



MEMORANDUM

To: Clark Worth & Libby Barg – Barney & Worth, Inc.
From: Eric Hovee
Subject: SWOC Assessment - Battle Ground Community Vision
Date: June 22, 2018

A home is only as good as the foundation on which it is set. Similarly, crafting a successful community vision depends – in large part – on identifying and shaping the economic foundation on which the strategy will rest. A good strategy might well reach beyond what’s achievable today – yet within the capacity of individuals and organizations to implement step-by-step.

This memorandum outlines strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges (SWOC) affecting the likelihood of achieving a Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan for the city and greater community of Battle Ground. The SWOC represents a compilation of inputs from other foundational work tasks completed to date:

- Stakeholder interviews (as a first step in the community engagement process)
- Demographic and economic trends analysis (also provided as a separate memo report)

This SWOC assessment compares the region’s economic advantages and disadvantages, tracks the potential negative factors, and identifies the most promising improvements. A high level assessment of Battle Ground’s infrastructure system readiness is also included.

Strengths and weaknesses essentially represent a snapshot of current conditions and trends – focused on addressing the question of “Where are we now?” The assessment of **opportunities and challenges** is more forward looking – focused on the next question of “Where are we headed over the next 10-20 years?”

With all four elements of the SWOC approach, it is useful to also focus on factors that most directly affect competitiveness for traded sector investments (as drivers of regional prosperity by selling customers regionally or globally) vis-à-vis factors that affect the broader vitality of supporting infrastructure (and resulting quality of life for the Battle Ground community).

AT-A-GLANCE SUMMARY

Summary findings of this SWOC assessment for the Greater Battle Ground community are as outlined by the 4-quadrant matrix chart below.

Battle Ground SWOC Summarized

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapid & continued population growth • Strong retail & service-driven job growth • Economic hub of North Clark County • Town & country lifestyle • Good place to grow up • Recreational gateway • Traditional values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure lagging behind growth • Lower wage retail-service economy • Limited control over community livability • Lack of cohesive town-country vision • School funding & facility concerns • Recreational value not captured • Too few North County regional partnerships
Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Battle Ground HS site redevelopment • Entrepreneurial/artisanal culture • Family wage/tech-forward jobs • Recreational economy • Greenbelt amenities • North County port/regional partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation/utility infrastructure funding • Path for educational re-investment • Employment lands in-town & near I-5 • Destination packaging • Wetlands & urban sprawl • Go-it-alone culture

As with the demographic and economic trends review, this SWOC assessment considers Battle Ground from two geographic perspectives – the City with approximately 21,000 residents (as primary focus) and the greater trade area encompassing the Battle Ground and Hockinson School Districts with 82,600 residents (as secondary focus). How town and country geographies interact is likely of considerable importance to this community vision process and outcomes.

From this SWOC, an important next step will involve consideration of several alternative futures (or scenarios) for the Battle Ground community. Based on the SWOC, this report also addresses three resulting questions that may be useful for the scenarios evaluation process:

- Out of the current strengths versus weaknesses and the prospective opportunities versus challenges, what might be the best economic bets?
- What can local initiative affect?
- And what might be useful as a checklist to assess economic and community vitality?

STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

As noted, the assessment of strengths and weaknesses addresses the question: *Where are we now?* This discussion benefits not only from a *snapshot* of current conditions, but also from some review of past trends that have influenced the community that Battle Ground is today.

STRENGTHS

Strengths represent attributes (or assets) that support the economic vitality of the greater Battle Ground area – generally representing conditions internal to the community rather than influences from external or outside sources. From the review of local and regional data and from stakeholder interviews, seven overall strengths are identified as pivotal to this economic strategic vision process:

- **Rapid & Continued Population Growth.** Since it's incorporation in 1951, Battle Ground's population has increased at an extraordinary pace – averaging 5-6% growth per year. This growth has come in waves – most recently from 2000-10 when the in-city population nearly doubled. While the rate of growth slowed with the Great Recession of the last decade, the community is on a renewed path of strong population increase.

Compared with other cities locally and regionally, growth has been relatively affordable to date (at least when measured in terms of housing prices). And since the recession, residential options have widened – with more apartments as part of the overall housing mix. This growth in-town as well as in the surrounding area has also made it possible for Battle Ground to support a broader array of shopping and service amenities than was possible previously.

A stakeholder interviewed as part of the community vision process describes the community as “enclosed, vibrant, rapidly growing.” Another describes Battle Ground as a “modern day Mayberry.”

- **Strong Retail & Service Driven Job Growth.** If Battle Ground is well recognized for its population growth, rapid employment increases are more surprising. Since 1990 and even in the aftermath of the recession, Battle Ground's job base has increased more rapidly than for any other city in Clark County.

Examples of core businesses include Anderson Dairy and Wilco Feed supporting the ag-industry, the regionally recognized construction contractor Tapani Inc, and the newer niche-based manufacturing firm TrailTec which builds electronic equipment for ATVs. Other major sources of employment include the Battle Ground School District, City of Battle Ground, Vancouver Clinic and major retailers on the SR502/503 corridors.

Battle Ground now has more jobs per capita than any Clark County city, except Vancouver and Camas. Retail and accommodation/food service jobs have led the way, followed by large increases in construction employment. Strong job growth has occurred despite distance from the interstate freeway corridors but driven in large part by growth not only in town – but across all of North Clark County.

