CHAPTER 5  SHORELINE ENVIRONMENT DESIGNATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The intent of designating shoreline environment is to encourage development that will enhance the present or desired character of the shoreline. To accomplish this, segments of shoreline are given an environment designation based on existing development patterns, natural capabilities and limitations, and the aspirations of the local community. Environment designations are categories that reflect the type of development that has occurred, or should take place in a given area. The scheme of classifications represents a relative range of development, from high to low intensity land use, and targets types of development to specific areas. The environment classification scheme is intended to work in conjunction with local comprehensive planning and zoning.

Management policies are an integral part of the environment designations and are used for determining uses and activities that can be permitted in each environment. Specific development regulations specify how and where permitted development can take place within each shoreline environment. Development Regulations in this chapter generally govern use, height limits, and setbacks. Additional policies and development regulations are provided for specific situations, uses and developments in other chapters of this Master Program.

5.2 Authority

Local governments are required, under the Washington State Shoreline Management Act of 1971 through WAC 173-26, to develop and assign a land use categorization system for shoreline areas as a basis for effective Shoreline Master Programs. The state’s Shoreline Master Program Guidelines describe the purpose of environment designations in WAC 173-26-191(1)(d): Shoreline management must address a wide range of physical conditions and development settings along shoreline areas. Effective shoreline management requires that the Shoreline Master Program prescribe different sets of environmental protection measures, allowable use provisions, and development Regulations for each of these shoreline segments.

The method for local government to account for different shoreline conditions is to assign an environment designation to each distinct shoreline section in its jurisdiction. The environment designation assignments provide the framework for implementing shoreline policies and regulatory measures specific to the environment designation.

5.3 Shoreline Environment Designations

The City of Tacoma classification system consists of six shoreline environments that are consistent with, and implement the Washington State Shorelines Management Act (Chapter 90.58 RCW), the Shoreline Master Program Guidelines (Chapter 173-26 WAC), and the City of Tacoma Comprehensive Plan. These environment designations have been assigned consistent with the corresponding designation criteria provided for each environment. In delineating environment designations, the City of Tacoma aims to assure that existing shoreline ecological functions are protected with the proposed pattern and intensity of development. Such designations should also be consistent with policies for restoration of degraded shorelines. The six shoreline environments are:

1. Aquatic
2. Natural
3. Residential

4. Urban Conservancy

5. High Intensity

6. Downtown Waterfront

5.4 Official Shoreline Environments Designation Map

5.4.1 Map Established

The location and extent of areas under the jurisdiction of this Master Program, and the boundaries of the various shoreline environments affecting the lands and waters of the City shall be as shown on the map, entitled, “Official Shoreline Environments Designation Map, City of Tacoma, Washington.” The official shoreline map and all the notations, references, and amendments thereto and other information shown thereon are hereby made a part of this Master Program, just as if such information set forth on the map were fully described and set forth herein.

In the event that new shoreline areas are discovered (e.g., associated wetlands) that are not mapped and/or designated on the official shoreline map, these areas are automatically assigned a Natural designation if they include critical areas, or, if no critical areas are included, an Urban Conservancy designation shall be applied until the shoreline can be re-designated through an TSMP amendment (WAC 173-26-211(e)).

5.4.2 File Copies

The official shoreline map shall be kept on file in the office of the City of Tacoma Building and Land Use Services Division, the Washington State Department of Ecology, and the Washington State Code reviser. Unofficial copies of the map may be prepared for administrative purposes. To facilitate use of this Master Program an “unofficial copy” has been attached as Appendix A.

5.4.3 Map Amendments

The designation map is an integral part of this Master Program and may not be amended except upon approval by the City and the Washington State Department of Ecology, as provided under the Shoreline Management Act.

5.4.4 Boundary Interpretation

If disagreement develops as to the exact location of a shoreline environment designation boundary line shown on the Official Shoreline Map, the following rules shall apply:

1. Boundaries indicated as approximately following lot, tract, or section lines shall be so construed.

2. Boundaries indicated as approximately following roads or railways shall be respectively construed to follow their centerlines.

3. Boundaries indicated as approximately parallel to or extensions of features indicated in (1) or (2) above shall be so construed.

Whenever existing physical features are inconsistent with boundaries on the Official Shoreline Map, the Shoreline Administrator shall interpret the boundaries, with deference to actual conditions. Appeals of
such interpretations may be filed pursuant to the applicable appeal procedures described in Chapter 2, Administrative Provisions.

