

Battle Ground Community Vision & Action Plan

Stakeholder Interviews

HIGHLIGHTS

Introduction

The City of Battle Ground is working with community members to develop a Community Vision & Action Plan that will guide Battle Ground's future. An independent consultant team led by Barney & Worth, Inc. is conducting the vision process.

Stakeholder Interviews

In the early stages of the visioning process, the consultant team conducted a series of interviews in April 2018 with a cross-section of community leaders and other persons who are deeply involved in community affairs and the local economy: educators, business owners, developers, Chamber of Commerce members, non-profit and government agency representatives, economic development specialists and others. Interviews were conducted in-person and by telephone with more than 35 persons. (A list of participants is attached.)

Participants were asked to share their perceptions about Battle Ground's current identity and strengths – weaknesses – and opportunities, along with their vision and suggestions for the future. Their advice also was sought on ways to attract broad participation in the vision process. The observations, insights and suggestions provided by the individuals who participated will contribute to subsequent phases of the vision process.

This report reflects the advice, feelings and attitudes of the individuals interviewed. It is not intended to provide a statistically valid profile of community opinion as a whole.

Highlights

1. **The number one goal for Battle Ground's Vision is to establish the community's future identity.** Community leaders are uncertain about Battle Ground's future identity, which is in flux due to steady growth. Common elements offered include continuing its traditional character as a small town – rural – suburban – bedroom community. But many participants admit they're uncertain about the best future direction. Some community leaders advocate shifting the community's rural/small-town identity to underscore instead the natural attractions nearby, while working to expand and diversify the local economy. Mentioned most often as possible models are neighboring cities – Camas and Ridgefield – and other communities closely identified with outdoor recreation: Wenatchee, Bend and Hood River.

"The key question – what do you want Battle Ground to become? We need an intentional sense of direction and a strong presence in Clark County."

"What is our identity?"

"Identity? Hard to say."

"Evolving."

"Small town, rural feel – but offering city amenities."

“True bedroom community.”

“Many people don’t even know that Battle Ground exists.”

“Time to develop a common understanding of what Battle Ground is and should be – get everyone on the same page.”

- 2. Battle Ground is coming to grips with steady growth pressure.** Residents are increasingly concerned about the threat to quality of life. There’s a general worry that City services aren’t keeping up: inadequate water supply, street repairs falling behind, too few police, parks too few and too small, planning and development controls inadequate. Schools are also negatively affected. However, other observers are excited about opportunities that growth provides. “Smart planning” and “balance” are seen as possible solutions.

“Doing the best they can with available funds.”

“Inadequate water and sewer; need to plan for and increase capacity.”

“Fire protection is currently adequate, but police are shorthanded. Need new police and fire facilities. Staffing parks quite inadequate.”

“Massive street maintenance backlog.”

“Schools struggle with funding.”

“Schools are busting at the seams. Classrooms are already bursting at the seams.”

“Newcomers want/expect a higher level of City services.”

“Can’t keep up with growth – need more comprehensive planning.”

- 3. Traffic congestion has become a high-profile concern.** This is a top of mind issue for nearly everyone, zeroing in on the junction of State Highways 502 and 503. A few observers place this complaint in perspective with much greater regional traffic congestion problems elsewhere. Battle Ground, they say, isn’t jammed up like I-5, I-205, or Tualatin or Beaverton. Perhaps it’s the contrast of experiencing bumper-to-bumper traffic after decades of little/no congestion. A few participants promote the idea of state highway bypasses around Battle Ground as a long-term solution.

“Traffic is a nightmare.”

“Transportation and traffic circulation are certainly a weakness.”

“Traffic challenges: commerce needs infrastructure?”

“There are transportation pinchpoints – but this is mostly a perception issue.”

“Traffic jam.”

“Horrendous traffic!”

- 4. Consensus view: Battle Ground needs more local employment.** With a majority of residents currently commuting to jobs in Vancouver and Portland, community leaders agree that adding jobs should be given a higher priority. Battle Ground has become a regional center for retail/restaurants/services, but those sectors provide few family wage jobs. And it’s unclear whether these fastest growing sectors of the past decade are tapped out, and what other economic niches Battle Ground might attract. Ties to an existing Port district (Vancouver or Ridgefield) or colleges are suggested as strategies to promote economic growth.

“There are no large employers – most residents work out of town.”

