



TACOMA TIDEFLATS

ISSUE PAPER

SHORELINE PUBLIC ACCESS & RECREATION

Tacoma Tideflats Subarea Plan & Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

December 12, 2023

Introduction

The Tacoma Tideflats shoreline is predominantly developed with heavy industrial and Port/Terminal related facilities. As a result, there is very limited opportunity for the public to reach and touch the water in this area. Through the visioning process, many respondents noted an interest in increased shoreline public access and recreation opportunities. The community saw the role of increased shoreline public access and recreation to help understand and make connections to a working waterfront as well as learn to be better stewards of the natural environment. Shoreline public access and recreation can serve both employees and residents; and serve as educational opportunities.

Increased shoreline public access and recreation that expands the ability of the public to see, touch, and enjoy the water and shorelands, where practical, is part of the shared vision of the Tideflats Subarea Plan.

The Subarea Plan envisions that development in the Tideflats contributes toward the establishment of a shoreline public access and recreation system. Access is planned in areas that will not interfere with port operations or cause public safety concerns. Where possible, trails are

BALANCING ACCESS WITH SAFETY, SECURITY AND RESTORATION

The Port of Tacoma office on Sitcum Waterway is an example of the type of access that is appropriate to balance safety and security. It provides a viewing platform from which the public can observe the day-to-day operations of the Port from a safe distance.

The Port of Tacoma has developed a viewing area at the q^wi q^wəlut habitat mitigation site on the Blair Waterway that provides the public with an opportunity to observe one of many habitat restoration projects located in the Tideflats.

planned that would link recreation and transportation systems, but these are generally located on the periphery of port/industrial operations and along existing publicly owned lands and rights-of-way.

There is also considerable cleanup and restoration activity that has been undertaken in this shoreline area which could accommodate limited access, including natural trails, kayak hand launch sites, Tribal fisheries access, or separated habitat viewing platforms. Access would need to be designed sensitively to prevent damage or harm to natural areas and mitigation sites.

Existing Policy Framework

Existing policies limit shoreline public access to the core area to ensure industrial activities are not affected. Recreation access is focused on the edges of the MIC. The hillside of NE Tacoma offers visual access to the study area.

City of Tacoma Shoreline Master Program (2019) and Public Access Alternatives Plan (2010)

The City of Tacoma's Shoreline Master Program (SMP) establishes two goals related to public access and recreation within shorelines areas in the city (City of Tacoma, 2019, pp. 45-46):

- **Public Access Goal:** To increase the ability of the general public to reach, touch, and enjoy the water's edge, to travel on the waters of the state, and/or to view the water and the shoreline from adjacent locations, provided that private rights, the public safety, and shoreline ecological functions and processes are protected consistent with the U.S. and State constitutions, state case law, and state statutes.
- **Recreation Goal:** To provide opportunities, spaces, and appropriate facilities for diverse forms of water-oriented recreation that takes advantage of the unique waterfront setting.

Specific objectives call for establishing a linear system of public access along the Tacoma shoreline starting with high-density intensive-use urban activity on the Thea Foss Waterway, and for encouraging cooperation with other public agencies, non-profit groups, and private landowners to increase and diversify recreation opportunities.

The City's Public Access Alternatives Plan (PAAL) is a stand-alone implementation plan associated with the SMP that further articulates the vision for public access to the shoreline and recreation. Several existing public access areas are within the study area (City of Tacoma, 2010, pp. 17-21):