5.5 Shoreline Environment Designations

5.5.1 Natural Environment

A. Purpose

The purpose of the "natural" environment is to protect those shoreline areas that are relatively free of human influence or that include intact or minimally degraded shoreline functions intolerant of human use. These systems require that only very low intensity uses be allowed in order to maintain the ecological functions and ecosystem-wide processes. Consistent with the policies of this designation, the City of Tacoma should plan for the restoration of degraded shorelines within this environment.

B. Areas Proposed for Designation

1. District S-4 Point Defiance - Natural

C. Management Policies

1. Preservation of the area's ecological functions, natural features and overall character must receive priority over any other potential use. Uses should not degrade shoreline ecological functions or processes or the natural character of the shoreline area.

2. New development or significant vegetation removal that would reduce the capability of the shoreline to perform a full range of ecological functions or processes should not be permitted.

3. Private and/or public enjoyment of natural shoreline areas should be encouraged and facilitated through low intensity recreational, scientific, historical, cultural, and educational research uses such as walking/hiking trails, provided that no significant ecological impact on the area will result.

4. Beaches, sea cliffs, and forests shall be retained in their natural state.

5.5.2 Aquatic Environment

A. Purpose

The purpose of the "aquatic" environment is to protect, restore, and manage the unique characteristics and resources of the marine areas waterward of the ordinary high-water mark.

B. Areas Proposed for Designation

1. District S-13 Waters of the State

C. Management Policies

1. Uses
a. Limit new uses and activities within the Aquatic environment, with few exceptions, to water-dependent uses and public access/recreational improvements designed to provide access to the shoreline for a substantial number of people.

b. Allow water-enjoyment and water-related uses in existing over-water buildings.

c. Allow non-water oriented uses on/in existing over-water structures only where they are in support of water-oriented uses and the size of the use is limited to the minimum necessary to support the structure's intended use.

d. Aquatic uses and modifications should be designed and managed to prevent degradation of water quality and alteration of natural hydrologic conditions including sediment transport and benthic drift patterns.

e. Water oriented recreational uses in the aquatic environment should not detrimentally impact the operations of water-dependent industrial uses.

2. New Over-Water Structures

a. Allow new over-water structures only for industrial water-dependent uses, restoration projects, public access, or emergency egress. New over-water structures must show significant public benefits. Pursuant to this policy, upper-story balconies or cantilevered decks may be permitted for the purpose of dedicated public access if attached to an existing legally established building, provided that ecological functions are not impacted.

b. New overwater residential uses are strictly prohibited.

c. The size of new over-water structures should be limited to the minimum necessary to support the structure's intended use.

d. In order to reduce the impacts of shoreline development and increase effective use of water resources, multiple use of over-water facilities should be encouraged.

3. Reuse of Historic Over-water Structures

a. Permit minor expansions of existing historic over-water structures when necessary to provide public access, to facilitate environmental restoration, or to meet building safety codes.

b. Refurbish or rebuild existing piers and wharves along Thea Foss Waterway and Ruston Way to maintain a modern-day link with the community’s maritime history.

c. Develop, in coordination with the Foss Waterway Development Authority, a moorage float and dock facility for passenger-only ferries and other seasonal commercial tour vessels at the Municipal Dock site on the Thea Foss Waterway.

4. Design Elements

a. All developments and uses on navigable waters or their beds should be located and designed to minimize interference with surface navigation, to be compatible with adjacent aquatic and upland uses, and to consider impacts to public views.
5. Environmental Protection

a. Shoreline uses and modifications within the Aquatic environment should be designed and managed consistent with the Environmental Protection policies and regulations of Chapter 6 including but not limited to preservation of water quality, habitat (such as eelgrass, kelp, forage fish spawning beaches, etc.), natural hydrographic conditions, and safe, unobstructed passage of fish and wildlife, particularly those species dependent on migration.

b. Remove abandoned over-water structures when they no longer serve their permitted use unless:
   
   i. Retaining such structures provides a net environmental benefit, for example, artificial reef effect of concrete anchors; or
   
   ii. Such structures can be reused in a manner that helps maintain the character of the City’s historic waterfront; or
   
   iii. Removing such structures would have substantial potential to release harmful substances into the waterways despite use of reasonable precautions.