“People would like to work close to where they live.”

“Diversification of retail – right now, retail seems to be predominantly focused on vintage stores.”

“Creating living wage jobs.”

“Yes – more jobs. Not sure what kind though.”

“We need more space for professional services.”

“Employers should fit Battle Ground’s workforce: blue collar, small niche manufacturing, light industrial.”

“High tech.”

5. **The Battle Ground High School campus represents a prime redevelopment site that could reshape the city’s future.** Two possible visions arise for the future of the BGHS campus: siting a major company headquarters or a large manufacturing plant, or redeveloping the site as Battle Ground’s new, more contemporary and more compact town center.

“120-acre BG High School site in center of town could be redeveloped.”

“The really BIG opportunity is the longstanding proposal to move the high school out of the core area. This would potentially create around 100 acres of redevelopment potential for commercial and retail in the core of the city.”

“The City will need to lead redevelopment of the high school site.”

6. **Community leaders are becoming increasingly aware of the potential to attract visitors.** Observers admit that few visitors have been drawn to Battle Ground over the years, although some arrive to visit family or travel through on their way to mountains, rivers, lakes, and other outdoor destinations generally acknowledged to be “first class.” That visitor profile is changing with the proliferation of good eateries, a resurgence of Old Town antique stores and craft shops, community events attracting guests, a world class skatepark, and wineries/breweries/distilleries springing up nearby that add a “cool” factor.

“Vibrant! Lots of arts and crafts in Old Town.”

“Visitors just drive through and don’t stop.”

“I don’t know a single Portlander who has ever visited Battle Ground except the ones I have invited.”

“Gateway to wilderness.”

“Best equestrian, hiking, biking, waterfalls, climbing, boating in the North County.”

“Our downtown is well known for its antiques shopping.”

“Historically, not much appeal to visitors – a farm town in the middle of nowhere. Now, there are wineries, breweries and more.”

“Close to world-class playgrounds.”

7. **Battle Ground can build on important economic assets and strengths – but must also confront a few challenges.**

Strengths/Challenges for Battle Ground Economy	
<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Challenges</u>
Growth	Growth/growing pains
Central location	Lack of distinct identity
Affordability of homes	Traffic congestion
Retail/restaurant hub	Infrastructure needs
Setting; proximity to natural attractions <u>and</u> big cities	Wetlands
Small town feel	Job base lacking
Locally owned businesses; old-town	Residents commute to work
Wineries/breweries/distilleries	Development review process
Community spirit	

8. **Can the community’s abundant wetlands be transformed into an amenity and asset?** With around 40% of Battle Ground’s geography reportedly in wetland, several participants share a similar vision that would preserve those natural areas and link them with parks, lakes, streams, trails, open space, bird sanctuaries, etc. as an amenity for development.

“We need to turn wetlands into a plus with trails.”

“Wetlands limit development.”

“Preserve and connect wetlands and streams; create beautiful places.”

9. **Community leaders nominate a list of projects to enhance** livability and the future economy. Named most often are facilities to accommodate activities for youth – a new YMCA, aquatics center, a larger community center that is programmed with youth activities, a sports complex and other indoor/outdoor gathering places.

Priority Projects
YMCA
Swimming pool
Indoor/outdoor gathering places
Sports complex
Showcase park
Paths, walking/biking trails, sidewalks
Farmers market

10. Neighborhoods can become the framework to connect longtime residents and newcomers and preserve the sense of belonging Battle Grounders want.

Preserving Battle Ground's special character will require integrating newcomers into community life. Most new arrivals must commute to work and lack time to make local connections. Forming a network of neighborhood associations is suggested as one strategy to help overcome this challenge.

"Provide a bridge between old and new groups."

"New people don't work here; aren't involved."

"How can we connect the new residents/neighborhoods?"

11. Multiple communication channels are critical to engage Battle Ground residents in creating the new Community Vision. *The Reflector* and face-to-face contacts are cited most often as effective tools for reaching area citizens. It's important, too, to engage the faith community, which represents a significant segment of the population. A variety of other methods are suggested, too, that appeal to various audiences.

"Personal relationships with longtime community members."

"Best way to engage this community is an online survey."

"Public meetings are NOT effective. Open houses don't work – poor attendance, or they attract the same people."

"BG Facebook page."

"Ad hoc committee of community leaders."

