

Point Ruston goes from cleanup to community

■ Next to open are a hotel and 178 residential units. More office, retail and housing is on tap for 2018.

By DALTON COLE
Point Ruston

Point Ruston is a 97-acre mixed-use site situated on nearly a mile of Puget Sound shoreline near downtown Tacoma. Standing in the footprint of the old Asarco copper smelting plant, Point Ruston is being redeveloped into a scenic Built Green neighborhood with apartments, condominiums, restaurants, retail, entertainment and public space.



Cole

Early phases have been completed, but plenty of work remains. Projects under construction include a 180-room Silver Cloud hotel and the Baker, which will bring 178 new apartments and condominiums. More buildings are scheduled to open in 2018.

Point Ruston hopes to cultivate this South Sound neighborhood into a top destination in Washington state for those seeking an urban setting but also a scenic and relaxing place to live, play and shop.

A long cleanup

Point Ruston's beautiful setting — with dramatic views of Commencement Bay, Mount Rainier, the Cascade foothills and the Olympic mountains — belies its long history as an industrial site.

The property was first developed into a lead smelting facility 128 years ago, in 1888. In 1905 the smelter was sold to the American Smelting and Refining Co. (Asarco) for \$5.5 million. Asarco would then expand the facility after switching from lead to copper smelting.

Through the process of refining copper, much of the leftover slag was dumped into the adjacent bay, creating a 23-acre peninsula where Asarco built additional facilities. The plant created so many pollutants and byproducts

that a majority of the site was used to sort and prepare the leftovers for shipment.

It wasn't until 1983 that the Environmental Protection Agency would declare the Ruston smelter site part of the Commencement Bay Superfund site, kicking off a long cleanup process. In 1993 came the demolition of the historic 571-foot-tall smelting stack, once known as the tallest brick smoke stack in the world.

The site was put up for sale in 2005 after Asarco filed for bankruptcy. The company lacked the finances to finish the cleanup, so it was forced to turn over the property to someone who could finish the job.

After competing with around 40 other bidders, Point Ruston LLC finalized purchase of the site in 2006 — entering into an agreement to buy the smelter property and take responsibility for the completion of the remaining elements of cleanup.

New development

Point Ruston began redevelopment in earnest, working to design and permit its master plan, including a final site-wide remediation plan approved by the EPA.

Concurrently, Point Ruston began construction on a 36-home subdivision on Stack Hill, where Asarco's brick smoke stack once stood. The picturesque neighborhood was completed in 2009, amid the Great Recession.

In 2012, Point Ruston opened the Waterwalk, a nearly mile-long public pedestrian trail system along Commencement Bay. The walk includes property between the Ruston waterway and the Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium that had been closed to the public for over 100 years.

New housing construction took a leap forwards in 2013 with the completion of the Copperline, with 173 apartments and 44 condominiums.

The second phase of development began in 2015 with the

grand opening of the Century building, which would add another 95 apartments and 40 condos, as well as approximately 55,000 square feet of retail space. The same year, the commercial space in the Copperline was fully leased to an array of tenants including cafés, restaurants and a Northwest Fitness Center. A state-of-the-art, nine-screen cineplex also opened, allowing residents and visitors to see the newest 3-D movies.

The Grand Plaza at Point Ruston was also completed in 2015. The plaza is a place to enjoy the scenery, relax between bike rides, or enjoy a meal with a view. A water fountain, public art, playground, and the nearby Waterwalk highlight the surrounding area.

Restaurants near the Grand Plaza offer something for everyone, from upscale dining to casual



Children gravitate toward the sprayground in Point Ruston's Grand Plaza. The 135-unit Century building, which opened in 2015, is in the background. Photo by Cody Finney

See COMMUNITY — page

Nonprofit brings art to Point Ruston

■ The developer established a nonprofit program that brings art to the neighborhood "in a big way."

