

3 The Harbor

3.1 Introduction

Downtown Gig Harbor is quaint, charming, and historic. The historical structures and landmarks included in this district represent an important cultural identity that continues to draw visitors, shoppers, and residents to the area. Historically, this draw from the amenities of the downtown has created development pressures on the city and has required the city to grow in the North and Westside of town to accommodate the needs of the new residents while preserving downtown character and form.

Over the last 30 years, Gig Harbor has held multiple public forums and sought public input regarding the future of the waterfront downtown areas and compiled an inventory of historic structures in The Harbor. The Historic Preservation Commission plays a vital role in safeguarding Gig Harbor's rich heritage and ensuring that our community's unique historic character is preserved. The following goals and policies reflect the extensive public outreach and input to provide a framework for future growth and vitality that maintains The Harbor's historical context and character.

3.2 Vision for The Harbor

The boundaries of The Harbor are provided below in Exhibit 3-1.

Rooted in the rich cultural heritage of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, Squaxin Island and Nisqually Tribes, alongside our maritime traditions, The Harbor reflects the deep connections to our past and serves as a foundation for our future. The Harbor is:

- A vibrant place where residents, visitors and boaters enjoy a walkable waterfront, picturesque views, and the natural environment.
- A place that celebrates and perpetuates the character and traditions of a working waterfront and preserves historic neighborhoods.
- A place that supports and values local retail shops and services.
- A place that provides services for recreational and commercial boating.
- The Harbor is a place where people live, work, play, shop and explore.

Exhibit 3-1. Boundaries of The Harbor.



Source: City of Gig Harbor, 2024.

3.3 Goals and Policies

The goals and policies of this element support a mix of uses along the waterfront in Gig Harbor. These uses include commercial fishing, boating, marine shops, and services, restaurants, and retail shops, as well as residential uses that support this location as a unique community. Over the long term, this area will continue to develop in ways to enhance the recreation, tourism, and marine industries in Gig Harbor, support the waterfront as a local economic asset, and maintain and improve community enjoyment and public access to the water.

► **HB-1 Promote multimodal transportation opportunities to encourage equitable non-motorized travel through The Harbor and reduce the need for parking in the historic Harbor overlay district while maintaining or improving connections for pedestrians, cyclists, and boaters.**

- HB-1.1 Support pedestrian access throughout The Harbor using linkages to the public park system.
- HB-1.2 Support and plan for public transportation opportunities in The Harbor and between The Harbor and the Centers of Local Importance.
- HB-1.3 Work with public transit agencies to establish and maintain “around town” paratransit and microtransit service throughout the year, allowing residents, visitors and boaters accessibility to and from The Harbor.

► **HB-2 Create and maintain a pedestrian-friendly environment throughout The Harbor by emphasizing safety, maintenance, and comfort.**

- HB-2.1 Coordinate traffic calming efforts throughout The Harbor to reduce vehicle speed and enhance roadway safety.
- HB-2.2 Maintain and enhance an efficient transportation network in The Harbor that balances vehicular mobility with safe, accessible, and integrated non-motorized transportation options, ensuring equitable service levels for all users.
- HB-2.3 Incorporate features that facilitate pedestrian crossings and improve visibility for drivers and pedestrians.
- HB-2.4 Provide streetscape amenities such as landscaping, common areas, seating areas, lighting, waste containers and signage that keep with the character and scale of The Harbor.
- HB-2.5 Promote a safe, inclusive and walkable environment.
- HB-2.6 Pursue opportunities to widen sidewalks and remove obstacles.

► **HB-3 Protect the views of the bay from within The Harbor area and from the bay toward The Harbor.**

- HB-3.1 Require waterfront developments to provide for additional docks, paths, walkways, overlooks, picnic and seating areas, fishing piers or areas, overlooks, and viewpoints as outlined in the Shoreline Management Program.

