Brewery District Steering Committee Final Report:
A Blueprint for Action

This document is intended to serve as a final report and recommendations from the Brewery District Steering Committee. This ad hoc committee has been meeting to discuss redevelopment issues affecting the Brewery District for approximately the past year.

The Brewery District Ad Hoc Steering Committee was originally established by a small group of individuals interested in the present and future development of the south downtown Tacoma district that includes many former breweries and a number of other old commercial buildings. Designated the "Brewery District," the area is presently zoned W/R or "warehouse/residential." The committee includes property owners, business owners and managers, tenants, and other stakeholders with a variety of backgrounds and areas of interest and expertise. All share in common both a love of the District, its old industrial buildings and its history and a great deal of excitement about the possibilities for the District's revitalization and future.

With much of the downtown undergoing redevelopment, interest in enhancing the unique character of the district surfaced. In October 2000, the committee held a public meeting to begin identification of some of the issues and interests specific to the District. In addition to the members of the Committee and representatives of the City of Tacoma, over 60 interested people attended the meeting. During that meeting, a presentation was made on the history of the district and the attendees identified a list of ideas, concerns, issues, and aspirations having to do with the neighborhood. These included possibilities for future development, enhancement of existing businesses and properties, the addition of residential units, the impact of the University of Washington Tacoma students, parking and loading zone needs, in-fill development standards, historic preservation, public
safety issues, design issues, building code compliance issues, street lighting, open spaces, spaces for gathering, and livability enhancements. Also briefly discussed were the possibilities of organizing the district and of pursuing Historic District designation. Additionally, an invitation was issued for any other interested persons to become members of the ad hoc steering committee.

Since the October meeting, the ad hoc group, with the addition of 2 new members who had attended the public meeting, has continued to discuss the issues identified and to explore some of the options for organizing the district. In that process, meetings have been held with Mayor Crowley, Deputy Mayor Kevin Phelps’ and with staff from the City of Tacoma's Economic Development Department. The Assistant Director of Tacoma Economic Development Department and the City of Tacoma's Historic Preservation Officer have also been active participants in a number of the meetings of the steering committee.

The committee now has reached some conclusions regarding the Brewery District and, as promised last October, is bringing those conclusions and recommendations back to the District’s stakeholders in the form of this report.

The committee is agreed that it is in the interest of the District’s property owners, business people, and residents to organize in a formal manner in order to have a significant voice in what happens to the District. As redevelopment activity accelerates downtown, along the Thea Foss Waterway, and in the Dome District, the committee believes that it is important for the Brewery District to have both a distinct identity and a means of self-determination. The members of the committee believe that the unique character of the district can be both protected and enhanced, but in order to play a vital role in the formal process, formal organization is necessary and desirable. There are several possibilities for the form such organization might take. These include becoming a formal business district, becoming active in the existing New Tacoma Neighborhood Council, or
becoming a neighborhood association registered with the City of Tacoma as a recognized group. Any of these options would facilitate coordination with and influencing city development plans. Each form of organizing offers some advantages. Organization as a private non-profit should also be considered in the context of the options mentioned above. Each of the options is described in the following paragraphs.

- **Becoming a formal business improvement district.** The City of Tacoma currently includes 12 individual business districts and a Cross-district Association that are organized around the needs of the City's business districts. These districts receive formal recognition and support from the City of Tacoma's Economic Development Department. This assistance includes planning services, staff assistance, and access to funding for business district enhancements. In the past two years, 6 of these districts have received this formal recognition and have joined the City's original 6 designated districts to become part of the City of Tacoma's Business District program.

- **Becoming active in the existing New Tacoma Neighborhood Council.** In 1992, a City ordinance was passed that divided Tacoma into 8 neighborhood council districts and created the Neighborhood Council program. Each of these 8 neighborhood councils is made up of the persons living, working, and/or owning property each the district. Each council is organized as an independent non-profit organization and elects a board of directors at an annual meeting. These directors serve two-year terms and have the legal and fiduciary responsibility to conduct their neighborhood council's business. The neighborhood councils operate on a contract for service with the City of Tacoma and are charged with advising city government and working to enhance their neighborhoods. Each Council is paid $5,000 per year by the City for services rendered.
The Brewery District falls within the boundaries of the New Tacoma Neighborhood Council. Although the Brewery District could attempt to become a separate neighborhood council, the existing 8 council districts are much larger than the Brewery District and encompass populations up to 45,000 residents each. Gaining recognition as a separate neighborhood council would involve an ordinance to change the existing districts and to create an additional council.

