- Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) offers long term, low interest loans for community facilities in rural areas. The maximum term of the loans is 40 years with an interest rate of 5% at present. This program has funded primarily sewer and water facilities in the past, but other critical public facilities are eligible.

- In addition to state and federal grant and loan programs, there are several local financing mechanisms available. Coupeville or the Port District could request voter approval to issue general obligation bonds for proposed projects such as improvements to the Wharf which would benefit the whole town or port district. Another option is to form an L.I.D. (Local Improvement District) to assess certain properties for projects benefitting them. An L.I.D. is suggested as an option for addressing the Front Street sloughing problems and could also be utilized to finance Main Street improvements.

- Community redevelopment financing is a further option which has been developed by the State Legislature. If approved by the voters of the state this fall, Coupeville would be able to sell bonds in the amount of projected property tax increases associated with capital improvements. As they accrued, the increased taxes would then be reserved specifically to pay off the bonds.

Another option which should be investigated for improvements to the Wharf is the Maritime Preservation Grant Program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Private/Community Organization Efforts

Contributions by individuals and the efforts of community organization could go a long way toward constructing the recommended waterfront improvements in Coupeville. Proposed improvements at the town park and boat launch would be suitable projects for a community group to undertake. Similarly, contributions of landscaping and pedestrian improvements along Main Street could be made by individual businesses.

Policy/Regulatory Actions

Several recommended actions involve Town Council actions and policy rather than construction of physical improvements. These actions include: development regulations to insure safe building in the shoreline zone, policies to allow and encourage beach housing needed to protect Front Street, an economic development strategy to strengthen the town's eligibility for EDA funds, and land use policies to encourage residential development and town-oriented businesses in or near the historic waterfront.

In sum, many of the recommended actions can be undertaken immediately within the existing resources of the town. Other improvements will require outside funding and will need to be staged over a number of years. As in the past, the future character and use of the shoreline will depend above all on the active concern and continued commitment of the people of Coupeville.

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