By BUSTER BABA
Art at Point Ruston

When my husband and I first walked the Waterwalk along the shore of Commencement Bay we knew we had found a place that would feed our soul, a place we could call home.

When I met Mike Cohen, the developer for the waterfront project at Point Ruston, and spent time talking with him, I knew I had found a kindred spirit. Mike explained that from the beginning of Point Ruston's concept, "artful living" was always in the forefront of his mind when designing this new enterprise.

And with that, a concept and relationship were born: Art at Point Ruston.



Baba

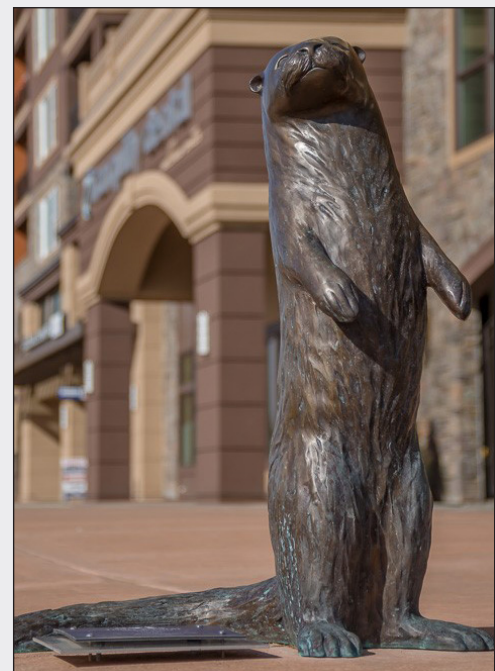
Art at Point Ruston is a nonprofit charitable organization invested in bringing art in a big way to Point Ruston. The organization is dedicated to curating and exhibiting public art throughout the Point Ruston neighborhood, offering a year-round venue that showcases an ever-changing and expanding exhibition of local, regional and nationally significant art and artists.

Point Ruston's stunning waterfront backdrop offers a world-class setting for artists to exhibit their works, and Art at Point Ruston provides participating artists a safe and insured venue to market and sell their art to the public.

As part of its commitment to the arts, Art at Point Ruston is pledged to purchase a minimum of one piece of art per year to add to the permanent collection on display throughout Point Ruston. This year that work is by nationally renowned sculptor Georgia Gerber.

The first round of 15 works were installed last fall. And efforts are currently underway to bring the next group to the property over the coming months.

Buster Baba is the executive director of Art at Point Ruston.



Artworks on display include this otter by Georgia Gerber, known for her Rachel the Pig sculpture at Pike Place Market. Photo courtesy of Art at Point Ruston

An urban park entices Tacomans back in the water

■ This former Superfund site on Foss Waterway will house a public center for kayaks, canoes, rowing shells and dragon boats.

By HANNAH ALLENDER
and DAVID STRAUSS
SHKS Architects

Not long ago, industry alone occupied the Thea Foss Waterway shoreline in Tacoma. Since they were designated Superfund sites by the Environmental Protection Agency in 1983, the waterway and Commencement Bay have been transformed into places where cultural, recreational and residential amenities coexist with remaining industrial uses.

As part of this urban evolution, Metro Parks Tacoma and the Foss Waterway Development Authority identified a building and site at the southern end of the Thea Foss Waterway for use as a center for human-powered watercraft. After over three decades of environmental effort, Tacomans are getting into the water again.



Allender



Strauss

Superfund site

Marine trade, foundries, plywood factories, lumber mills, chemical-processing plants and shipbuilding operations polluted the Thea Foss Waterway throughout Tacoma's history.

In 1983, the EPA identified the Thea Foss and Wheeler-Osgood waterways as part of the larger 12-acre Commencement Bay Superfund cleanup site. Between 2002 and 2006, contractors dredged nearly 425,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment from the Thea Foss and Wheeler-Osgood waterways. The subsequent remediation



Foss Waterway Park will have a new boat-storage building (left), a renovated boathouse (right), an esplanade and open space. Image courtesy of SHKS Architects

of sites along the waterway opened sites for residential and commercial development, and recreational opportunities in floats, ramps and boating facilities.

