

1. Introduction

Guemes Island

Guemes Island is situated in the northern part of Puget Sound (Figure 1.1). The island is roughly triangular in shape and covers about 8 square miles or approximately 5100 acres. It is separated from Anacortes on Fidalgo Island by the Guemes Channel and is served by the Skagit County public ferry service from Anacortes ferry dock at 6th Avenue and I Street.

The 2000 U.S. Census counted 563 residents on Guemes Island, including 69 children under 18 years of age. Currently the Guemes Precinct lists 584 registered voters. This number includes a few people from other islands and many people who are not full-time Guemes residents. The island has experienced significant growth in recent years. This has led to concerns about growth-related impacts upon the qualities that make the island such a desirable place to live. Since groundwater is the main source of potable water on Guemes Island, protection of quantity and quality of the groundwater is a primary concern.

Goal and Vision Statement

The overall goal of this sub-area plan is to allow growth that will conserve the island's groundwater resources, rural character and sense of community. Rural character is understood to include both the amenities of the natural environment – the open spaces, views, wooded areas and wildlife – and the lack of urban-scale development. The term applies to the non-visual aspects of rural life on the island, the self-sufficiency, sense of community and mix of land-uses as well as the visual appearance of Guemes Island.

The intent is to make planning and sustainability internally derived and to reflect that goal in the sub-area plan. This ongoing process will use an integrated assessment of social, economic and environmental factors. By combining these features, useful ways of approaching highly complex issues can be found.

Today, Guemes Island is a rural neighborhood of mostly small-scale homes. Islanders embrace values reflecting a strong sense of community, neighborliness, an unhurried pace of life, respect for privacy, awareness of history, stewardship for land and shore, creativity, and an independent spirit.

We envision a future wherein these community values will be retained:

- Uncrowded country roads where walking and bicycling riding are safe;
- A network of healthy, accessible shorelines and wetlands, open fields, wild thickets and forests, all supporting abundant wildlife;
- A mix of rural densities that preserves maximum open space and maintains the scale and character of current island homes;
- Sustainable growth as permitted by use of the island's aquifer and other natural resources, and by social and economic factors.

Most importantly, we see a future where sustainable growth and direction will continue to happen by building on active community involvement.

This vision has been captured by Gary Davis, a local island poet:

Welcome

As you walk here step gently
enjoy the young raven in the ancient
fir tree that shades the cattail marsh
just up from the beach

Sense the harmony of the islanders
as they go about with an
unhurried pace, a kind wave of the
hand for all passers by

Admire the quiet. Breathe the peace
we all try to preserve for each other

and do no harm here
to our place...to our home

Gary Davis

History

Spanish explorers reported the first European sighting of the island in 1792 and named it after Señor Don Juan Vicente de Guemes.

Guemes Island was home to many Samish People who have been living on and using the island for as long as we can know. They continue to have a presence on the island. Guemes was one of the places where Samish people built huge winter houses, made from horizontal cedar planks split from living or downed trees and attached to a post and beam framework. The interior of such a Coast Salish longhouse had posts spaced along the outer walls and had a row of center posts inside the structure. Post were carved or painted in designs inspired by the owner's guardian spirit. Many families lived together in a house through the winter.

One such house was known as the Guemes House and was the central structure in what was called the New Guemes Village. The house has a well-documented history, dating from the homestead applications in 1876 by Bob Kitholano and Sam Watchoat for two plats on the west side of Guemes Island. The house, built across the dividing line of the two plats, was constructed in the traditional manner. According to several sources, this longhouse was one of the last traditional structures built in the late 1880s. The

interior was divided into partitions for living quarters for the nine resident families. The longhouse functioned as a potlatch house as well.

The potlatch, banned from Indian reservations, continued to function over several decades at the Guemes Longhouse. One description in the *Puget Sound Mail* newspaper tells of hundreds of people coming by canoe and staying for several days of feasting and festivities. Although the Indian agents at the reservations tried to prohibit reservation residents from attending potlatches, many eluded the agents and traveled by canoe to the Guemes Village.

The last recorded Samish tribal potlatch was in 1917. The New Guemes Village fell into disrepair and was reportedly sold for tax liability in that era. White settlement had begun on Guemes in the 1860s, following the American Civil War. James Mathews, Sr. was the first to settle permanently in 1862, building a house on Deadman's Bay, now South Shore Road. Here he raised a family and brought the first cattle, sheep and poultry to the island where previously the Samish had raised wool-bearing dogs.