- **Becoming a neighborhood association registered with and recognized by the City of Tacoma.** The City of Tacoma maintains a registry of official neighborhood groups or organizations. These include such groups as the Old Town Improvement Club, the Hilltop Action Coalition, and the North Slope Coalition. These groups normally represent a geographic area that is smaller and than a neighborhood council district and that is larger and more diversified than an official business district. Official recognition, achieved through registration, gives the group access to information disseminated by the City having to do with land use and economic development. These associations, when designated as "recognized," become formally "in the loop" for relevant land use notices, participation in hearings, and such actions. They are also included in certain outreach activities conducted by the City to gain input into public policy development in topic areas such as zoning and capital improvements. The precise organization of such a neighborhood association can take various forms. These associations can become non-profit organizations under Chapter 16 of the Revised Code of Washington, and/or can, depending on their purpose and activities, become tax-exempt 501 (c)(3) or 501 (e) (3) organizations under the Federal Internal Revenue Code regulations.
The Brewery District Steering Committee believes that formally organizing the stakeholders of the Brewery District is in the interest of the future of the district. A formal group that can speak for the district and that can participate in policy debates and influence policy development has the potential to help shape the future of the district and to create an attractive, vital, and economically thriving area of the City. Without a formal organization, the committee believes that influencing the future development of the District will be left to individuals who may or may not serve the best interests of the district as a whole. The committee believes that it is important for the district as a whole to have a voice in its own future and to take an active role in crafting it.

Keeping self-determination in mind, the committee thinks that it is important for the stakeholders to develop a conceptual framework that can act as a guide in establishing the Brewery District as a viable urban community and an exciting part of the City of Tacoma. The following is suggested as one of several possible visions around which such a framework could be constructed. The Brewery District could become:

- A multiple-layered community that retains the spirit of its industrial/mercantile past in its architecture, both old and new, and in its work ethic;

- A community that embraces and promotes the fine and applied arts, encouraging the development of arts-based businesses;

- A community that fosters and maintains the vitality of a 24-hr environment in the district, a kind of ‘urban garden’ with at least a few night blooming flowers;

- A community that is user friendly, that feels secure to the pedestrian and cyclist at any time, while accommodating motorist’s needs for access and parking;

- A community which preserves continuity of purpose through internal organization that keeps information flowing about changes and developments, acting as an informal interface representing the neighborhood to the city on policy matters of mutual concern, and helping to refine “Destination Downtown”; and
- A neighborhood that has a unique character and is ready to play a considerable role in the revitalization of Tacoma.

Whatever the vision or organizational form the Brewery District adopts, the committee believes that some issues should be addressed as soon as possible. These include:

- **Historic preservation.** Immediately adjacent to the Union Depot/Warehouse Historic District, the Brewery District presently contains several properties of historic significance and design interest. The Pacific Brewing and Malting Company Complex is already listed on the National Historic Register. Some of the old buildings in the district will be lost to previously committed projects. Others are currently being restored and redeveloped. Decisions need to be made regarding the futures of the additional properties. The option of obtaining official Historic District designation, one way to preserve the unique character of the District, should be considered for its potential economic and design implications. Historic Districts allow certain tax benefits to developers but impose certain design criteria for the exteriors of applicable buildings. Design standards and zoning regulations are other possible means of both protecting and creating the character of the District. In any event, prompt action should be taken to make sure that appropriate preservation and redevelopment occur.

- **Infrastructure Improvements.** Decisions need to be made about streets, sidewalks, sewers, street lighting, and such infrastructure components. Thought should be given to prioritizing needs, obtaining necessary funding, and aesthetic considerations. In some cases, existing infrastructure components will need upgrading. In other cases, decisions need to be made about the desirability of adding sidewalks and pedestrian lighting.

- **Encouraging Specific Uses.** The district presently includes light industrial, applied arts, and technology businesses, with some residential and other uses. Attention should be given to encouraging specific uses that will contribute to the vitality and ambiance of the District. Interest has been expressed in making the District an "applied arts" district, with working artists operating in studios and in live-work spaces. Technology workers and their firms have the potential to help create a 24-hour environment of people living and working in the District. Additional residential units could bring more people and vitality to the District.
- **Streetscape Design.** Such enhancements as landscaping, gathering places, greenery, and open space can be incorporated in ways that can make the District more attractive and encourage activity. Consideration should be given to specific elements that create the type of place and encourage the behaviors desired. Issues of design, lighting, and planned uses need to be explored in order to create an attractive and inviting environment in which to work, live, and play.

- **Integration.** For the District to thrive consideration needs to be given to integration of both old and new construction and uses. Careful planning in this area can significantly enhance the existing appeal of the District and insure that its development occurs in ways that continue to contribute to its ambiance and uniqueness and make the District a place where people will want to be.

- **Marketing the District.** The stakeholders of the Brewery District should have a key role in the marketing of the District. Developing a shared vision and working with the City in any economic development marketing efforts will allow coordinated efforts that can serve the interest of the District as a whole.

The members of the steering committee believe that this is an important and exciting time in the history of the Brewery District. The stakeholders of the District have an unprecedented opportunity to take coordinated action to shape what can become one of the most exciting areas of the City of Tacoma and of the Pacific Northwest region.

Carol Sloman, Ph.D., authored this report on behalf of the Brewery District Steering Committee. Members of the Steering Committee were:

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