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Westport needs to maintain an 'authenticity of place'

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Authenticity is critical to the success of any town - large or small. Westport is sited very dramatically where Grays Harbor meets the Pacific Ocean and maritime industries are its history. It is critical to the success of Westport to maintain an authenticity of place during this current period of growth. Westport has the potential to attain a pedestrian, people-focus for the Marina District, but it needs to be more than a superficial, "Disney-facade" such as a city like Leavenworth. Future planning and development should reflect the current and past history, industry and people - and with integrity.

Much of the current development is occurring in the Marina District, where there is tremendous opportunity for "in-fill" development that replaces single, under-used buildings and sprawling parking lots with buildings that enliven the street life around the marina.

We should work to preserve the unique heritage of Westport, increase and celebrate the maritime industry, while preserving nearby parks and open space where we can experience the natural landscape.

New building construction should be sensitive to the extreme climate of the South Beach region. Climatic data reflected in the local building codes require that structures be capable of withstanding 100 mph winds and this should be reflected in the architecture.

The salt air also has a significant impact on buildings, and materials need to be carefully selected to stand the test of time in such a harsh environment. Building design that works inland is not necessarily suitable for the South Beach. The architecture of the area should be appropriate to the coastal environment and unique to Westport and vicinity. It is the responsibility of the developers and architects working in the community to design for Westport.

The City of Westport needs to be proactive as a planning authority to ensure that future development completes a vision that feels like a diverse, yet cohesive community.

Successful city planning will result in layered "land uses" with a pedestrian-focus where the architecture of each building is unique, but is compatible in the overall context of the city. Mixed-use buildings can provide for a community where people who work in Westport can also afford to live in Westport. While kite stores and doughnut shops may attract the tourist during the high-season daylight hours, it is people living above those same businesses who create activity from early morning to late night. These same residents can help to sustain small convenience businesses such as a cafe, drug store and hardware shop.

Land use and zoning policies should encourage a variety of housing

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options so that Westport is able to support a wide variety of income levels and a rich diversity of residents year-round.

During our travel to other coastal communities across North America and Europe, we have found that the places people want to return to are not those where only the affluent live, but communities where you will see the hardware store owner at the coffee shop, then have lunch at the same cafe as a postal clerk because these places are central to where they live and work. Memorable communities are those where the geographic location, the climate and the economy are reflected in the architecture; where you look around and know that you are in a uniquely identifiable place that can't be mistaken for anywhere else.

The city has to show leadership in shaping the future of development throughout Westport, either by standing behind the most recent comprehensive plan or by creating a vision in which all stakeholders - the city, property owners, residents, and business owners - are invested.

There is currently a contradiction between the existing zoning designations, comprehensive plan and shoreline regulations. The city needs to revise and assemble all of these regulations into a single, coherent land-use plan that will shape future development - not in terms of prescribing types of materials and paint colors, but in terms of mixed-use development, building massing, view corridors, the desired residential density and parking.

Now is the time to support good development practices that can enhance the livability and character of Westport.

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