Burien Shoreline Master Program Overview

Washington state’s Shoreline Management Act (Act) was adopted in 1972 with the intent to ensure that development of our shorelines promote and enhance the public interest. This is to be accomplished through the protection of natural shorelines, and by encouraging water-related and water-dependent uses. Stating that shorelines are among the most valuable and fragile of the states’ resources, the Act sets out to prevent harm to the state’s shorelines by uncoordinated and piecemeal development.

The Burien Shoreline Master Program (SMP) defines the goals, objectives, and sets forth policy direction as reflected in the aspirations of the city’s citizens and shorelines’ stakeholders. The overarching goal of the SMP is to adopt and implement a program that causes “no net loss” to ecological functions along the shorelines and balances the interests of private property owners and the public interest.

An underlying goal is to find an equitable balance between uses that permit reasonable development and economic activity and uses that give preference to preserving the public’s access and enjoyment of the state’s shorelines.

The Act recognizes and protects private property rights along the shorelines and aspires to preserve the quality of these resources for Washington residents.

The Act applies to all marine waters, submerged, tidelands, lakes over 20 acres, and all streams with a mean annual flow greater than 20 cubic feet per second, Marshes, bogs, and swamps associated with the lakes, streams, and marine waters are also included, as is a 200-foot wide shoreline area landward from the water’s edge. In Burien, only two water bodies – Lake Burien and the approximately five miles of shoreline along Puget Sound – are regulated under the Act.

The Act matters to anyone who cares about shorelines. From water-dependent businesses to those who live along the water’s edge, to others who enjoy occasional water access, all Washington residents are affected by how we manage our shorelines.

The Act regulates shoreline activity through local Shoreline Master Programs (SMP) based on guidelines established by the state’s Department of Ecology (Ecology) although each SMP is “tailored” to the unique characteristics, both physical and economic - of each locality.

As required by the Act, each SMP is both a planning and a regulatory document consisting of goals and objectives, policies, and land use regulations and even though local jurisdictions have primary responsibility for regulating shoreline development, Ecology has the authority to review and approve the local SMP.
Burien’s shorelines are almost entirely developed. Uses along Burien’s shorelines are primarily single-family residential and parks, with one community residential facility on Lake Burien. The City of Burien does not have any commercial or industrial uses on its shorelines.

Since Burien incorporated in 1993, the community has been good stewards of the environment, including the shorelines. A few examples include:

- Removal of 1,200 linear feet of shoreline armoring along the southern shoreline of Seahurst Park. Removal of another 1,800 linear feet of armoring along the northern shoreline of the park is funded and will begin in 2011.
- Purchase of 6.5 shoreline acres for Eagle Landing Park.
- Designation of both Seahurst and Eagle Landing Parks as “Marine Reserves”.
- Installing oil separators in storm drains around Lake Burien to protect the lake from street pollution.
- Opposition to SeaTac Airport’s 3rd Runway, which led to the Port of Seattle providing both primary and secondary treatment of polluted stormwater. This removed untreated airport runoff from Miller and Walker Creeks, which eventually flowed into Puget Sound.
- Supporting low-impact development throughout the city.
- Burien has supported educational efforts related to stewardship. For example,
  - Burien has a stream steward, who works with the community and homeowners along the creeks to make them healthier and decrease the pollution entering streams that flow into Puget Sound.
  - Burien provides free natural yard care classes.
  - Burien provides support to the Environmental Science Center, which operates out of a City owned building at Seahurst Park to educate children and adults in best practices to keep Puget Sound healthy for generations to come.

Chapter I of the SMP provides a “user’s guide” for understanding the underpinning legislation, how the Shoreline Management Act relates to the Growth Management Act, and the city of Burien’s responsibility over shoreline jurisdiction.

Chapter II of the SMP includes elements that address:

- Economic Development
- Public Access
- Recreation
- Circulation
- Land Use
- Conservation
- Historic, Cultural, Scientific, and Educational Value
- Flood Prevention and Minimization
- Restoration
Chapter III describes the environment designations established by the Act and how they apply to Burien.

Chapter IV contains the policies and specific regulations that manage the uses (and modifications) along shorelines in compliance with the Act.

Chapter V spells out the types of permits and the appropriate review procedures for development along shorelines including the Substantial Development Permit, (and exemptions), Conditional Use Permits, Variances, and regulations that govern alteration and replacement of nonconforming structures.

Chapter VI contains definitions to help the user understand the meaning of some specific terms.

As a way to sustain the balance of authority between local jurisdictions and the state government, Ecology has the authority to review shoreline development permit decisions and must approve, condition or deny shoreline variances and shoreline conditional use permits following their approval by local government. In other words, all proposed uses and development occurring within shoreline jurisdiction must conform to Chapter 90.58 RCW, the Shoreline Management Act, and with the Burien SMP.