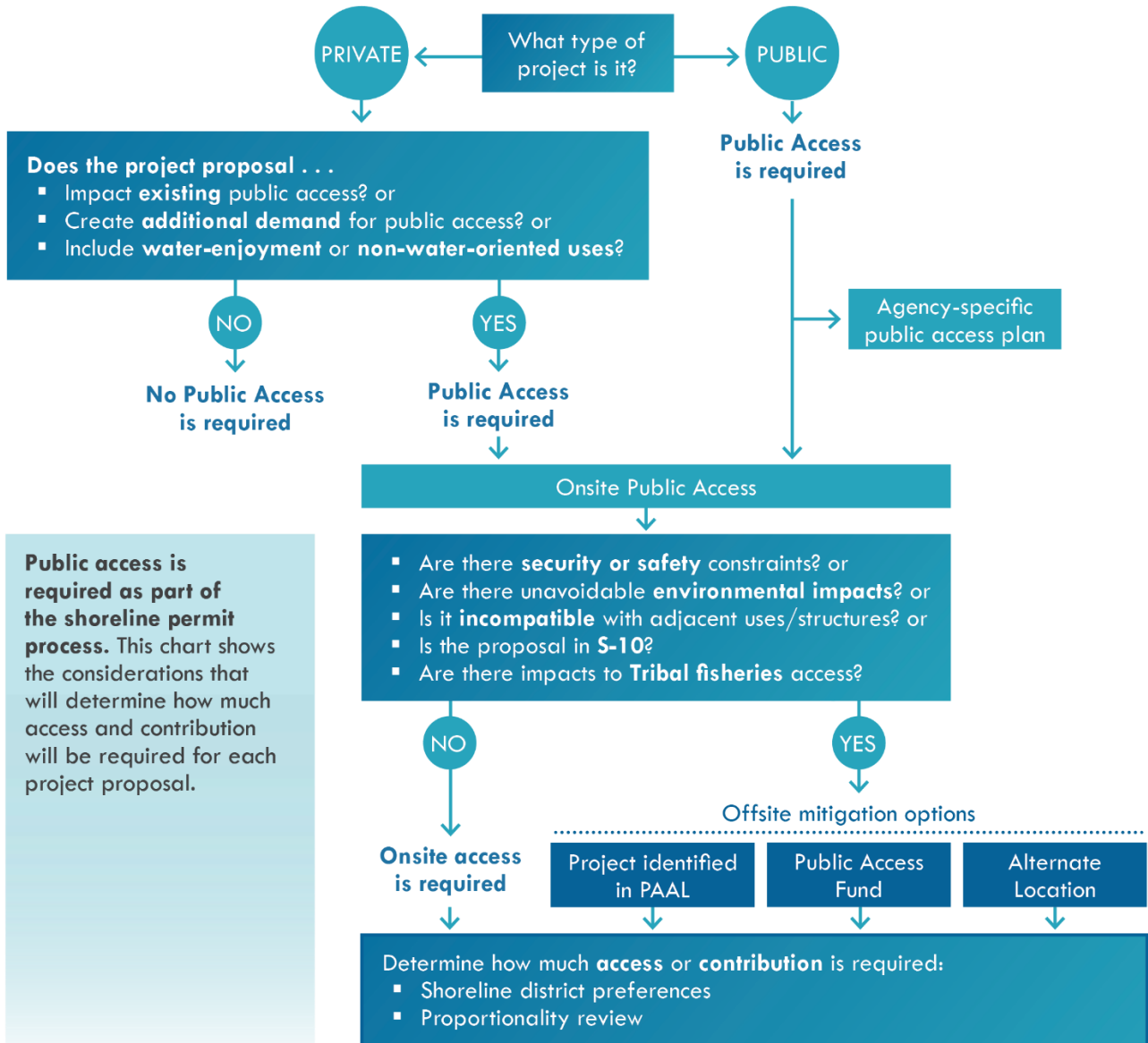
- Existing viewpoint at the Port of Tacoma Observation Tower.
- Existing public marinas, private marinas, and hand boat launches on the northern shore of the Hylebos Waterway and eastern shore of the Thea Foss Waterway (including at Waterway Park).

- Existing habitat observation points on the southern shore of the Blair Waterway (the Lincoln Ave public street end) and northern shore of the Puyallup River (near the wetlands by the Lincoln Ave bridge).