New watercraft center

The shoreline site of Foss Waterway Park is at the southern end of the waterway, bounded by Dock Street and East D Street in

the shadow of the East 21st Street Bridge.

The site has been partially remediated, capped with clean sediments to keep the contamination in place. Access to the

water is limited to an existing dock: Due to risk of disturbing contaminants, new driven piers

See URBAN PARK — page

Foss Waterway Park

Owners:
Metro Parks Tacoma, Foss Waterway Development Authority

Landscape architect (prime):
Site Workshop

Architect:
SHKS Architects

Structural engineer:
Swenson Say Faget

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The Foss is a hot spot for development in Tacoma

■ With a hotel, two parks and two multifamily projects in the works, 2017 is shaping up to be a busy year.

By **NORMAN GOLLUB**
Foss Waterway Development Authority

Significant developments have taken place along the 1.5-mile Thea Foss Waterway in downtown Tacoma since this former Superfund site was acquired by the city of Tacoma 20 years ago.

It is hard to imagine that the waterfront area was once declared by the Environmental Protection Agency as one of the worst Superfund sites in the nation. A century of industrial pollution and neglect made the idea of redeveloping the waterway and adjacent uplands — many with decaying warehouses and industrial buildings — practically impossible. However, this did not deter city leaders from tackling this challenge and purchasing many of the industrial properties along the waterway.

The city created a redevelopment vision and began working with multiple local, state and federal agencies to begin a coordinated effort to remediate the contamination and restore the waters and adjacent lands leading into Commencement Bay.

This year marks the 10-year anniversary of the \$107 million cleanup. It also marks what is expected to be a significant year of continuing real estate development activity along “the Foss,” coordinated by the Foss Waterway Development Authority (FWDA).



Gollub

Recent developments

The FWDA is the city’s coordinating agency for development along the waterfront. Over the past 20 years it has been managing development activities on both land and water along the waterway.

Currently four market-rate condo and apartment buildings house 594 residential units. They are located between the attractively landscaped public esplanade next to the waterway and Dock Street, the roadway running parallel to the waterway.

The buildings, some with ground-floor restaurants and offices, overlook the water, many with views of Mount Rainier as well as the Foss marinas. Five marinas offer over 700 boat slips for rent. All currently have waiting lists.

This does not hamper Puget Sound mariners from boating into downtown Tacoma to tie up for the day or for a week along the over-1,800 feet of transient moorage located in front of Foss Maritime Seaport Museum and the Museum of Glass.

The “bridge of glass” adjacent to the Museum of Glass displays works by artist Dale Chihuly. It leads downtown and provides a colorful pedestrian passage above railroad tracks and traffic to connect downtown’s many shops, restaurants and performance venues.

The Foss Waterway Seaport museum, designed by Olson Kundig, recently began year-round operations. The 45,000-square-foot museum and events venue has quickly become Puget Sound’s premier maritime heritage center.



The Foss Waterway Seaport museum was renovated in June with a new glass-faced facade.

Photo by Kevin Scott, courtesy of Olson Kundig

Housed in a century-old wheat-transfer structure known as the Balfour Dock building, it is one of two remaining wooden warehouses originally built as a mile-long complex in 1900 to accommodate cargo-carrying, square-rigged ships doing business in Tacoma.

It features a marine science and environmental education center, a heritage boat-building shop and numerous exhibits. It has rapidly become a favorite place to hold weddings and corporate receptions.

The Henry, a 161-unit mixed-use development opened last November near the south end of the waterway. Designed by BCRA of Tacoma and developed by the Henry Foss Group LLC, the seven-story building has many amenities, including a rooftop dog run and deck, views of Mount Rainier, concierge services, a secured tenant parking garage, fitness center, clubhouse and patio space. Its location at the

south end of the Foss makes it an attractive location for young professionals and others.

