



PORT OF BELLINGHAM
Washington State

Georgia Pacific Due Diligence
Existing Building Assessment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this document is to present the Port of Bellingham with the findings of an assessment of the reuse and redevelopment potential of existing historic buildings situated on the property referred to as the Georgia Pacific Site in Bellingham, Washington. This evaluation includes all existing building stock (except the tissue warehouse), including those currently used for ongoing Georgia Pacific Operations.

Building Inventory

In order to establish a benchmark for further review, a cursory analysis of each building was conducted. This information was used to divide the buildings into one of four categories.

- Reuse Potential – Based on unique architectural character or historic significance.
- Interim Use Potential – Possible near term industrial reuse with few modifications.
- Minimal Reuse Potential – Usually newer industrial buildings ill suited for mixed use redevelopment.
- Ongoing GP Operations – Current use in tissue manufacturing.

In order to determine the feasibility of adaptively reusing selected buildings, the consultant team set out to explore various issues concerning cultural and historic resources, structural condition of properties, potential renovation costs, preliminary strategic concepts, and development incentives for historic districts.

Historic Property Assessment

In the years prior to World War I, a sequence of large industrial projects began to unfold on the site, culminating in the ambitious plans of Ossian Anderson in 1937 to build a state of the art pulp and paper mill. In May of 1938, the primary brick masonry buildings of the Puget Sound Pulp & Timber Company went into operation. It took more than a decade to develop the complex of sprawling red brick buildings, but when it was completed in 1949, Bellingham was home to one of the most productive, efficient and visually elegant wood pulp production facilities in the world.

Consequently, the Georgia Pacific property includes a rich assortment of industrial buildings and structures that are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, either as individual sites or as a larger historic district. The buildings have excellent potential for adaptive reuse due to their sound structural condition, strong architectural merit and dramatic physical setting and location.



Mill complex circa 1950

As designated National Register sites, there are well-used economic incentives and financial tools that make the properties attractive to higher real property development. As a matter of land use planning and environmental effect, the site holds great promise for wise and sustainable growth of the urban core, expanded social activity on the downtown waterfront and improved air and water quality.

Structural Evaluation

The structural evaluation consisted of a general visual analysis of each building to identify the type of construction and to identify signs of structural distress, differential settlement, and deterioration. A majority of the buildings classified for potential reuse are steel frame structures with masonry infill walls and are built with a heavy floor loading capacity (250-300 psf) which easily accommodates mixed use redevelopment.

Nearly all of the buildings are supported on a wood pile foundation. They are generally in a good state of repair with the exception of some minor deterioration due to industrial use.

While loading due to gravity forces are well accommodated, the structures will require seismic retrofitting for lateral resistance. These structural concerns, however, are common for industrial buildings constructed in the 1930's and 40's and are similar to other buildings that have been successfully renovated in the Puget Sound area.

Renovation Costs

Retrofitting historical buildings for adaptive reuses can sometimes drive costs beyond that which the market is willing to pay. In order to test the viability of development assumptions, five buildings were selected for more scrutiny. Each structure exemplified characteristics evident in other similar buildings. Once established, costs could be extrapolated for similar buildings.

In formulating these costs it was assumed that the quality of construction would be high, and that labor costs would conform to prevailing wage rates. Needless to say, if development is performed in the private sector, some savings would likely occur. While each proposed project deserves further scrutiny, it appears that construction costs for the renovated structures fall within the range (although on the high side) of market sustainability.

Historic District

The history of development on the Bellingham Waterfront is closely tied to what once were our most plentiful natural resources: fish and timber. The pulp and paper industry played a large part in dictating our patterns of growth and directing our social development as a community. Through the creation of an Historic District, a significant step is taken to preserve and enhance the story of our working waterfront.

The proposed Historic District encompasses a total of 16.4 acres, and is divided into three distinct zones.

Core Historic District – Includes all of the "brick era" buildings and would presumably have the strictest design standards.

Waterfront Craftsman District – Includes the four wood-framed buildings on or near the wharf and may be used for water related activities until redevelopment occurs.

Approach Development Zone – Adjacent development zones governed by less stringent, yet compatible design guidelines.

Two street grid concepts were considered in order to test the viability of establishing a suitable pattern for vehicular and pedestrian circulation within the Historic District. Both illustrate the opportunity to organize the existing buildings within a coherent roadway pattern, while offering ample new development potential.

Conclusion

The renovation of existing significant buildings on the Georgia Pacific Site and their inclusion in a Historic District represents a remarkable opportunity to highlight the historical development of Bellingham's working waterfront. Many factors lead to its potential success:

- Retaining the core of the industrial complex lends a sense of authenticity to future development that will surround it.
- The substantial structural and architectural quality of the buildings made them more attractive for redevelopment.
- The location of the district allows it to be more easily woven into the existing street grid.
- The district forms an effective buffer between future development and Georgia Pacific ongoing operations.

Cities around the region and indeed the world, are seeking ways to reinvent themselves through the thoughtful reclamation of their waterfronts. The most successful waterfront redevelopments are limited to the inherent characteristics of their location. Creating a sense of place through the reinterpretation of history provides a unique linkage between environmental influences and cultural heritage.