2.3 THE WATERFRONT SCALE

MAKING PLACES: TIDELINES AND FOLDS

At the waterfront scale, the Framework Plan establishes a continuous public waterfront, connecting the Stadium District and Pioneer Square to Belltown, Pike Place Market, the Olympic Sculpture Park and Myrtle-Edwards Park. The continuous waterfront includes a new surface street, pedestrian promenade, and bike path. Overlaid on this urban fabric are a series of open spaces, ranging in scale from small and intimate to large and civic, which will draw visitors to the waterfront for a variety of events and activities throughout the year. These places relate to nearby existing destinations to form synergies of audience and program. Together, these elements create a dynamic urban district, filled with cultural, social and recreational activity on the waterfront.

The public realm at the waterfront is grounded in two design concepts, the Tidelines, which provide continuity along the promenade and connectivity into the city, and the Folds, affording large open spaces and great views to the city and bay. These concepts are further developed in the following pages.
The shape of the waterfront has shifted greatly over the years with the in-fill and build-out of the area’s port, piers and harbors. For example, the map to the right from 1855 shows marshland and tidal flats where Pioneer Square exists today. The photos (far right) recall the massive construction and re-grading efforts undertaken by Seattle in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Much of this land was used as fill to reclaim portions of Elliott Bay.
Tidelines are visible everywhere along the Elliott Bay Waterfront. They can be seen in driftwood deposited on beaches, rust lines on the hull of boats, barnacles on pier pilings and algae on seawalls. They can also be seen in the complex site topography, the occasional openings to the water and the desire lines of people moving through space. Taking cues from landscape processes, as well as art and culture, they express the dynamism of Seattle’s Waterfront.

The Tidelines provide an organizational and thematic framework for continuous design elements along the Waterfront while maintaining the area’s dynamic threshold, varied relationship to the water. In addition to moving along the waterfront, the Tidelines step up and into the city along topographic contours. In this instance, the Tidelines mark the vast differences in topography on the site, from the flat lands of Pioneer Square to the downtown “escarpment” to the bluff in Belltown. Thus, the Tidelines conceptually weave together the bay and the city at the waterfront.

The Tidelines will be translated into design elements including: paving, planting, furnishing and lighting along the waterfront, circulation along Alaskan Way, east-west connections to Central Seattle, and stormwater management strategies.

The diagram to the right expresses this concept as a series of lines that trace visible elements, such as driftwood deposits on the beach and water stains on pier pilings, as well as the invisible forces, which include pedestrian desire lines and topographic contours. These “tidelines” are both the physical and conceptual framework for the project’s design.
TIDELINES FRAMEWORK

- Existing Pier Edge
- Tidelines
- Existing Topography

1000 ft.
CONSTRUCTED TIDELINES

The Tidelines create opportunities for interlacing the public realm with the ebb and flow of tides by allowing occasional get-downs where people can physically interact with the water. The Tidelines might also extend uphill, into the city, to become viewing terraces, garden stairs, platforms, and canopies, or mark contour intervals and changes in elevation. This collection of diagrams outlines the possibilities and potentials of the Tidelines concept. Rather than discreet design elements, these typology studies being to suggest a design vocabulary for the waterfront.

As constructed terraces, the Tidelines could support stormwater retention and demonstration of water systems.
Conceptual diagram showing the potential for a constructed urban tideland in the public realm.
WATERFRONT SCALE
CONCEPTUAL TIDELINE TYPOLOGIES

GRAVEL BEACH

HARBOR BENCH
The Elliott Bay Seawall provides an opportunity to redefine the water's edge and re-invent the relationship between water and land. The existing public realm is set at elevation +16' while the water level ranges from -2.3' and +11.3', resulting in a 7' to 13' drop between people and water. In select areas, including Pier 48 and the Aquarium, the bathymetry is deep and complicates the creation of a natural edge sloping into the bay. Furthermore, the pier structures and harbor regulations do not allow filling to compensate this difference. In other areas the bathymetry is shallower and provides opportunities to create aquatic habitat and make places for the public to "touch the water".
The new seawall will be located east of its current alignment. The pull back allows for the addition of new habitat and ecological enhancements including habitat shelves, and light penetrating surfaces, and substrate habitat benches. These elements will benefit the ecology of Elliott Bay, and specifically the salmon migration run in this area.
THE FOLDS

Overlaid on the continuous Tideline fabric of the waterfront are a collection of exciting civic spaces, elevated above ground with fantastic views of the city and bay. These “Folds” will be signature destinations at the water’s edge, creatively traversing the steep topography of Seattle, and replacing the great views seen from the viaduct. They will link to major points inland, host programs complementary to the neighboring urban and waterfront districts, and attract large numbers of visitors.

The Olympic Sculpture Park, which abuts the project site to the north, provides both contextual precedent and inspiration for the future Waterfront Folds. The park connects the Belltown neighborhood to Myrtle Edwards Park and Elliott Bay over a large constructed landform while bridging the divide created by the street and the railway. This allows pedestrians to have a continuous and safe passage to the waterfront while providing unobstructed views to the Bay and mountains.

The Folds share a common language of simple, elevated planes, while each Fold responds to its unique physical and urban setting. Festival Pier, with its vicinity to Pioneer Square and the sports stadiums, would host concerts and large performances, while the Ferry Fold’s deck would provide commuters views to their ferries and the bay. Along with open spaces, the Folds also provide sheltered and enclosed spaces that would support a variety of programs such as parking, service and leasable amenities such as restaurants, cafes, and shops.