- HB-3.2 Provide incentives for the protection of view corridors.
- HB-3.3 Explore opportunities to place utility lines underground throughout The Harbor.
- HB-3.4 Maintain and promote trees and vegetation as assets for views, and ensure that sufficient tree protections are in place to prevent unnecessary removal, preserve the natural character of The Harbor, and enhance environmental sustainability.
- HB-3.5 Establish landscape standards to support views of the bay along Harborview and North Harborview Drive throughout The Harbor area, and promote the use of native vegetation wherever feasible.

► **HB-4 Protect the natural and built environment from degradation and pollution.**

- HB-4.1 Encourage sustainable, low-impact land development and building practices in new development and construction, ensuring that The Harbor is free from significant obstruction, pollution or intensive development.
- HB-4.2 Conserve native vegetation along shorelines.
- HB-4.3 Promote well-vegetated shorelines as preferred over vegetation clearance for views or lawns. Allow limited and selective clearing for views and lawns where slope stability and ecological functions are not compromised.
- HB-4.4 Establish incentives for environmental protection to improve the ecological functions in the area.
- HB-4.5 Preserve and protect habitats and associated ecosystems, including the Crescent Creek and Donkey Creek estuaries and critical saltwater habitats. Key habitats include, but are not limited to kelp beds, eelgrass beds and mud flats.
- HB-4.6 Manage the location, construction, operation, and maintenance of shoreline uses and developments to maintain and enhance the quantity and quality of surface and groundwater.

► **HB-5 Establish and manage a well-balanced system of public properties along the waterfront of The Harbor that meet the needs and desires of the community.**

- HB-5.1 Create complementary parks and uses throughout The Harbor. Balance services and active recreational uses for all users of the park system.
- HB-5.2 Develop existing publicly owned shoreline properties to provide additional public access where appropriate.
- HB-5.3 Create a mixture of active and passive recreational uses that do not intrude on the natural features of the shoreline or the residential neighborhoods.
- HB-5.4 Coordinate with outside public and private agencies and organizations to acquire and preserve additional public shoreline and open water access.

HB-5.5 Ensure that publicly owned parks are available for public use and uses that provide the greatest public benefit of residents and visitors alike.

► **HB-6 Retain and protect the unique character of historic business and residential neighborhoods within The Harbor.**

HB-6.1 Define and designate distinct historic neighborhoods within The Harbor, each reflecting its unique character, to address specific concerns, such as appropriate transitions or buffers, while promoting cohesive development that honors the area's cultural heritage.

HB-6.2 Promote design standards and development regulations that respect and enhance the unique character and historical patterns of neighborhoods in The Harbor, ensuring new development complements traditional building features and integrates with the surrounding community. Note that these should be in alignment with the guidelines contained in the Design Manual.

HB-6.3 Improve public spaces, streetscapes, and waterfront access with designs that reflect the historic and cultural identity of The Harbor, creating welcoming and vibrant community spaces.

► **HB-7 Maintain the form and design of existing structures through maintenance, adaptive reuse, and design standards that complement the historical form and scale.**

HB-7.1 Preserve the existing heights, setbacks, and massing of historic structures while maintaining an appropriate scale and relationship between buildings in residential and commercial neighborhoods.

HB-7.2 Encourage residential designs that promote interactions with the neighborhood, such as front porches, windows, and other treatments.

HB-7.3 Promote the use of durable and compatible materials that enhance and respect the integrity of historic structures.

HB-7.4 Support architectural designs that align with the historical and cultural aspects of The Harbor.

HB-7.5 Promote the preservation of properties eligible for the city's historic register in forms as close to original as possible.

HB-7.6 Provide incentives and streamlined permitting to encourage the preservation of historical properties eligible for or listed on the city's historic register.

HB-7.7 Consider the needs of adaptive reuse as part of the design standards included in the city's Design Manual.

HB-7.8 Refine the historical district zoning boundaries to acknowledge both the preservation of historic distinctions and the dynamic nature of communities.