On the boards

Currently in the planning stages is a 55-and-older residential project. Transforming Age (formerly PRCN) has proposed a 107-unit assisted living and memory care project to be located just south of the Murray Morgan Bridge (11th Street).

Designed by the Seattle firm GGLO, the development will provide a mix of amenities tailored to its clientele as well as to the public, such as a coffee shop, salon and other retail space located along the esplanade.

When completed in 2019, the project will distinguish the Foss Waterway as a multi-generational neighborhood.

A hotel project will also be constructed south of the Murray Morgan Bridge. The 86-room project designed by Murphy Var-

ey of Seattle is currently set to break ground in early 2017. It will be part of a multi-phase project developed by Hollander Investments of Bellingham.

North of the Murray Morgan Bridge, Foss Harbor LLC has proposed a mixed-use residential project on property they own. The \$35 million-plus project would provide approximately 150 living units and 7,500 square feet of commercial space along the esplanade.

Jon Graves Architects & Planners in Tacoma is the designer. A date for construction has not yet been established.

Park projects

Planning for two new public park projects has also recently begun.

Central Park will be located adjacent to the Transforming Age project and provide amenities for both young and old.

Waterway Park will be located

at the south end of the waterway and is being designed for the launching and storage of human-powered watercraft. Rental storage space will be available for rowing shells, kayaks and stand-up paddle boards.

The park will also serve as a neighborhood park for the adjacent Dome District, which is developing as a transit-oriented district. Development of both parks is a joint collaboration between the FWDA and Metro Parks.

With two residential projects, a hotel project and two public park projects in the works, 2017 is shaping up to be a busy year for real estate development in Tacoma’s downtown waterfront neighborhood.

Norman Gollub was appointed in June as the executive director of the Foss Waterway Development Authority and has been involved in developing and managing projects for over 30 years.



A bridge for pedestrians and cyclists will connect Point Defiance Park to Ruston Way.

Image by Stephanie Bower

11-acre waterfront park will top huge slag pile

By **CLAYTON BEAUDOIN**
Site Workshop Landscape Architecture

The swarm of trucks currently moving 350,000 cubic yards of earth makes it obvious that something major is underway at Tacoma’s historic Point Defiance waterfront.

The dramatic earthmoving effort is just the beginning of a phased transformation of a contaminated Superfund site into a multi-layered recreational space that expands one of the region’s most beloved parks.

“Metro Parks Tacoma has been working for decades on how to best connect Point Defiance Park with the Tacoma waterfront,” said Roger Stanton, project manager with Metro Parks.

“Knowing that the land is polluted from a local smelter, spans multiple jurisdictions, and is highly valued by the community, we knew the design challenge would be as complex as the circumstances surrounding it.”

As landscape architects leading a multidisciplinary team, we felt a great responsibility to ensure this expansion of Point Defiance Park respects its natural and industrial history, as well as the interests of the more than 3 million users who visit the park each year. Created in 1888, the 760-acre park is home to remnant old growth forest, along with cultural institutions such as the Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium, Fort Nisqually Living History Museum, Japanese Garden, and the Science & Math Institute.

Remediating contaminated soil is just the start of a larger effort to embrace the waterfront as

an integral part of the greater park.

Decades of contamination

A 571-foot-tall brick smokestack once towered over Tacoma’s shoreline between Point Defiance

Park and the town of Ruston as an iconic, regional landmark. Built in 1917, the smokestack served what eventually became one of the largest employers in

See **SLAG PILE** — page



Beaudoin

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Metro Parks Tacoma

EPA designer/ remediation:
CH2M Hill

Bridge engineering:
COWI

Geotechnical/ environmental:
GeoEngineers

Architect:
Boe Architects

Artist:
Adam Kuby

Owner’s representative:
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Community

Continued from page 2

bistros, sports pubs and intimate cafes. In the future, the Grand Plaza will expand to play host to community activities, such as art walks, farmers markets and special neighborhood events.