The PAAL identifies other potential projects on the Thea Foss Waterway, on Marine View Drive, and on Port Industrial shorelines in areas that will not interfere with port operations or cause public safety concerns. These projects include a pedestrian walkway on the Thea Foss Waterway, motorized and non-motorized boat launches, additional habitat observation points, improved public access/viewing signage, and new viewpoints (City of Tacoma, 2010, pp. 25-29).

Existing Regulations

Existing City regulations implement the Shoreline Master Program's public access goals. The City currently requires shoreline public access as part of public projects and non-water dependent projects. General priority is given for shoreline public access on site, but current regulations prefer off-site public access for projects in the port/Tideflats area. The diagram below shows the public access requirements for different projects.

Exhibit 1. Existing Public Access Requirements Flow Chart

Source: City of Tacoma, 2023

City of Tacoma & Port of Tacoma Interlocal Agreement

The City of Tacoma and the Port of Tacoma entered an interlocal agreement to authorize a flexible approach to shoreline public access provision that the Port and its tenants could use at their discretion to fulfill the public access requirements of the City's adopted Shoreline Master Program, in lieu of site-by-site requirements.

The ILA established a Fee-in Lieu and a public access fund and methodology. It also identified priority public access project locations. According to the ILA, after consultation with the City, the Port and its tenants may direct any fee-in-lieu payment associated with a particular shoreline permit to any of the following projects:

- Chinese Reconciliation Park
- West Foss Central Park
- Waterway Park
- Balfour Dock Esplanade
- Schuster Parkway Trail
- 11th Street Public Boat Launch
- Or other sites as mutually agreed upon by both parties

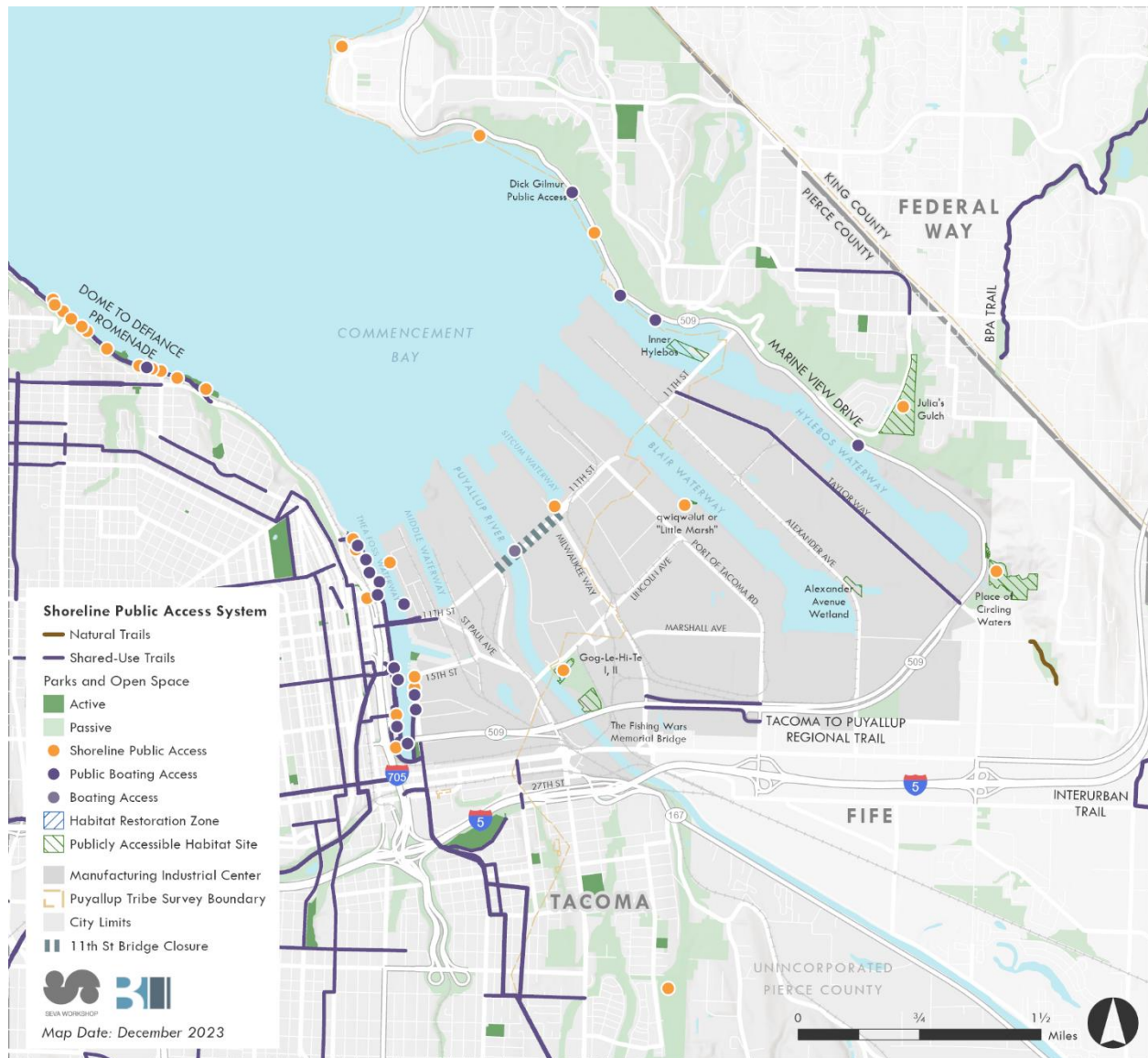
The Port and its tenants can also direct any fee in-lieu payment associated with a particular shoreline permit in the form of public access investments to any Port owned sites at the following locations:

