

10 Shoreline Management

10.1 Introduction

The Shoreline Management Element of the Gig Harbor Comprehensive Plan is integral to preserving the unique and diverse characteristics of the city's waterfront areas while promoting sustainable development and public enjoyment. This element is guided by the Shoreline Management Act of 1971 and the city's Shoreline Master Program (adopted by reference in this Plan), initially adopted in 1975, and updated most recently in 2013 and 2022. It encompasses the various aspects of shoreline use, including historical fishing industries, contemporary residential and recreational marinas, and commercial activities that are essential to the city's identity and economy. The overarching aim is to balance ecological preservation with development, ensuring that the natural and scenic qualities of Gig Harbor's shoreline are protected for future generations while supporting economic and recreational opportunities.

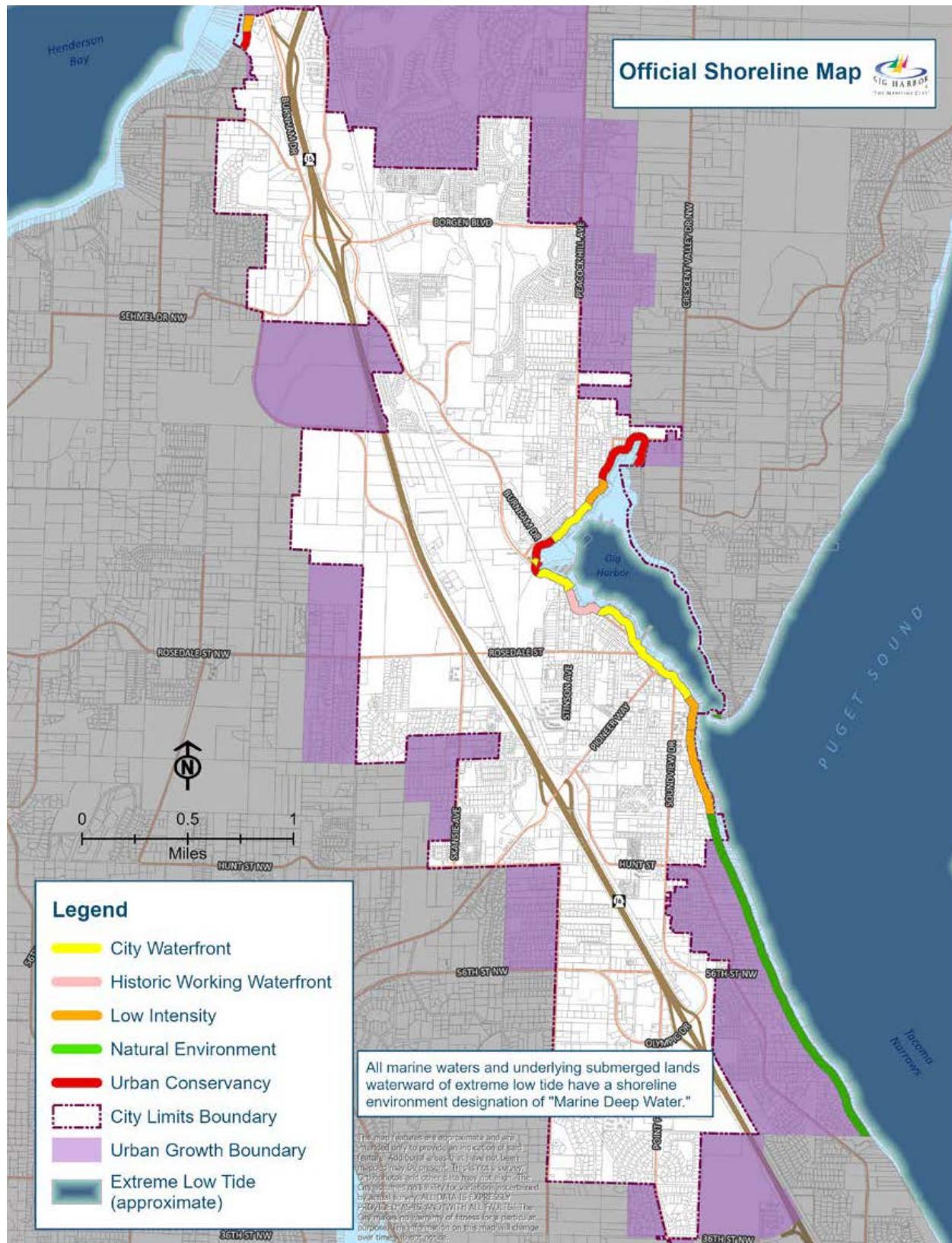
Key goals of the Shoreline Management Element include:

