

# Nehalem Waterfront Advisory Committee Report to City Council

## July 2022



### Introduction

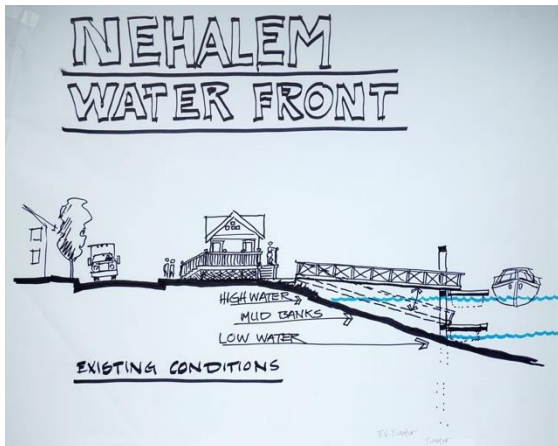
The City of Nehalem fronts on the Nehalem River. While it is a coastal community, its identification is with its frontage on the river as it moves into its bay and then onto the Pacific Ocean. The Nehalem is a navigable river, but the City's frontage is mostly on a portion of the river protected from the main channel and current by an island. This creates a placid and beautiful section of the river ideal for waterfront activities, access, and use.

There are three activities found along the river: residential uses, public access, and commercial uses. Many of the residential uses have private docks on the river. Some of the commercial uses take advantage of their river frontage as a place for customer activity especially for food service uses. There are two points of public access, each with public docks.

The Waterfront Advisory Committee's role is to make recommendations to the Council on public investments at the waterfront. The need for this input came when opportunities arose to pursue outside funding for improvement projects and there was a realization there were no policies or strategic direction to guide prioritizing or even pursuing those improvements.

# Nehalem Waterfront Advisory Committee Report to City Council

## July 2022



The Committee's charge is to make recommendations on near term projects and to make recommendations on next steps looking several years ahead.

### Process

The City Council approved a committee representing a variety of interests in the Waterfront area. That committee consists of:

- Claudine Rehn - Deputy Director of the Tillamook Estuary Partnership
- Janice Gains - Spa Manzanita owner, SUP school owner and leader
- Nancy Hoffman - Tillamook Estuaries Partnership Board
- Sharon Hayes - Business Owner Riverside Trading and Fish and Chips, lives on river
- Julie Chick - Planning Commission, Tillamook County Water Trail facilitator, former kayak business owner
- Dan Haag – Tillamook County Visitor Association, advisory member

The Committee is chaired by Melissa Thompson-Kiefer, Nehalem City Manager. The project is facilitated and lead by John Morgan, Nehalem City Planner, with the assistance of Bob Foster FLSA, an urban designer.

The Committee held three meetings. The first was to agree on guiding principles and to lay out ideas and options. The second was to narrow those ideas down to specific proposed actions. The third was to review a draft compilation of the material from the second meeting and agree on a set of recommendations to make to the City Council.

### Guiding Principles

The Committee reached consensus on these principles as a guide to evaluating and deciding on options. These principles are based on these findings about what defines Nehalem as a place people love:

- The proximity to water which defines the physical presence and character of the community.



# Nehalem Waterfront Advisory Committee Report to City Council

## July 2022

- The river supports the local economy creating opportunity for the entire community.
- The town of Nehalem is a special place because of its proximity within the Nehalem Estuary. Daily and seasonal changes of the river and bay provide unlimited opportunities for residents and visitors to appreciate the variety of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats.
- Nehalem has diverse activities and a place where it is easy to get into the wild.
- Nehalem is the type of place where people want to retire because the citizens are very supportive of each other, the pace of the community is slow instead of hectic or frantic, and the town is magical in that way.
- People care about keeping the Community clean.

The Committee discussed the balance between preservation of things as they are and encouraging economic development. It was decided to pursue both as honoring and protecting the character of the community can be a major element of any economic development effort, and economic development will bring additional prosperity to all. It is not a zero-sum game.

The Committee also recognizes water-based recreation is very popular in Nehalem. As it is growing in popularity in the population at large, many people are coming to Nehalem because of the ease of access to the river and the charm of the community and those numbers are only going to grow. As a growth in tourism will happen regardless of the city's actions, it is best to identify and pursue projects which help guide that tourism in a safe manner, one that is based on equity and inclusion, and which creates an environment promoting local businesses.