By 1877 the Woodcock and Mangan families had arrived at what is now the ferry landing and established a store and post office before there was any commercial activity across the channel in what is now Anacortes. Other early settlers included Allen Kittles, H.P. O'Brient, William Payne, Lucius Blackinton, John Edens and John and Sol Shriver. James Mathews Jr., and Lucius Blackinton both married native women and raised large families.

The first schoolhouse, a log structure, was built on the South Shore in 1873. It was moved to the center of the island on land donated by William Edens in 1885. Edens also donated land for the cemetery in 1904. Most communication was by rowboat or hired steamboat until W.C. Pyle established the first private ferry to Guemes in 1890. Telephone service came to the island in 1908. By that time, 100 families lived on the island. The first newspaper, the weekly *Guemes Tillikum* was first published in 1912, and rural mail delivery soon followed.

The Community Hall and Community Church were both established in 1914 on land donated by Jack Kidd. Both buildings were constructed with island funds and volunteer labor. The privately owned and operated car ferry Guemes began running in 1917 to service the Sloan Shipyard which enjoyed about a year ramping up to build ships for the World War I effort before going bankrupt at the end of the war. Electricity did not come to Guemes until 1949.

By 1960, the population of Guemes Island was an estimated 216 people. After a decade of slow growth, between 1960 and 1970, the population growth accelerated. By 1975 the estimated population was 289 people. Skagit County had been running the ferry system since 1965. In 1978 it replaced the 9-vehicle ferry Almar with the newer and larger capacity vessel Guemes, which is still in service today, thereby more than doubling its capacity. At that time, the Guemes Island Property Owners Association (GIPOA) was formed to address issues facing all property owners and residents on the island. Ferry

issues had always been of great importance to the islanders, and in 1980 a Ferry Committee was formed at the request of Commissioner Jerry Mansfield. He wanted the ferry business to be handled by one representative group rather than by numerous individuals and organizations. Its mission is to coordinate ferry-related issues among ferry users, the Skagit County Public Works Department and the Skagit County Board of Commissioners. Both GIPOA and the Ferry Committee have remained active to this day.

A number of small stores, several located near the ferry dock, served the community through the years. After a 5-year struggle to get the property rezoned, Anderson's General Store opened in June of 1998. The store is located at Mangan's Landing, a stone's throw from the first store built on Guemes in the late 1800s. It provides people with the option to buy provisions and gasoline on the island.

The old-time tradition on Guemes for the community to take care of its own affairs has been maintained through time, as exemplified by the Murray Read Pavilion, built recently with funds raised on the island and constructed with volunteer labor at the Guemes Island Schoolhouse Park. The pavilion was dedicated on July 4, 2004.

The Growth Management Act and Sub-Area Planning

The 1990 Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA), Substitute House Bill 2929, directs the counties to encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process and to ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts [Section 2 (11)]. The GMA provides for sub-area plans, which have to be consistent with the County's comprehensive plan. Sub-area plans are detailed land-use plans for smaller geographic areas [Section 8 (2)].

The Skagit County-Wide Regional Comprehensive Plan Policies (1992) states that Skagit County shall utilize broad-based Citizen Advisory Committees to participate and assist in the development of the Comprehensive Plan Elements, sub-area plans and functional plans [Planning Goal 11, Citizen Participation (11.6)].

The Skagit County Comprehensive Plan of 2000 calls for Guemes Island to be a "Rural Area of More Detailed Planning." Guemes is suitable for sub-area planning because it is an island with distinct physical boundaries whose rural character continues to be shaped by its dependence on a ferry for access and on groundwater for drinking water. The community plan for Guemes shall address rural commercial uses and locations, sole-source aquifer issues, shoreline environs, ferry service, open space and natural resource lands, and provisions for maintaining rural character and lifestyles. Consideration should be given to the community's previously drafted sub-area plan for the island [4A-7.15(e)].

The Guemes Island Sub-Area Planning Process

In 1991, after the GMA had been enacted, the residents and property owners of Guemes Island community elected thirteen members for a Guemes Island Planning Advisory Committee (GIPAC) to formulate a basis for a Sub-Area Plan. The GIPAC presented its

draft proposal of the “Guemes Island Policy Recommendations for Comprehensive Plans as mandated in SHB 2929” to the Skagit County Commissioners. Unfortunately this sub-area planning effort was premature as the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan was still under development at that time.