"Consider meetings involving the schools."

"Go to people where they are."

Community Engagement Channels

Reflector

Surveys: online, door-to-door

Citizen Advisory Committee

Social media: Facebook; Instagram

Through schools

Through community organizations

Through faith-based groups

Through local businesses

Harvest Days and other community events

Signage promoting website: billboards, posters

Final Advice

At the end, participants were invited to offer a “single most important piece of advice.”

The themes sounded most often:

- Reach out and involve all elements of the community. Make the Vision community-driven.
- Create a Vision that's realistic and implementable. Revisit it periodically and make adjustments.
- Focus on the future – plan for the next generation and people who don't live here yet.

Here are the participants' collective contributions.

Move beyond Monday City Council meetings to reach broader community.

Solidify relationship between church and community.

Listen to citizens, but move past complaints to solutions.

Involve the right (problem-solving) people.

City seems to know what the community's needs are and address them – keep doing what they are doing. Make the best of the strategic advantages we already have: our centralized location, served by two highways, and a large and rapidly growing population.

Provide a bridge between the old and the new groups.

Stay the course with this Vision!

If you build it right, they will come.

Be realistic about the life of the community Vision; ensure that it is revisited every 2-3 years and make adjustments.

Try to develop a common understanding of what BG is and should be – “get everyone on the same page.”

Grow, but don't lose what makes BG special.

Plan for growth!

Keep that small town feeling!

Support our youth. They are our future.

Make this vision truly community-driven. Find ways to engage the community.

It's important to give everyone – young and old – a chance to become part of the vision.

“Go west, young man”: move town closer to I-5.

“Think big!” Keep the vision high level – the “how to” details can come later.

Focus the vision on the future – not the past.

Be confident about building a unique community identity and pride.

Don't sell BG short; no need to be resigned to BG as a bedroom community.

Play to your strengths: natural setting; rural character; conservative.

Think about what your children will need in 20-40 years.

Think self-sustaining; provide for ourselves.

Consequences of inaction are great. Growth is the right way.

Growth is important, but we do need to retain that small-town feel.

Figure out how to keep the small-town character, despite growth.

Plan like crazy.

There's nothing for children to do in Battle Ground.

Battle Ground needs to build a community for people who don't live there yet.

Attract some tourists!

What the City thinks and wants does not really matter. The City is a steward – not the culture.

Want everyone to have a living wage job. Together, Battle Ground must grow,

Respect Battle Ground's history – build on it.

Don't start it if you can't finish it.

DRAFT

Battle Ground Community Vision & Action Plan

Stakeholder Interviews

Monty Anderson	Tapani Company
Cindy Arnold	Battle Ground Schools
Peter Bascetta	Battle Ground Free Clinic
Mike Bomar	CREDC
Shane Bowman	Battle Ground City Council
Russell Brent	Mill Creek Pub
Mindy Brooks	Battle Ground Resident
Mike Brown	Park Advisory Chair
Liz Cerveney	North County Community Food Bank
Adrian Cortes	Battle Ground City Council
Mike Dalesandro	Mayor
Cherish DeRochers	Battle Ground City Council
Kathy Deschner	Clark County
Eric Eisemann	E2 Land Use Planning
Dave Halme	Forestry/Land Use Consultant
Diane Harris	Owner: Old Towne Battle Grounds
Denise Hays	Battle Ground Snap Fitness
Eric Holmes	Former City Manager
John Idsinga	Realtor/former Mayor
Philip Johnson	Battle Ground City Council
Betsey Kenworthy	Former Parks Advisory Board, long-time resident
Ron King	3 Kings Environmental
Stacy Hickman Kysar	Planning Commission
Tim Miller	College Student, Works at Rock Solid
Brian Munson	Battle Ground City Council
Alkesh Patel	Best Western Owner
Steven Phelps	Battle Ground City Council
Amy Price-Robinson	Riverview Bank
Valerie Prickett	Best Western
Rick Sawczuk	Battle Ground Four-Square Church
Tim Schauer	MacKay Sposito
Gayle Smith	Branch Manager, Columbia Credit Union
Marcy Sprecher	Rock Solid Teen Center
Troy Steigman	Barrel Mountain Brewing
Kevin Tapani	Tapani, Inc. VP
John Williams	Former City Manager
Steve Wrightson	Retired Fire Chief-District 3