- protecting the natural quality of the shoreline
- maintaining the historical fishing industry
- promoting mixed-use waterfront development
- ensuring high-quality development that respects the historical and cultural character of the area.

Implementation of these goals involves conserving vital habitats, maintaining water and shoreline quality, and managing vegetation to support ecological functions. The plan also emphasizes the importance of water-oriented uses and public access to the waterfront, supporting activities like pleasure boating, and residential developments that enhance the public's interaction with the shoreline. By integrating these goals into the Comprehensive Plan, Gig Harbor aims to foster a vibrant, accessible, and sustainable waterfront that continues to serve as a cornerstone of the community's identity and economic vitality.

The planning segments used for the Shoreline Master Program are provided in Exhibit 10-1. These are based on coordinating land use, environmental, and development regulations for distinct segments of the shoreline in Gig Harbor and its UGA.

Exhibit 10-1. City of Gig Harbor Shoreline Master Program Official Shoreline Map.



Source: City of Gig Harbor, 2022.

The Official Shoreline Map for the SMP includes five distinct types of shoreline environments:

- **Natural Environment**, designated to protect those shoreline areas that are relatively free of human influence or that include intact or minimally degraded shoreline functions that would become irreversibly impaired as a result of human development and activity. These systems require that only very low intensity uses be allowed in order to maintain ecological functions and ecosystem-wide processes. Consistent with the policies of the designation, restoration of degraded shorelines within this environment is appropriate.
- **Urban Conservancy**, intended to protect and restore ecological functions of open space, floodplain and other sensitive lands where they exist in urban and developed settings, while allowing a variety of compatible uses.
- **Low Intensity**, developed to accommodate residential development in areas that are already developed with or planned primarily for residential uses. The Low Intensity Environment may also include water-oriented commercial and recreation uses, and public access.
- The **City Waterfront** designation includes Gig Harbor's historic, social, and commercial center, offering a diverse mix of residential, recreational, and commercial uses that support tourism and local needs. This designation aims to preserve water-dependent activities, protect historic resources, promote public access, and balance ecological restoration with existing land uses.
- The **Historic Working Waterfront** designation recognizes and preserve two of Gig Harbor's most notable historic industries: commercial fishing and boatbulding. The area possesses a significant concentration of historic uses and structures that have aesthetic, architectural, historical and cultural significance and characterize the community's regional maritime identity. This designation allows a limited range of non-water oriented uses as a means of promoting the preservation and rehabilitation of the historic structures.

10.2 Goals and Policies

► **SM-1 Protect the ecological processes and functions in the shoreline and nearshore area.**