Based on Skagit County Comprehensive Plan [4A-7.15(e)], islanders decided the time had come to develop a plan for sustainable growth on Guemes Island. At a public meeting in 2002, the island’s community elected a new GIPAC to draft a sub-area plan. The Skagit County Commissioners recognized GIPAC as the Community-Based Representative for purposes of obtaining funds and initiating a Sub-Area Plan for Guemes Island (Resolution 20030037).

Subsequently GIPAC developed a Work Program, which was adopted by the Skagit County Board of Commissioners on January 24, 2005, by Resolution 20050025.

In 2005 GIPAC received a grant from the Washington Department of Ecology (WDOE) to hire a consultant to develop a Guemes Island Component of the Skagit County Shoreline Master Program. John Owens from MAKERS Architecture and Urban Design produced a draft document that provided GIPAC with material to select and adapt for inclusion in the Guemes Island Sub-Area Plan.

Early Community Commitment

Past activities show a high level of commitment of the Guemes Island Community:

Aluminum Smelter. In 1966 the Northwest Aluminum Company, a subsidiary of Bell Intercontinental Corporation, was interested in building an aluminum smelter on Guemes Island because of its proximity to shipping and cheap power. The proposed 720-acre site stretched from South Shore Road to Edens Road in the Valley. Skagit County and economically depressed Anacortes favored this opportunity, so the county commissioners hastily rezoned part of the island to heavy industry. Guemes Islanders, organized as the “Save the San Juans” group, hired Seattle lawyer John Erlichman, who pursued the legality of this rezone, and eventually appealed to the State Supreme Court. Northwest Aluminum bowed out under public pressure and the prospect of a long legal fight even before the Supreme Court ruled in 1969 that the rezone was a violation (See Washington Supreme Court Decision).

Nori Seaweed. In October of 1987, the American Sea Vegetable Company applied for shoreline development and conditional use permits for a proposed seaweed farm off North Beach, around Jack Island, initially of 700-acres of sea bottom, later reduced to about 360 acres for the exclusive cultivation of Nori seaweed. The proposal met with stiff opposition from Guemes Islanders and also from crab fishermen, as the project would have eliminated one of their most productive areas. The citizen’s group, Save the San Juans, revived to fight the project on the grounds of freedom of navigation and the protection of Jack Island, a Nature Conservancy preserve, and gathered 3000 signatures on a petition opposing the project. This process went on for several years. In the year

1990 the company lost its major financial backer and reorganized. Skagit County delayed action on the permit applications, partly because of public pressure. In the end the company withdrew its plans.

Guemes Island Environmental Trust. In July, 1988, the Naval Air Station-Whidbey Island shifted its ground controlled approach training flights over Guemes Island by placing a radar point at Cap Sante and routing A-6 air traffic around it. In response to the severe noise impact generated by these flights, the islanders organized the Guemes Island Environmental Trust (GIET) in April of 1989 to address this problem. After several years of discussions between GIET representatives and the Navy Commander and many protest calls and letters from the islanders, the radar point was removed in early 1991.

Roadside Maintenance. In 1989 GIET obtained a 5-year moratorium from Skagit County regarding the use of toxic herbicides to control the roadside vegetation. A method of Integrated Vegetation Management was adopted, which relies on mowing and grading and limits the use of herbicides to specific areas. This moratorium has been extended indefinitely.

Groundwater Study. In 1991 GIET, under sponsorship of the Skagit Conservation District, applied to the WDOE for a grant through the Centennial Clean Water Fund for an initial groundwater study of the island. The request was granted and the U. S. Geological Survey (USGS) completed a two-year study, funded jointly by USGS and WDOE. The report was published in 1995.

Sole Source Aquifer Designation. In 1994, the Guemes Island Property Owners Association applied to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for designation of Guemes Island's aquifer system as a Sole Source Aquifer; this was granted in 1997. This designation is based on the condition that at least 50 percent of the islanders obtain their drinking water from the groundwater.

Community Emergency Response Team. In 1996, a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) was organized to assist the fire department in responding to any type of disaster on the island. Neighborhood volunteer leaders check on all households in their designated area. If telephone systems fail, a radio communications network is activated to report damages and people's needs to the Guemes Island Fire Hall communications center. The Guemes Island Church and the Community Center are both designated American Red Cross emergency shelters.

Current Public Participation in the Sub-Area Planning

In addition to the GIPAC's meetings, which were posted on www.linetime.org and open to the public, and a number of public meetings, several additional opportunities for public participation were made available.