- Dick Gilmur Kayak Launch and the associated Saltchuck mitigation site
- Julia's Gulch and NE Tacoma Trail Network
- Youth Marine Foundation
- Or other sites as mutually agreed upon by both Parties

Existing Shoreline Public Access and Recreation System

The existing shoreline public access and recreation system in the Tideflats includes trails, parks and open spaces, public access points including boating access, bikeways, and publicly accessible habitat restoration sites. See **Exhibit 2** and **Exhibit 3**.

Exhibit 2. Existing Shoreline Public Access and Recreation System



Source: City of Tacoma, 2023

Note: Public Boating Access points include locations such as marinas and boat launches. Shared-use trails allow for off-street pedestrian and bicycle use. Wheelchairs, joggers, skaters and other non-motorized users are also welcome.

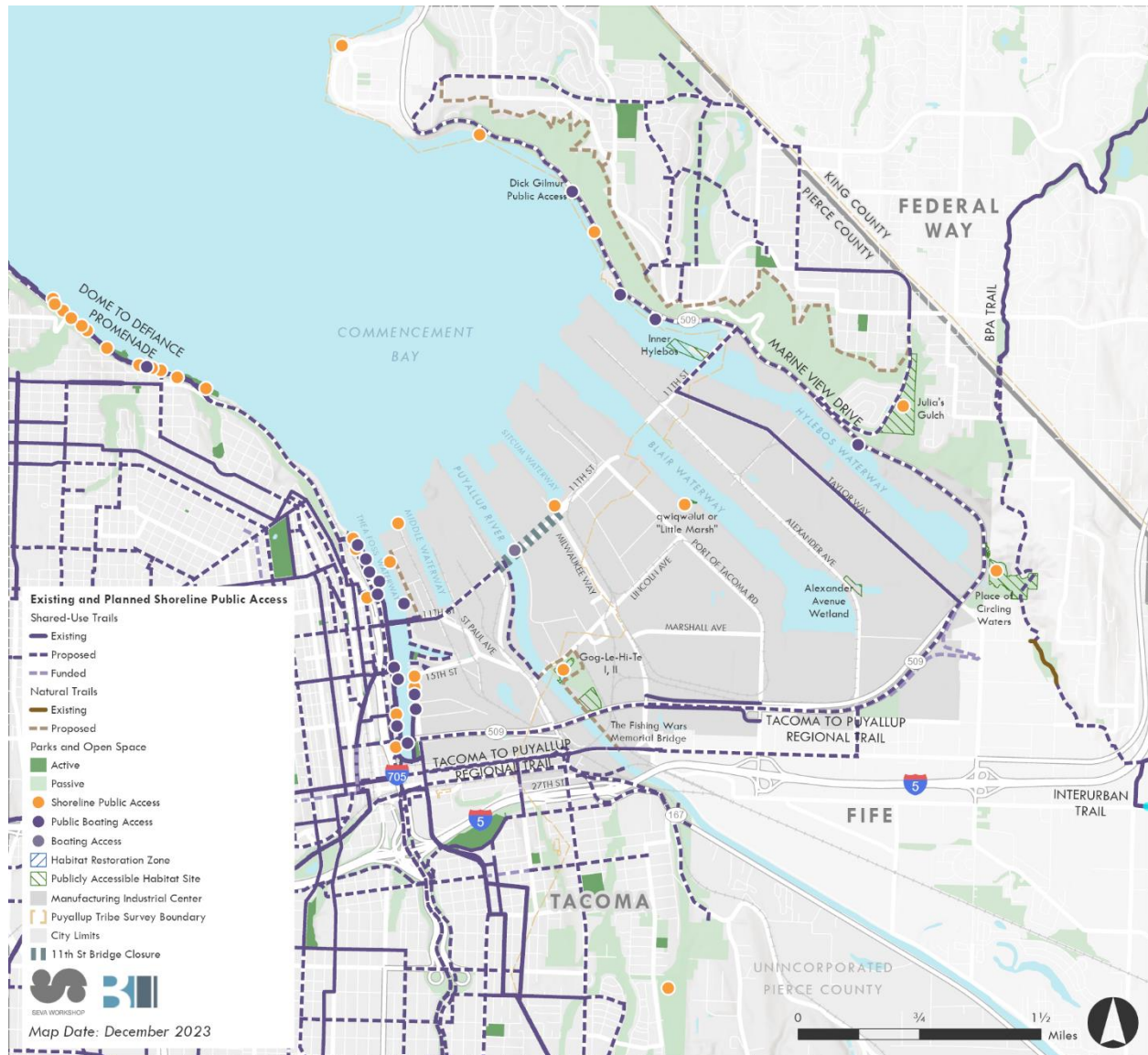
Exhibit 3. Existing Shoreline Public Access and Recreation Points



Source: City of Tacoma, 2023

Planned Shoreline Public Access & Recreation System

Exhibit 4. Planned Shoreline Public Access and Recreation System



Source: City of Tacoma, 2023

The following projects will be necessary to complete the shoreline public access and recreation system as shown above:

- **Thea Foss Waterway:**

- Complete Foss Waterway Park and Recreation facilities, including the West Foss Central Park, Melanie Dressel Park, public esplanade, and pedestrian improvements along E D Street from 11th Street to the Center for Urban Waters.
- **Marine View Drive:**
 - Marine View Drive scenic viewpoint and habitat area site improvements. Complete pedestrian sidewalks and protected bike facilities on Marine View Drive to ensure safe connectivity to shoreline public access and recreation sites along the Marine View Drive Shoreline. Enhance restoration sites to incorporate signage, parking.
 - Connect the Taylor Way bikeway to Marine View Drive across 11th Street.
 - Evaluate the feasibility of gulch trails connecting Northeast Tacoma neighborhoods to Marine View Drive.
- **Regional Trails:**
 - Tacoma to Puyallup Regional Trail
 - Evaluate feasibility of BPA Trail route alignments to connect to Fife and Marine View Drive.
- **Puyallup River:**
 - Establish Puyallup River Levee Trail from Downtown Tacoma, along 11th Street, connecting to existing access sites at the Gog-li-hi-te wetland.

Key Policies and Actions for the Plan

The following policies and actions related to shoreline public access and recreation should be considered for inclusion in the Tacoma Tideflats Subarea Plan.