- SM-1.1 Preserve and protect shoreline habitats which provide unique value, including the Crescent Creek and Donkey Creek estuaries, McCormick Creek, and critical saltwater habitats such as kelp beds, eelgrass beds, spawning and holding areas for forage fish such as surf smelt and sand lance, sand spits, mud flats, and areas with which priority species have a primary association.
- SM-1.2 Protect and restore shoreline vegetation to maintain the multiple benefits native vegetation provides, including structural stabilization, ecological functions and habitat, coastal bluff stability, public safety, the protection of property, and visual and aesthetic quality.
- SM-1.3 Promote the use of soft shoreline stabilization techniques, such as beach nourishment and natural buffers, over hard armoring solutions to protect shoreline areas while preserving natural processes and habitat. Where hard armoring is necessary, ensure it is designed to minimize ecological impacts.
- SM-1.4 Maintain and enhance the quantity and quality of surface and ground water by managing all shoreline uses and developments.
- SM-1.5 Develop measures to conserve native vegetation along shorelines, including the avoidance or minimization of clearing or grading, restoration of areas of native vegetation, and/or control of invasive or non-native vegetation.
- SM-1.6 Encourage well-vegetated shorelines over vegetation clearance to create views or provide lawns, but allow limited and selective clearing for views and lawns when slope stability and ecological functions are not compromised.

► **SM-2 Provide for a mix of water-oriented shoreline uses that support public access, recreation, and historical commercial activities while minimizing impacts to shoreline ecological functions.**

- SM-2.1 Give preference to shoreline uses that are water-oriented (water-dependent, water-related, or water-enjoyment), provide public access and recreational opportunity, or are residential, as consistent with state policy (RCW [90.58.020](#)).
- SM-2.2 Shoreline uses should be located, designed, and maintained in a manner that minimizes adverse impacts to shoreline ecological functions and/or processes.
- SM-2.3 Non-water-oriented development should be allowed in shoreline areas provided the development supports the objectives of the Gig Harbor Comprehensive Plan and the Shoreline Master Program.
- SM-2.4 Retain a mixed-use waterfront on Gig Harbor Bay that includes commercial endeavors such as commercial fishing, boating, marine shops and services, restaurants and retail shops, as well as

residential uses, which are uniquely able to capitalize on the bay's appeal and associated ecosystems.

- SM-2.5 Continue to develop and enhance recreation and tourism uses along Gig Harbor Bay to encourage public access and enjoyment of this resource and provide economic opportunities.
- SM-2.6 Retain the maximum open surface water area possible to facilitate safe and convenient watercraft circulation.
- SM-2.7 Provide for single and multifamily residential uses with access to the shoreline that respect valuable waterfront settings and characteristics.
- SM-2.8 Require commercial developments to permit public facilities and access to shoreline beaches, docks, walkways, and other facilities including views and vistas.
- SM-2.9 Develop existing publicly owned shoreline properties to provide additional public access where appropriate.
- SM-2.10 Create a mix of active and passive public recreation facilities that do not intrude on the natural features of the shoreline.

► **SM-3 Provide for high-quality development in waterfront areas that balance the needs of residential, recreational, retail, and commercial uses.**

- SM-3.1 Maintain a balance in waterfront land use development so that any single use does not overpower or detract from the others.
- SM-3.2 Support compatible, human-scale development that ensures new structures are consistent with existing facilities and do not dominate the shoreline in terms of size, location or appearance.
- SM-3.3 Maintain design standards for shoreline uses based on the city's Design Manual.
- SM-3.4 Create an accessible and visible waterfront and shoreline that includes public beaches, fishing and boating docks, picnic and passive overlooks and viewpoints.
- SM-3.5 Require private developments to provide unobstructed access and visibility for tenants, waterway users, and the general public.
- SM-3.6 Encourage waterfront developments that provide public amenities consistent with the scale and the character of the development, such as additional docks, paths or walks, overlooks, picnic and seating areas, fishing piers or areas, and viewpoints.
- SM-3.7 Maintain Best Management Practices governing the development of associated improvements (e.g., parking areas, sidewalks, stormwater facilities).
- SM-3.8 Provide design standards to control scale, construction methods and materials, drainage patterns, site coverage, landscaping and screening, signage, and other features of unique importance to the waterfront setting.

SM-3.9 Encourage innovative, effective solutions which cluster and share common improvements, reduce paved areas and otherwise blend construction with the natural setting or with desirable features of the built environment.