Visual Planning Survey. On May 2, 2004, a group of students from the Huxley College Planning Studio of the Western Washington University conducted a Visual Planning

Survey. Sixty members of the Guemes Community attended the public workshop. The respondents preferred images of smaller roads, single-family houses set back from public streets, small-scale commercial land uses, scenic open spaces and farmland with traditional structures. The results of the study are reported in the “Guemes Island: Preserving Rural Elements and Enhancing Conservation Opportunities.” A number of recommendations to preserve the rural character of the island are included in the report.

Written Survey. The Guemes Island written survey was modeled on the Lummi Island survey of 2002. After an extensive review process by twenty island residents the survey was mailed out to about 800 households of island residents and off-island property owners in July of 2004. We received a return rate of 46 percent. This excellent return validates the results.

The responses reflected a broad spectrum of opinions. Generally, aspects of the physical environment and the rural character of the island were rated very important by many respondents. Neighborliness and sense of safety received high marks as well.

One question concerns “the trade-offs between individual property rights and the community’s right to preserve its character.” People were asked to mark on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is “development rights most important” and 10 is “preservation is most important,” which number best characterized their value. More than half of the respondents (56%) marked numbers 8-10, whereas 9% marked numbers 1-3. This indicates a very high appreciation of a rural community.

In addition to the survey itself, many people sent in comments and suggestions, which were all tabulated and give a broad perspective on the diversity of the island’s population. Preliminary results of the written survey were presented at a public meeting on September 25, 2004. (*Appendix A: written survey results*)

Rapid Shoreline Inventory. The Skagit County Marine Resource Committee (MRC) was established by Resolution #17433 in May, 1999. It is funded through grants from the Northwest Straits Commission. People for Puget Sound (PPS) is a non-profit citizen’s group working to protect and restore the health of Puget Sound and the Northwest Straits. This group obtained a grant from the Skagit County MRC to conduct a Rapid Shoreline Inventory (RSI) of shorelines of Guemes Island in 2005, where landowners granted permission. During the summer of 2006 PPS in cooperation with members of the Skagit MRC trained volunteers on Guemes and inventoried 6.45 miles of shorelines. The results augmented the knowledge and understanding of the importance of shoreline features to support marine life and pointed at areas of concern. This information is relevant to the Shoreline Management Element. (*Appendix B: RSI Report*)

The Beach Survey Results were presented at a public meeting on October 16, 2005.

AIA Workshop. Late 2005, GIPAC submitted a proposal for a service grant from the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Center for Communities by Design and Guemes Island was selected to receive technical assistance under their Sustainable Design

Assessment Team (SDAT) program in 2006. A three-day workshop was held June 20-22, 2006, which included two public meetings and a number of intensive roundtable discussions, each table having an AIA technical expert as its facilitator. Because of the pivotal importance of water on the island, the acronym WATER was chosen to represent the five roundtables: Wildlife; Shorelines and Open Space; Aquifer; Transportation/Ferry; Energy Resources; and Rural Community Character. Many county staff and other experts from the Skagit County Planning Commission, the City of Anacortes and the Skagit County PUD participated in the roundtable discussions. The public meeting concluding the workshop had an unprecedented attendance of an estimated 150 people.

In the AIA Final Report, the Sustainable Design Assessment Team discussed the challenges the Guemes Island Community faces in maintaining the rural character of the island while accommodating additional growth. One of the key recommendations is to implement where possible non-regulatory and incentive programs rather than imposing new regulations.

The issues, conclusions and recommendations discussed in the final report validate the path the island community wishes to follow, thereby upholding the objectives of the sub-area plan.

Acknowledgements

At various times Richard Hein, Bob Henderson, Victor Garcia, Willie McWatters, Tim Rosenhan, and Matt Simons, also served on the GIPAC, while Jaime Diamond, Hal Forsey, Joan Palmer, Anne Passarelli and others served on sub-committees. Rebecca Paskind and Paul Beaudet shared their technical expertise with the statistical analysis of the written survey. Anne Jacketts edited the draft document.

In addition, many members of the Guemes Island community gave their time and effort to the formulation of the Guemes Island Sub-Area Plan by reviewing draft documents, by participating in the surveys, the Rapid Shoreline Inventory, and the AIA Workshop, and by attending public meetings.



Figure 1.1 USGS Topographic Map of Guemes Island