5.5.3 Shoreline Residential Environment

A. Purpose

The Shoreline Residential designation accommodates residential development and accessory structures that are consistent with this chapter. An additional purpose is to provide appropriate public access and recreational uses.

B. Areas Proposed for Designation

1. District S-1b Western Slope South – Shoreline Residential

2. District S-16 Browns Point UGA

C. Management Policies

Development within Shoreline Residential shoreline areas shall be consistent with the following policies:

1. New development should be designed and located to preclude the need for shoreline armoring, flood control works, vegetation removal and other shoreline modifications.

2. The scale and density of new uses and development should be compatible with the existing residential character of the area while sustaining shoreline ecological functions and processes.

3. Public or private outdoor recreation facilities should be encouraged if compatible with the character of the area. Preferred uses include water-dependent and water-enjoyment recreation facilities that provide opportunities for substantial numbers of people to access and enjoy the shoreline.

4. Commercial development should be limited to water-oriented uses.
5. Alternatives to traditional impervious areas should be implemented to the maximum extent possible.

6. Multi-family residential, multi-lot (4 or more lots) and recreational developments should provide shoreline areas for joint use, and public access to the shoreline.

7. Establishment of native vegetation within a required buffer to slow surface and ground water movement and for improvement of the near-shore function including habitat and natural resources should be a priority.

### 5.5.4 Urban Conservancy Environment

**A. Purpose**

The “urban conservancy” environment is intended to protect and restore the public benefits and ecological functions of open space, natural areas and other sensitive lands where they exist within the City, while allowing a variety of compatible uses. It is the most suitable designation for shoreline areas that possess a specific resource or value that can be protected without excluding or severely restricting all other uses. It should be applied to those areas that would most benefit the public if their existing character is maintained, but which are also able to tolerate limited or carefully planned development or resource use. Permitted uses may include recreational, cultural and historic uses provided these activities are in keeping with the goals of protection and restoration as stated.

**B. Areas Proposed for Designation:**

1. District S-2 Western Slope Central
2. District S-3 Western Slope North
3. District S-5 Point Defiance – Urban Conservancy
4. District S-6 Ruston Way
5. District S-9 Puyallup River
6. District S-11 Marine View Dr.
7. District S-12 Hylebos Creek
8. District S-14 Wapato Lake

**C. Management Policies**

1. Permitted uses should be those that would preserve the natural character of the area and/or promote the protection and restoration of ecological function within critical areas and public open spaces, either directly or over the long term.

2. Restoration of shoreline ecological function concurrent with development and redevelopment within Urban Conservancy shorelines should be a priority.
3. New development should be designed and located to preclude the need for shoreline armoring, flood control works, vegetation removal and other shoreline modifications.

4. When development requires shoreline modification or stabilization, bioengineered shoreline stabilization measures, conservation of native vegetation, and Low Impact Development techniques for surface water management should be implemented to minimize adverse impacts to existing shoreline ecological functions unless some other form of modification or stabilization is necessary.

5. Public access and public recreation objectives should be implemented whenever feasible and adverse ecological impacts can be avoided. Continuous public access along the marine shoreline should be provided, preserved, or enhanced consistent with this policy.

6. Protection of ecological functions should have priority over public access, recreation and other development objectives whenever a conflict exists.

7. Primary permitted uses should consist of low intensity uses that preserve the natural character of the area or promote preservation of open space and critical areas.

8. Water-oriented commercial uses are encouraged when specific uses and design result in substantial open space, public access and/or restoration of ecological functions and if compatible with surrounding uses.

9. Existing historic and cultural buildings and areas should be preserved, protected and reused when feasible.

5.5.5 High-Intensity Environment

A. Purpose

The purpose of the "high-intensity" environment is to provide for high-intensity water-oriented commercial, transportation, and industrial uses while protecting existing ecological functions and restoring ecological functions in areas that have been previously degraded.

B. Areas Proposed for Designation:

1. District S-1a Western Slope South – High-intensity
2. District S-7 Schuster Parkway
3. District S-10 Port/Industrial Area
4. District S-15 Point Ruston/Slag Peninsula

C. Management Policies

1. First priority should be given to water-dependent uses. Second priority should be given to water-related and water-enjoyment uses. Non-water oriented uses should not be permitted except as part of mixed use developments and where they do not conflict with or limit opportunities for water oriented uses or on sites where there is no direct access to the shoreline.
2. Full utilization of existing high intensity areas should be achieved before further expansion of intensive development is permitted.