Onsite garages provide a total of 1,356 parking stalls for visitors, ensuring that as the waterfront community grows there will be ample room for parking.

Looking ahead

After the completion of the Baker apartments and condominiums next year, the remaining phase will open by 2018. The projects are anticipated to include 415 additional residential units, a locally owned grocery store and 150 assisted-living units. The Silver Cloud hotel is also slated to open in 2018.

Up to 250,000 square feet of Class A office space and 100,000 square feet of additional retail space could be brought to market by the end of 2018, leaving only a few smaller projects to be developed to complete the neighborhood master plan.

The Point Ruston development has rewritten the fate for this once-polluted site, allowing it to flourish as a vibrant mixed-use community with a variety of housing, retail and public spaces. The neighborhood will continue its transformation as it grows and breathes new life into the Puget Sound waterfront.

Dalton Cole is a marketing coordinator at Point Ruston. He received his bachelor’s degree from Evergreen State College in 2015.

Urban park

Continued from page 2

are prohibited. To remediate the remainder of the site and locate construction above the base flood elevation, grade will be raised three feet uniformly across the site.

Foss Waterway Park incorporates two buildings: a new structure and an adapted timber-frame warehouse built in 1960. Together, these will accommodate human-powered watercraft such as rowing shells, dragon boats, outrigger canoes, kayaks, canoes and paddle boards.

The two offset buildings frame an open green space, providing lay-down area for boats, as well as public event space. Running north-south through the site, a “waterway esplanade” links the buildings, expanding to a boat wash and staging area, and reconnecting to a pedestrian stair from Dock Street.

A steep embankment along Dock Street defines the southwest corner of the site. An electrical easement requires this area be kept clear, lending itself to a meandering trail through native plantings and tree cover.

The existing warehouse is a simple, heavy timber-framed structure, nearly three times as long as it is wide, with a large volume of clear floor area running

Slag pile

Continued from page 2

Pierce County, the Asarco copper smelter.

For decades, the smokestack spewed lead, arsenic and other contaminants over the park, surrounding neighborhoods and throughout the South Sound. By the time the plant closed in 1985, the Environmental Protection Agency listed the 67-acre property as one of the nation’s most polluted Superfund sites.

The smelter stack was torn down in 1993, leaving an enduring legacy of contaminated soil that has been the focus of ongoing remediation. While the lingering contamination remains largely invisible, sitting just off the Point Defiance shoreline is a prominent reminder of the site’s history: a 23-acre peninsula of slag that formed as the Asarco plant routinely dumped solid-waste arsenic and lead into Puget Sound.

Transforming the waterfront

Today the massive slag pile is the heart of a major redevelopment of the Point Defiance waterfront. In partnership with the EPA, Metro Parks Tacoma is redeveloping the peninsula as a new recreational amenity for the greater park.

The peninsula’s embankment is currently being stabilized and “armored” with large stones to protect the slag from being broken down by ocean currents and released into Puget Sound. Contaminated soil from the park’s upland areas is also being excavated, relocated to the peninsula, and capped with clean earth har-

in both directions.

Reuse of the warehouse — rather than demolition and new construction — enables storage of the long and often unwieldy eight-person rowing shells, oriented along the east side of the rectangular building. Single, double, and quad boats are distributed on racks along the remainder of the building with locker rooms and amenities towards the south end.

Building floor levels will meet grade to maintain accessibility and clear maneuvering room for watercraft. Materials are durable — an exposed concrete floor, existing timber structure, and new exterior envelope relate to adjacent buildings along the waterfront.

Wide, glazed overhead doors open to the north, near the boat launch. New glazing at the perimeter of the building allows for views through the building, affording glimpses of the exquisitely tuned racing shells inside, and offering a visual symbol of recreation from the water.

A new boat storage building provides storage for dragon boats, outrigger canoes, kayaks, and stand-up paddle boards. Open, flexible space accommodates irregularly-shaped boats

vested from lower depths.