### Issues

The primary issues are:

- Water based recreation is growing and that opportunity and impact on Nehalem will continue to grow as well.
- People are seeking experiences outdoors and may not know or understand basic principles of safety and respect for the property of others. There are definite safety issues with the river including tree branches creating hidden hazards, cold water impacted by tides and wind, and the lack of ladders.
- It is difficult to climb from the river onto the docks.

# Nehalem Waterfront Advisory Committee Report to City Council

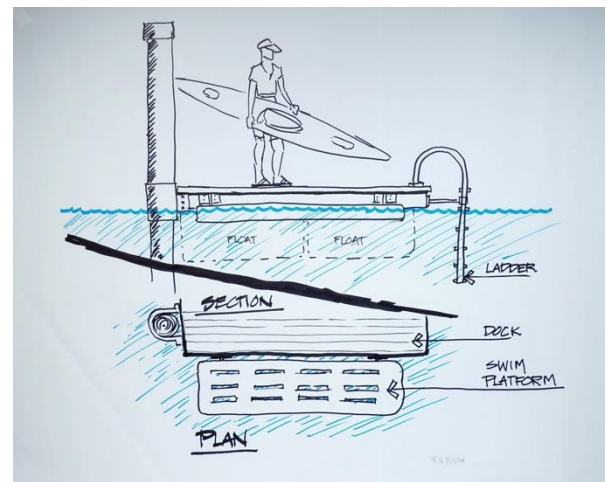
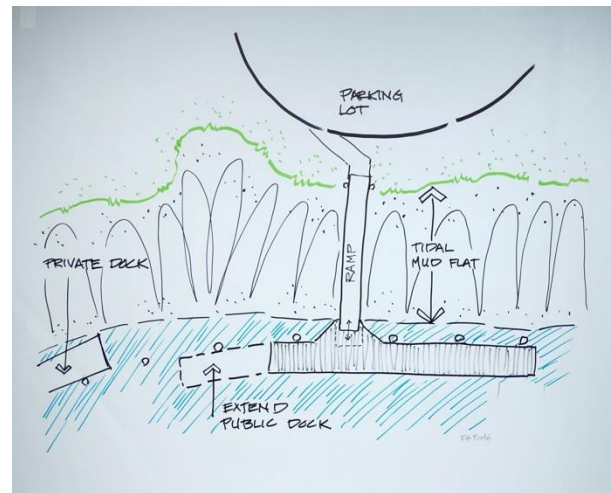
## July 2022

- It is difficult to access a non-motorized watercraft from a dock because of the distance between the dock and the water level. It is a goal to provide safe and convenient access for all.
- Motorized and non-motorized watercraft are using the same areas and docks creating safety hazards.
- Traffic flow and parking are problematic as the demand is high in the summer with limited parking spaces available immediately near the river. People may not show respect for the property of others.
- Funding is available for a variety of small projects, but the City has no policy context to help define the types of projects to be pursued to best meet local needs and goals, and the priorities for making applications or making budget decisions.

To address these issues, the Committee created the following list of ideas for consideration:

### Ideas

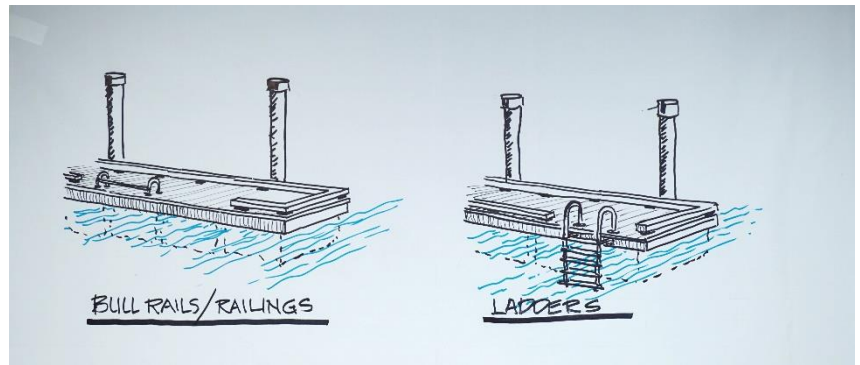
- Increase size of dock area for non-motorized use.
- Improve access from dock into river
- Need ladder
- Kayak-only access area and tubes for storage
- Non-motorized access equipment
- Accessibility ramp for wheelchair