► **HB-8 Promote high-quality design and construction for future development that considers the unique historic character and structures of The Harbor.**

- HB-8.1 Emphasize active public orientation of structures by providing common areas and direct access from surrounding public areas (street and waterward), and discouraging blank walls and privacy fences.
- HB-8.2 Develop incentives for mixed-use structures in commercial areas and nodes.
- HB-8.3 Incorporate visual points of interest into building and landscape design that is viewable from the public street.
- HB-8.4 Minimize asphalt coverage along waterfront parcels.
- HB-8.5 Develop a balanced parking strategy for The Harbor that supports economic development by providing adequate visitor and commercial parking while ensuring residents have accessible and convenient parking options to foster a vibrant community atmosphere.
- HB-8.6 Ensure that individual developments complement current and future uses with respect to form, massing, and on- and off-site impacts.
- HB-8.7 Support human-scale development that aligns with existing development and does not deviate significantly from surrounding development in terms of size, location or appearance.

► **HB-9 Support and enhance the cultural heritage of the Tribal Nations and commercial maritime history within The Harbor and its recognition in the community.**

- HB-9.1 Identify, preserve, enhance, and promote Gig Harbor's multicultural heritage, emphasizing both that of the local Tribal Nations and maritime fishing traditions as integral to the community's evolution. This encompasses the historical narratives of the city and its neighborhoods, along with traditions and cultural features, including significant historical sites, buildings, artworks, objects, views, and monuments that reflect the contributions of the First People and the maritime fishing community.
- HB-9.2 Support the commercial fishing fleet as a significant historical and cultural resource.
- HB-9.3 Identify and incorporate significant historical and cultural lands, sites, artifacts, and facilities into the design and development of the public waterfront.
- HB-9.4 Promote educational initiatives that raise awareness of the cultural heritage Tribal Nations within Gig Harbor, highlighting the history, traditions, and contributions of local Tribal communities to enrich community understanding and appreciation.
- HB-9.5 Support organizations that provide cultural programs and activities to the public.
- HB-9.6 Provide incentives for preservation and increased public access to historic sites and structures.

HB-9.7 Support the installation of public art and informational signage that celebrate and reflect the heritage of Tribal communities within Gig Harbor, fostering a deeper connection to the land and its original inhabitants.

HB-9.8 Engage with local Tribal partners in the planning and development of cultural heritage projects, ensuring their voices are heard and their perspectives are integrated into community events and initiatives.

► **HB-10 Support a mix of uses in The Harbor, including fishing, boating, retail, commercial, and residential uses.**

HB-10.1 Promote a balance of jobs and housing in The Harbor to encourage a balanced neighborhood.

HB-10.2 Encourage street-level commercial and retail uses to support pedestrian experience.

HB-10.3 Increase the number of residential units in mixed-use commercial nodes.

HB-10.4 Balance services, amenities, and other uses within The Harbor to promote necessary access by residents, workers, and visitors.

► **HB-11 Encourage a diverse mix of housing types, sizes, and densities compatible with the neighborhoods within The Harbor.**

HB-11.1 Support development of a mix of attached and detached housing units in The Harbor.

HB-11.2 Ensure that residential development standards for attached and detached accessory dwelling units on a single family lot enhance the character of the established neighborhood.

HB-11.3 Promote fair and equal access to housing for all persons and prohibit any activity that results in discrimination in housing.

► **HB-12 Encourage a strong, diversified, and sustainable economy for Gig Harbor that respects the natural and cultural environment and supports a high quality of life in the community.**

HB-12.1 Regularly review regulations and procedures to encourage economic vitality within The Harbor.

HB-12.2 Coordinate with the downtown businesses, property owners and community groups on efforts to establish a stronger economic base in The Harbor.

HB-12.3 Support innovative solutions for parking issues that would not impact the historical structures or waterfront, such as the development of shared parking programs and shuttle services,.