Moving so much soil around the site provides opportunities to meet other long-term goals for Point Defiance. This includes stabilizing the bluff above the marina, providing ADA connections from the waterfront to the park, improving boat access and parking, redesigning the Pearl Street entrance, and creating a range of new park amenities.

New park space

The final design for the peninsula emerged from a concept plan that our office developed for the site in 2004, collaborating with the local community, Metro Parks Tacoma and other stakeholders.

A primary feature of the park is the sculpted landforms that embrace the panoramic, 270-degree views of Mount Rainier, Vashon Island and Puget Sound. Three sail-like mounds are built up with contaminated fill and a clean soil cap that reaches towering heights to shape the visitor experience and frame views.

Emphasizing passive recreation, the site design integrates a variety of gathering areas, art installations and paths for strolling or jogging. The north end of the peninsula serves as a flexible, outdoor events venue. Artful elements are woven throughout the site, expressing the site’s ecological and cultural legacy in engaging ways.

The redevelopment also accommodates the Tacoma Yacht Club, which has leased part of the

slag peninsula for its clubhouse since 1971.

Connecting the peninsula to the shoreline, the project adds a key segment of the Dome to Defiance Trail, a planned 8.5-mile, multimodal trail that leads from downtown Tacoma to Point Defiance Park. Before continuing along the waterfront, the trail will fork off from Ruston Way to provide the only ADA-accessible link between the shoreline and the upland park.

The trail design also incorporates a variety of placemaking elements, including a new park entry, overlook areas, and unstructured, nature-based play opportunities. One fun surprise along the trail is 60 feet of slides running parallel to a hillside stairway.

Prairie plantings

Planting on the peninsula evokes a rapidly disappearing part of our region’s natural history with expansive native prairie. Once common throughout Puget Sound, only 3 percent of our native prairies remain. The prairie planting will provide valuable urban habitat, as well as educational opportunities to support awareness and conservation.

Given the scale of the new park space, the prairie concept brought additional benefits to the project. Since the chosen plant palette thrives on well-drained, low-nutrient soils, we were able to use excavated subsoils from the bluff as planting soil with minimal imported amendments.

wood and metal materials, maintaining a contextual connection to the surrounding buildings, while enhancing visual connections from Dock Street to the waterway, and providing a lively environment for boaters and pedestrians.

Rich with potential

Recent economic reinvigoration and renewed development interest in downtown Tacoma have highlighted the Foss Waterway as an area rich with potential to preserve local history while providing opportunities for recreation, education and continued economic development.

Together, the adaptive reuse of an existing building and formerly blighted landscape with a new building and site intervention will contribute to the transformation into a vibrant place for public recreation on the waterfront, providing an example for future development.

Hannah Allender is a project designer and David Strauss is a founding principal with SHKS Architects. SHKS focuses on the sustainable renovation, repair, and adaptation of buildings and sites for contemporary use.

And not least, the prairie will require significantly lower maintenance resources over the long term, compared with traditional lawn and shrub planting.

Scheduled for completion in late 2017, the project has been complex in both scope and scale. In addition to managing a diverse consultant team, multiple funding sources with various requirements, and a general contractor/construction manager delivery method, our work involved extensive coordination with two cities, the Washington State Department of Transportation, Washington State Ferries, Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Ecology, Point Ruston LLC and the Tacoma Yacht Club.

While similar projects are often led by engineers or architects, we’re convinced that our perspective as landscape architects was essential in developing integrated design solutions that enhanced the overall project.

Roger Stanton, the Metro Parks Tacoma project manager, would agree.

“As an architect, I wasn’t sure how it would be to have a landscape architect as the prime designer on our \$60 million project,” he said. “What I have learned is that (landscape architects), Site Workshop in particular, have a great perspective on large site projects that extends beyond what architects and engineers typically focus on.”

Clayton Beaudoin is a principal at Site Workshop Landscape Architecture.