# Nehalem Waterfront Advisory Committee Report to City Council

## July 2022

- Create waterfront walking trail
- Pay-for-use lockers for renting space and storing equipment.
- Lifting/Transporting kayak is challenge for older and disabled population



- An outfitter could provide and rent equipment. Where to rent is frequent question.
- Have further discussions regarding liability?
- Keep launches simple and low-maintenance (like wooden example in photo) West side of dock often in mud in low tide.
- Simple handrail for paddleboard access off dock – 90 degree bar on dock
- Bull rail – remove some sections
- Be environmentally conscious with any development
- Think long term regarding climate change and water level
- Visitor info regarding tides is key. Got tides? (see language in tide book trail); QR codes (cell service poor there)? Post most important information. (Uptick in vandalism of signs, make it indestructible)
- Cold water safety – how to dress
- Safety around motorized boats/all types of users
- Wayfinding signs – add to corner parking lot as orientation – gateway kiosk to waterfront?
- Roundabout – may enhance accessibility to waterfront
- Deer island – city needs to own it and connect it by walkway; use as park setting

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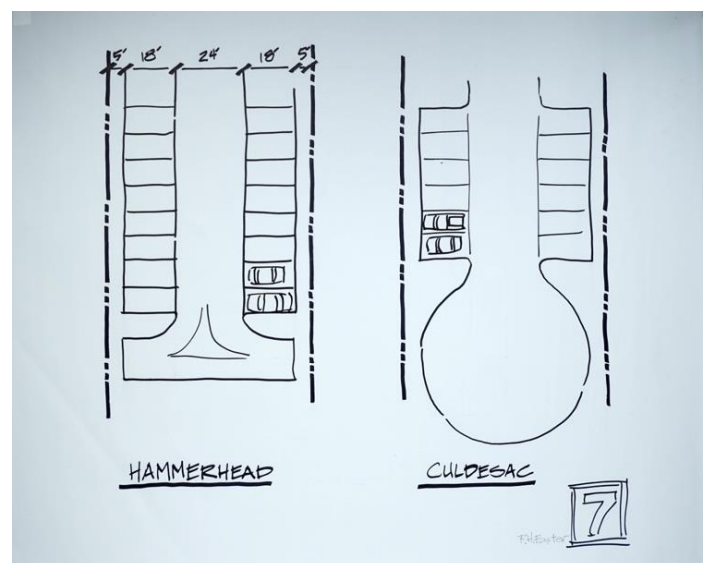
## Recommended Actions

Recommended actions fall into two categories consistent with the Committee's charge. These are short term and long-term actions.

- Short term actions are those for which funding is likely available within two years and which effectively address the identified needs and values. These are the actions recommended to the City Council for near-term approval.
- Long term actions are those addressing identified needs and values, but which are larger in scale and therefore do not have immediate funding possibilities, or which require significantly more public input, planning, design, and permitting.

### Recommended Short Term Actions:

- Improve access from dock to river
  - Remove portion of bull rail
  - Add a ladder to the water
  - Handrail along portion of dock to help with kayak and paddleboard ingress and egress
- Add wayfinding signs directing visitors to parking, loading, and water access areas
- Develop and cultivate a partnership with the Port of Nehalem to address waterfront issues and opportunities



# Nehalem Waterfront Advisory Committee Report to City Council

## July 2022

### Recommended Long Term Actions:

- Undertake a comprehensive Waterfront Development planning process. The purpose of this plan is to create a cohesive framework to address the issues identified above within the context of the identified values. This plan must be in the context of a public/private partnership given the majority of the waterfront area is privately owned.
- The overall plan must establish a common direction for development and redevelopment of the waterfront focusing on access, economic development, and maintenance of community values. The ideas create by the Committee and listed in this document, along with the guiding principles, should initiate the discussions needed to create the plan.
- The plan must guide public investment in the docks, traffic circulation, parking, and public access areas. Findings from the upcoming Transportation System Plan update should be considered.
- The plan must guide private investment in building and business upgrades and the relationship of privately held properties to the waterfront.
- The plan must identify and guide common actions to address safety, access, signage, and marketing of the waterfront area and recreational opportunities.
- As an element of the plan, an environmental assessment of Deer Island should be completed determining if there is any appropriate public use which can be developed without degrading the island's environmental quality.