HB-12.4 Encourage historical and cultural preservation that can support economic development.

► **HB-13 Support business retention, attraction, and expansion in The Harbor to provide the jobs, products and services that support and enhance the vibrant, historic, and culturally diverse Harbor.**

- HB-13.1 Identify and implement local business attraction, retention, and expansion strategies targeted to economic sectors that could support additional local employment.
- HB-13.2 Promote small businesses, especially startup businesses owned by or employing local residents.
- HB-13.3 Collaborate with local organizations to enhance and ensure the viability and vitality of The Harbor business community.
- HB-13.4 Provide home occupation guidelines and standards for home-based businesses in residential neighborhoods that encourage entrepreneurship while minimizing impacts to the surrounding neighborhoods.
- HB-13.5 Encourage community activities in commercial districts that can attract potential customers to local businesses.
- HB-13.6 Support small-scale entertainment venues for theater and musical performances.

► **HB-14 Increase economic opportunities through new investment.**

- HB-14.1 Support the reuse or revitalization of older buildings and redevelopment of vacant properties in areas requiring additional investment.
- HB-14.2 Provide incentives to encourage the revitalization of commercial areas, when appropriate, such as:
 - a) Reduced fees for permits or utility connections;
 - b) Waivers from height, bulk, and density requirements;
 - c) Expedited permit processing;
 - d) Property tax incentive programs, including, but not limited to Multi-Family Tax Exemptions; and
 - e) Reduced parking standards.
- HB-14.3 Encourage special improvement districts and other programs necessary for revitalization of older business and commercial areas of The Harbor that can also provide public benefits and are appropriate to the long-range goals of the city.

► **HB-15 Promote The Harbor, bay and related waterfront lands with improvements and features that support uses related to commercial and recreational boating and water activities.**

- HB-15.1 Promote innovative concepts such as mixed-use developments, buffer zone setbacks, and common shoreline or dock improvements that can help conserve and improve valuable fishing and recreational water activities within The Harbor.

HB-15.2 Support temporary docking facilities for visiting vessels that retain open surface water area for watercraft circulation.

HB-15.3 Explore the appropriateness and viability of the development of a fuel dock for boating needs.

HB-15.4 Allow supportive uses and services for boaters, commercial crews, and residents.

HB-15.5 Protect adequate navigation corridors and access within the bay.

► **HB-16 Promote and preserve the Gig Harbor commercial fishing fleet as a significant cultural and economic resource.**

HB-16.1 Allow over-water, water-dependent development that directly supports the commercial fishing industry, such as net sheds and load/unloading docks.

HB-16.2 Allow and encourage supporting sales and services related to the commercial fishing industry, such as marine fueling facilities or direct dock sales of sea food products.

HB-16.3 Encourage the development of facilities that support the commercial fishing industry while ensuring that such advancements are balanced with the historic scale of existing development in The Harbor. This includes the retention and thoughtful redevelopment or reuse of waterfront properties that facilitate commercial fishing activities.

HB-16.4 Promote local commercial fishing as an important component of the economic, cultural, and community life of Gig Harbor through educational opportunities and community events.

HB-16.5 Encourage the development of additional moorage and docking facilities consistent with local commercial fishing needs.

► **HB-17 Develop the waterfront as a place of outdoor activity.**

HB-17.1 Encourage outdoor activities along the commercial waterfront zones with outdoor dining locations, play areas, spaces for civic events, and other public spaces that apply inclusive design principles.

HB-17.2 Develop public art displays at the waterfront.

HB-17.3 Design protective features to improve the comfort of outdoor public spaces and allow them to be used year-round.

HB-17.4 Minimize asphalt coverage and hard surfaces along waterfront, especially with respect to parking.

HB-17.5 Use treatments and materials such as colored, textured or grass-block pavers to break up hard surfaces along the waterfront.

HB-17.6 Encourage human-scale development with ground-level uses and designs that complement the streetscape.