

Belfair UGA Planned Action

Stakeholder Interviews | Fall 2020

Introduction

Mason County proposes to develop a Planned Action Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and ordinance for the Belfair Urban Growth Area (UGA) and refresh the 2004 Belfair Urban Growth Area Plan.

To identify key issues and opportunities for Belfair and shape public engagement opportunities, the County and consultants BERK Consulting, Inc. obtained a list of stakeholders from County staff and Board of County Commissioners.

Background on the proposal was shared including that the County recently received a grant to expand the sewer system and WSDOT is planning a new freight corridor, or “bypass.” The County expects these investments to affect growth trends in Belfair. While the Belfair UGA itself has a small population, the area serves as a commercial hub for a much larger population living in nearby communities. This planning effort aims to facilitate growth reflective of a community-supported vision in light of this anticipated investment. Questions included:

- What’s your relationship to Belfair?
- How would you describe Belfair as a community?
- What about the Belfair UGA is working / what would you like to see stay the same?
- What challenges do you perceive within the Belfair UGA / what would you like to see change?
- We anticipate seeking public input throughout the planning process, but particularly up front at a Vision workshop and at the time of a Draft EIS and Draft Plan. Do you have any advice about moving forward with community participation? What’s most effective from your perspective?
- What other key stakeholders should we consult about the project?

These questions were covered to different degrees with each interview. This document provides a summary of the interviews. It has been shared with stakeholders and the public at the time of the scoping process.

Relationship to Belfair

Interviewees varied from property and business owners to residents and agencies. Some were involved in the 2004 Belfair Plan. The team set up calls with the stakeholders over August to October, including:

- Beau Baaken, North Mason Fire
- Jennifer Baria, Economic Development Council

- Ken Van Buskirk, Resident
- Bob Dressel, North Mason Fiber
- Erin Hall, Olympia Master Builders
- Justin Holzgrove, Mason PUD 3
- Jack Johnson, Peninsula Topsoil
- David Overton, E.E. Overton
- Judy Scott, realtor, property owner, Port of Allyn Commissioner
- Michelle Tragesser, WSDOT
- Danette Brannin, Mason Transit
- Pam Volz, North Mason Chamber of Commerce
- Dale Webb, Belfair Water District

Interview Results

Under each topic, high level themes and summary comments are provided.

ABOUT BELFAIR

Belfair is a hub and crossroads.

- Belfair is more of a crossroads than a community. There are not many residents within the UGA, most people who utilize Belfair’s services live outside the UGA.
- Town center core where business takes place – center of traffic congestion and density.
- The idea of Belfair as a place is not limited to just the UGA – Belfair is a hub for all of North Mason County.
- Belfair is “in-between.” Belfair is between Shelton and Bremerton, and sometimes gets forgotten.
- Belfair is a crossroads and service center, not a true community.
- Belfair is a broad community with a localized commercial core.
- Belfair’s transportation system in the area also serves commuters, travelers, logging and freight traffic, and local residents. Traffic congestion, especially during peak commuting hours and holidays, has been a long-standing issue. This makes it difficult to get around and poses challenges to emergency services.

Belfair has a small but tight knit community and is growing in residents and workforce.

- Belfair has a broad spectrum of demographics/socioeconomic status.
- Belfair is tight knit. That may not stay the same as it grows. Belfair is family oriented, and there is a sense of community and shared purpose. Make it a better place. Schools, fire district, and businesses.

- People choose to live in Belfair. There is a oneness. Committed to community. Hope for more community activities. Have strong non-profit support. Take pride.
- The Belfair community continues to grow and has a diverse demographic with permanent and seasonal residents. It serves a rich recreational environment.
- Belfair includes workers for the larger industrial producers in the area with a small amount of local businesses serving the local residents, tourists, and outlying areas.
- Belfair is a strong and independent community, and wary of change.

Belfair is poised for change due to its affordability and quality of life, and is influenced by the Navy and Fast Ferry.

- Mason County is a very desirable place to live, and the County has an opportunity to plan for Belfair to get ahead of the oncoming rush of development. Plan carefully to make sure development in Belfair doesn't blow up and get out of control.
- Belfair was its own community, with a more rural influence and laid back atmosphere. Now Belfair is becoming bedroom community for the Puget Sound Shipyard and Kitsap County. Trend will continue. People are leaving Seattle, and can work from home. In Belfair there is more house for money. Younger people are coming in their 20s and 30s with families. They can pay less taxes and get a nicer house with land.
- The real estate market and the Navy are major driving factors. Navy is making major investments in their facilities at Bremerton and Bangor.
- The community who is going to invest in the area is not here yet; they will be coming in the future from surrounding areas.
- There are several hundred homes in permit process. Fast ferries have changed things. Belfair is affordable. What worked 15-20 years ago doesn't work now.
- Lots of growth coming in – Belfair has the room for it, and services will come with growth.
- People who are coming to Belfair: Multigenerational families; influx from metro area with summer homes making transition to live full time; technology; and retirements.
- Huge demand for land in the region. Anything made available for development is going to go fast – building and permitting has been moving fast this year, in spite of COVID-19.

