



## WHAT I DID ON MY SUMMER VACATION

by Roland Lewis, President and CEO

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Dear Waterfront Alliance,



This summer, I had the opportunity to combine business with pleasure. I left early for my family vacation in the beautiful Pacific Northwest and met with a number of government and civic leaders in Portland, Seattle and Vancouver to discuss their respective waterfronts. All three of these cities are doing remarkable work and I'd like to share a few of the observations from my meetings and travels. Keep in mind that these are big, complex waterfronts and my notes below are only my comments and impressions after a few meetings and a few tours. That said, I found the short trip very interesting and want to share some of it with you.

### SEATTLE

Located between Lake Washington on the East and Puget Sound on the west, Seattle's waterfront is vibrant. It plays an integral role for the maritime industry in an extremely diversified economy – with recreation, tourism and parks a healthy part of the mix.

#### Waterfront Highlights:

- **Westway Redux.** Much of Seattle's waterfront is cut off by State Route 99 – formerly known as the old Alaskan Highway. This elevated highway has outlived its normal lifespan and is not built to withstand earthquakes. The People's Waterfront Alliance (PWA), a local civic organization, is leading the effort to find an alternative to simply replacing this arterial with another highway. If they took the additional step of replacing it with a road at grade, or with a tunnel or submerged highway, the waterfront at Seattle's downtown and front door would



be opened up. PWA's advocacy has been effective and a consensus seems to be developing around a waterfront boulevard and park, with a series of traffic and transit alternatives to mitigate the loss of a quick cross-town alternative for 120,000 vehicles daily. Final determination awaits, as do the financing and timetable. The debate felt a lot like Westway to these New York ears.

- **Ferries:** The State of Washington has a ferry system which famously connects the San Juan Islands and Canada. The City of Seattle, after much study and political pressure from the affected communities, decided to invest in a greatly expanded municipal ferry system that will create two existing routes and start three new routes for a 10-year trial. Like San Francisco, they have allocated a substantial amount of funding for their ferry expansion. In Seattle's case, \$200 million through a real estate tax.



- **Good Paying Blue Collar jobs.** For all its beauty and recreational opportunities, the Seattle port is decidedly a working waterfront. A huge fishing fleet made famous by the television show, "Deadliest Catch," calls Seattle home and mines the huge and sustainable Alaskan fishery. A large and diverse manufacturing base continues to grow – flying in the face of the opposite national trend. This is no small potatoes – excluding Boeing, other Seattle manufacturing and other industries had sales of \$31 billion in 2006. This working waterfront flourishes with the support of private industry and political support. This was most recently evidenced by the strengthening of manufacturing zoning, which they did by limiting commercial and office development on 5,000 waterfront acres.
- **Parks and Recreation.** Frederick Law Olmsted (Central Park's famous designer) had a grand plan for Seattle's parks. Never implemented in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its revival shot down by the voters in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a vestige of the Park system will live in the Lake Union Park now under development by the Seattle Parks Foundation and the Seattle Parks Department. A waterfront park that will include boat building, kayaking, seaplanes and historic shops will be a great addition to their park system. Seattle is also working on a greenway system that will hug much of its waterfront.
- **Pike Street Market.** The famous open air market adjoins the waterfront and hopes (with the demolition of Highway 99) to have a direct connection to the water. The Pike Street Market, much like Granville Island (its sister project up in Vancouver), is at its root, is an effort to preserve working class jobs and heritage. More on that below.

## PORTLAND

150 miles south of Seattle, Portland, Oregon lies on the Willamette River just before it joins the Columbia River as it flows toward the Pacific. Beginning in the 1970s, the waterfront highway was demolished and replaced with a waterfront park that now bears the name of late Governor Tom McCall. The Willamette had been fouled by industrial pollution, especially from paper mills, but, with leadership, by the Portland Audubon Society and the government, the Willamette River is as clean as it has been in over a century.

### **Waterfront Highlights:**

- **Nature in the City.** Nature is rebounding right in the heart of Portland, with sanctuaries like Ross Island in the middle of the Willamette River created for fish, fowl and plants.

- **Waterfront Parks.** The large waterfront park on one side of the Willamette River came into being when the highway was done away with. On the opposite bank and up river and down, additional esplanades and parks have been created and, I can attest are heavily used in the middle of a busy Portland workday.



- **On Water Transit and Use.** Portland does not currently have a water transit system, but in partnership with entrepreneurial and civic organizations, they are contemplating the creation of one. They even have a small fleet of wooden boats, formally from Crater Lake, stored away and ready for use.

- **Comprehensive Waterfront Planning.** Over the last ten years, Portland has undertaken a comprehensive review of its waterfront. Starting with a survey in 2001, then with strategy based on that survey, and finally with metrics to be reported on annually, Portland takes its waterfront planning very seriously. The River Renaissance Directors, convened and empowered by the Mayor and with the participation and leadership of applicable City Commissioners and the City Council, have made the River Renaissance a top priority of the City. It is an impressive effort with significant results. Check it out at <http://www.portlandonline.com/river/>.



- **Waterfront Development.** Along with the River Renaissance effort, there has also been a transformation of much industrial waterfront in downtown Portland to residential communities. The Portland skyline and many upland views are now

dominated by modern residential buildings. Waterfront parks, esplanades and ecology parks also come with these new communities.

- **Waterfront Jobs.** Like Seattle, Portland has a large number of waterfront industrial and maritime jobs. The next phase of the Portland River Renaissance Planning process will be a plan to preserve the jobs and the industry, as well as improve the environment, on this northern section of the river.

## VANCOUVER



Directly to the north of Seattle and across the Canadian border lies the waterfront city of Vancouver. Consisting of peninsulas and rivers, Vancouver seems like it is nothing but waterfront. With shipping, recreation, ferries (and even seaplanes – Seattle has them too), Vancouver has the look and feel of a city very much in touch with its maritime roots.

### Waterfront Highlights:

- **Granville Island.** If I was going to create a perfect waterfront destination with something for everybody, it would be Granville Island. With shops for tourists and locals, ferries, an open air market, a town dock, a marina, restaurants, a maritime center where you can buy and sell boats, a university, a working cement factory with material barged in and out – it is a beehive of activity and probably the most famous destination in Vancouver. Underlying this success is the same idea that made the Seattle Pike Street Market work so well, a governmental initiative to preserve working class jobs, businesses and character in the heart of the city. The high-end stores that cater to tourists pay more rent and subsidize local artisans. This touch of socialism makes for a healthy mix, no chains and a tourist Mecca in the heart of the city (as in Seattle for the Pike Street market.)
- **Stanley Park.** Imagine if the New York City founders had declared all of Manhattan below 14<sup>th</sup> Street parkland and kept much of it forever wild. You would get a taste of the huge and remarkable waterfront park that is Stanley Park. It also contains a huge marina, an aquarium and many other attractions.