Policies

Siting Public Access

- Shoreline public access and recreation should be sited in such a way as to:
 - Avoid and minimize conflicts with Port operations
 - Ensure safety and security of the site and adjacent uses
 - To provide low-impact access to natural areas and habitat sites
- Where practical, focus shoreline public access and recreation in the transition areas to balance the needs of industrial activities and port operations in the core area.
- Where practical, development should include shoreline public access and public recreation spaces within the subarea, including access to tidal areas and views of historic and cultural sites. Within these public spaces provide educational signage or other opportunities for people to learn about the history and culture of the area.

Types of Public Access

- Where practical, provide opportunities, spaces, and appropriate facilities for diverse forms of water-oriented recreation that takes advantage of the unique waterfront setting within the Tideflats subarea and informs and educates the community about a maritime industrial Port.
- Promote access to tidelands and waterways within the subarea for traditional Tribal cultural practices like fishing, clamming, crabbing, and canoeing activities.

Design Considerations

- Coordinate changes in shoreline public water access and design of public access sites with the Puyallup Tribe to ensure these sites are supportive of Treaty fisheries access.
- Incorporate educational signage, public art, or other opportunities for people to learn about the history and culture of the area.
- Design facilities to respond to the unique cultural, maritime, and environmental setting of the site.

Draft Actions

- Support existing **programmatic efforts to increase shoreline public access and recreation** to the subarea such as boat tours, and maritime-oriented cultural facilities such as the Foss Waterway Seaport.
- Support regular coordination between government and Tribal partners to **regularly communicate access issues** related to boat ramps and other fisheries & water vessel access points.
- **Limit on-site access to restoration sites** to protect ecological functions while providing opportunities for wildlife viewing and education regarding the area's ecology and restoration efforts.
- Consider offering **public access fee-in-lieu** methodology into the Shoreline Master Program to provide greater clarity and certainty to future permit applicants. Consider performance tracking and periodic updates **to the fee methodology and priority project list** to ensure the program is effective in delivering public access opportunities.
- On the Foss Waterway, consider new development opportunities and public facilities such as fishing piers, bike paths, an exercise course, a boat launch, and benches and paths along the shoreline where feasible.
- Work with the Washington Department of Natural Resources, Department of Ecology, Department of Fish and Wildlife, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Abandoned and Derelict Vessel Program, and the Coast Guard **to remove and dispose of abandoned or derelict vessels in marinas** or surrounding waters.
- **Where practical**, promote access to **shellfish harvesting and fishing in the subarea** through protecting existing shoreline environments from further encroachment, consider expansion of these environments, and identify rehabilitation efforts to prevent contamination.

- Priority **near-term shoreline public access and recreation improvements** include:
 - **Thea Foss Waterway:**
 - Complete Foss Waterway Park and Recreation facilities, including the West Foss Central Park, Melanie Dressel Park, public esplanade, and pedestrian improvements along E D Street from 11th Street to the Center for Urban Waters.
 - **Marine View Drive:**
 - Implement Marine View Drive scenic viewpoint and habitat area site improvements.
 - Complete pedestrian sidewalks and protected bike facilities on Marine View Drive to ensure safe connectivity to shoreline public access and recreation sites along the Marine View Drive Shoreline; enhance restoration sites to incorporate signage, parking.
 - **Regional Trails:**
 - Funding and construction of the Tacoma to Puyallup Trail
 - Evaluation of the feasibility of a shared use segment for the Puyallup River Levee Trail that connects Downtown Tacoma to Gog-Le-Hi-Te.
- Update Public Access Alternatives Plan with partner governments and Metro Parks Tacoma to re-evaluate city-wide access system and roles and responsibilities, funding mechanisms, and cost estimates to complete the system.
- Consider updates to project prioritization criteria in the City of Tacoma Comprehensive Plan Park and Recreation and Transportation Elements to reflect multiple values of projects that enhance waterfront access as well as perform other transportation and recreation functions.