3. Policies and regulations shall assure no net loss of shoreline ecological functions as a result of new development. Where applicable, new development shall include environmental cleanup and restoration of the shoreline to comply with relevant state and federal law.

4. Where feasible, visual and physical public access should be required as provided for in WAC 173-26-221(4)(d). Pedestrian and bicycle paths should be permitted as public access opportunities.

5. Aesthetic objectives should be implemented by means such as sign control regulations, appropriate development siting, screening and architectural standards, and maintenance of natural vegetative buffers.

6. Require new development to provide physical and visual access to shorelines whenever possible and consistent with constitutional and statutory limitations, provided such access does not interfere with industrial operations or endanger public health and safety.

5.5.6 Downtown Waterfront

A. Purpose

1. Foster a mix of private and public uses, including parks and recreation facilities, that are linked by a comprehensive public access system, including a continuous walkway encircling the entire Thea Foss Waterway;

2. Strengthen the pedestrian-orientation of development on the Thea Foss Waterway;

3. Promote the design vision for the Thea Foss Waterway through the establishment and implementation of design guidelines and standards;

4. Manage the shoreline area in a way that optimizes circulation, public access, development, and environmental protection;

5. Encourage and provide opportunities for mixed-use development that supports water-oriented uses and provides significant public benefit and enjoyment of the Waterway for the citizens of Tacoma;

6. Promote the east side of the Foss Waterway as a center for industries and firms specializing in the design, research, development, and implementation of clean technology;

7. Encourage a mix of uses, including water-oriented industrial and commercial uses that are compatible with public access objectives, and residential uses except in that area of the east side of the Foss Waterway north of 11th Street; and

8. Retain and enhance characteristics of the Thea Foss Waterway that support marine and recreational boating activities.

B. Areas Proposed for Designation
1. District S-8 Thea Foss Waterway

C. General Management Policies

1. Land Use

a. General

i. Retain and enhance characteristics of the Thea Foss Waterway that support marine and boating activities.

ii. Buildings adjacent to the esplanade/public walkway and public access/view corridors should provide ground-level uses that are pedestrian-friendly and publicly accessible where appropriate.

iii. Encourage and provide opportunities for mixed use development that supports water-oriented uses and provides significant public benefit and enjoyment of the Waterway for the citizens of Tacoma.

iv. Encourage uses that generate significant walk-in and casual visitors.

v. Promote diverse, high-quality, pedestrian-related development that highlights the rich cultural, natural and maritime history of the Thea Foss Waterway.

b. East Foss

i. Retain the “working waterfront” by encouraging a mix of water-oriented commercial, industrial, retail and office uses, and industries specializing in the design and development of clean technology.

ii. Encourage residential uses in that area south of 11th Street.

2. Views and Aesthetics

a. Emphasize the uniqueness of the Thea Foss Waterway as a protected waterway immediately adjacent to a downtown core, bringing together the attractions of the downtown area, the industrial, mixed-use waterfront, and public spaces.

b. Important public views of the Thea Foss Waterway from downtown should be protected.

c. Encourage existing industrial and commercial uses to improve the aesthetics of the Waterway through techniques such as aesthetic treatments of storage tanks, cleanup of blighted areas, landscaping, exterior cosmetic improvements, landscape screening, and support of the Waterway environmental cleanup and remediation.

d. Foster desirable character through the establishment and application of design guidelines and standards.

e. Public art, historical interpretation and/or design elements which enrich the area are encouraged.
f. Encourage the incorporation of aesthetic elements and/or artwork in the design of public facilities and amenities.

g. Historic markers and design elements that reflect the history and culture of local and indigenous peoples should be encouraged where appropriate.

h. Develop site features that facilitate public participation in maritime events and activities.

3. Public Access

a. Provide a wide variety of physical settings, landscaped parks, plazas, and pedestrian attractions.

b. Unify and link parks, public areas, uses and attractions by a public walkway along the shoreline edge, where appropriate.

c. Public spaces should be designed to be recognizable as ‘public’ areas and to promote a unified access system, including the design and location of site details and amenities consistent with the Tacoma Waterfront Design Guidelines.