WHAT IS WORKING IN BELFAIR

Nature/Beauty

- Belfair has abundance of beauty and nature. It is what people love. Do your best to protect that.
- Maintain the integrity and beauty of the area. Maintain critical areas and green spaces.
- Thaler wetlands are critical for Belfair.

Keep Improving Walkability/Roads

- There are improvements like sidewalks going in, road widening, and turn lane to SR 106, which has helped with accidents and somewhat with backups.

Safety

- Community feels safe. Not a lot of things get out of hand.

Community Support/Pride

- Committed to community. Hope for more community activities. Have strong non-profit support. Take pride.

CHALLENGES/NEEDED CHANGE/ADVICE

Transportation/Traffic

- Traffic and safety on SR3 need to be addressed. Address private road extensions to take pressure off SR3 and serve industrial development away from the main highway frontage.
- Work around pinch point. Advantageous to attract more commercial offerings. People would rather go to Belfair than to Silverdale, Port Orchard, or Gig Harbor.
- Until corridor is built, traffic remains difficult. Area has outgrown roads.
- There are several choke points that—even with the advent of the freight corridor—will not improve. Even the widening of SR3 was never completed. Traffic very bad when school lets out.

Infrastructure/Utilities/Services/Parks

- After many years of somewhat slow growth in the Belfair UGA, this in-rush of new requests has put a strain on available power capacity. With the tremendous expected growth in the Belfair UGA over the next decade, there will need to be a special emphasis in designating and protecting utility corridors and access.
- Hard place to raise a family – lack of services. Often commuting to Kitsap County to access services.
- No development in the UGA in the last 20 years, even after sewer went in. Address most likely areas for infrastructure investment. Be clear about requirements for school mitigation and other infrastructure investments in roads, water etc.
- Utilities and infrastructure in the area have historically been a limiting factor. Finally getting to the point now where the infrastructure is available to allow lots of new development. That said, expect development to come in waves, not steady growth.
- Work on public projects with public benefit – regional parks, possible school relocation.

Growth and Maintaining Area Beauty

- Concerned about the influx of development in the area, and Mason County in general – lots of people migrating to the area from Kitsap, Pierce, and King Counties. Wants to maintain the integrity

and beauty of the area. Wants the County to control the amount of condos and apartments in the area.

- Would like to see Mason County exert careful control over development to maintain the character and keep the area desirable.
- Belfair is growing, and it is better to get ahead of it and manage it/ mitigate impact.

Strengthen Business and Tourism

- Due to recreation need more hospitality facilities; the area is lacking lodging. Have B&B/STRs; need larger. Power sport recreation is popular – off road vehicles (ORV). \$300 spent per visit. Opportunities for ORV tourism.
- Need more diverse job opportunities. More robust living wage jobs.

Land Use Pattern/Policies/Housing

- Focus on eastern Belfair along bypass. Focus development on plateau where there's more buildable land.
- Development on the ridgeline will be driven by market opportunities, not a planning vision.
- Need for more market-rate housing (80-120%) in the area. Also called “middle-market” housing. Some of the proposed development projects in Belfair are roughly equivalent to the typical household in Thurston County (based on affordability).
- Break up the UGA into zones or focus areas to distinguish the downtown core from the valley. Convey that central Belfair is likely stable.
- Revisit Festival Retail – not appropriate for Belfair UGA. That 3-over-1 style of development is being built in the Tacoma area, not Belfair.
- Address Salmon Center and its facility.
- UGA / zoning corrections. Would like to see Old Belfair Hwy removed from UGA.
- Look into funding opportunities to help pay for the planning and code work that needs to be done. State grants may help with infrastructure, but code work is not eligible.
- County's development code is outdated. Doesn't fit with the kind of development that is coming to the area.
- Need more flexibility in policies and regulations.
- Doesn't feel like the County is listening. Some regulation changes have not been codified.
- Would like to see the ability to plat larger lots in Belfair (at least 1/3 acre), though this is a challenge under the Growth Management Act and County policies.
- Been close to 20 years without an update to the subarea plan, looking forward to seeing that happen.

ADDITIONAL CONTACTS AND ENGAGEMENT METHODS

Some wanted to see more intensive public engagement and others felt that less intensive engagement was needed if the center of Belfair would generally remain stable and the undeveloped land near the bypass is the focus.

Some stakeholders identified agencies, tribes, individuals, and businesses to contact. Some were contacted for interviews but were not available. They will be invited to participate through the EIS scoping process:

- North Mason Resources
- Salmon Center
- School District
- The Hub
- Tribes

Methods for Engagement/Awareness could include:

- Surveys
- Mailers, flyers, notices
- Online meetings: with COVID-19 some are doing online meetings; some may be less comfortable; provide surveys and other ways to engage too with handouts or mailers.