- **Economic Hub of North Clark County.** Battle Ground is the go-to commercial and service hub for a population base that is four times that of the in-city population alone. The geographic extent of Battle Ground’s market reach exceeds that of any other city in Clark County. The 82,600 residents served in the larger trade area is almost half the population of Vancouver – allowing for far more consumer choices than the in-town population alone would support.

While the population of this full trade area is not increasing as fast as within the city, the rate of growth still exceeds that of Clark County and the State of Washington. This trade area now accounts for more than one of every six Clark County residents. And this Battle Ground area population is forecast to account for an increasing share of county-wide population going forward – giving Battle Ground an ever-more prominent position in the economic and political life of Clark County.

- **Town & Country Lifestyle.** Due in part to its location away from the major freeway corridors of Clark County and to constraints ranging from topography to wetlands, the greater Battle Ground area offers a range of as-yet affordable residential and lifestyle choices that are increasingly in short supply elsewhere in Clark County and throughout the greater metro region. A long-time civic leader notes the availability of a range of housing options, from “entry level homes to mini ranches.”

Battle Ground continues to be home to a major dairy, to small hobby and farm-to-market operations, and to specialty equestrian and winery operations. In-town, the shift is to craft and vintage shops as well as major retailers. As one stakeholder commented, Battle Ground has a “boutique feel – not a city or a normal small town – very special.”

Residential lots – whether in town or out – may be a bit larger than what a growing family might find available and affordable elsewhere. Battle Ground is a place where it is still possible to live in the country, yet readily access urban amenities – whether for shopping, dining, getting medical services or catching a movie at the cinema.

- **Good Place to Grow Up.** Youth under the age of 18 represent 31% of Battle Ground’s population, as compared with 26% of trade area and 24% of county-wide population. Battle Ground also retains a large share of post-high school young adults – up into the early 20s.

Nearly 56% of Battle Ground households have 3 or more persons as compared with 43% county-wide. This creates greater demand for kid- and youth-friendly places to recreate, shop, eat and just hang-out. A current downside, as one stakeholder notes, is that there is “not enough opportunity for community gathering.”

- **Recreational Gateway.** While not known as a recreation destination by itself, Battle Ground is described by stakeholders as the last outpost and launch pad for hiking, kayaking, mountain biking, swimming, and climbing. Nearby attractions include Battle Ground Lake, Lewis River, Trapper Creek Wilderness, the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, and points along less traveled routes to Mount St. Helens.

The Battle Ground area also reportedly has a growing recreation-related business sector with adventure and agri-tourism opportunities, new businesses based on recreational products, active “development” of wetland resources, and outdoor programs in schools.

And even “geocaching” events that can draw visitors from as far as British Columbia and Oregon.

- **Traditional Values.** More so than elsewhere in Clark County or the greater metro region, Battle Ground appears to be a community that retains a strong link to a family-oriented, rural and faith-based identity that is less common today than a generation ago. Demographically, this is evident by relatively large households and a high proportion of youth as a share of the total population.

This is also exemplified by the regionally recognized strong role of the faith and church community – including the area’s reputation as the “largest concentration in the U.S.” for the Old Apostolic Lutheran church. A range of other faiths are also represented locally including New Apostolics and Seventh Day Adventists as well as church organizations common to other parts of the metro area. As one citizen stakeholder notes, the area’s churches “are very unique – they are the heartbeat of the community.” The faith community is important also as a resource for business activity, for example, as a link to many of the construction firms for which the Battle Ground area is regionally recognized. While faith communities historically were well represented in the early settlement of many communities across the Pacific Northwest, the Battle Ground area remains distinctive as a place where church-based connections remain culturally and economically significant even today.

WEAKNESSES

Counterbalancing strengths are existing weaknesses which either have impeded or may impede the economic vitality of Battle Ground. As with strengths, weaknesses generally are viewed as internal to the community rather than the effects of external forces such as national or global economic trends. The following weaknesses are noted with this SWOC assessment:

- **Infrastructure Lagging Behind Growth.** Starting with traffic congestion, infrastructure is becoming a more *top of mind* issue for residents and businesses – certainly for stakeholders interviewed. While improvements on the SR 502 corridor from Battle Ground to I-5 have helped, this has not solved the problem of not having a street grid in place to relieve the ever growing traffic pressure on the 502/503 corridors. Funding for long-term solutions is not currently in sight.

The City is facing a near term water supply shortage but with a strong plan to meet long-term water needs. Battle Ground also faces significant costs to fund a new pipeline. Larger developments are likely to more cost-effectively fund local sewer improvements; however, the prevalence of wetland areas may cause a more dispersed (or hopscotch) pattern of development that can be increasingly costly to serve.

Looking beyond the *hard infrastructure*, there are similar issues with the *softer staffing side* of providing public services. Those interviewed cite the police and parks departments as being particularly understaffed. *Note:* a more detailed 2-page Infrastructure Forecast is attached as an Appendix to this report.

- **Lower Wage Retail-Service Economy.** Persons working in Battle Ground are paid 20% less, on average, than employees county-wide. The average annual wage in Battle Ground is 42% less than for available jobs in Camas and 23% less than in Vancouver. In large part, this disparity is due to the disproportionately high share of Battle Ground jobs in lower paid retail and service sectors than elsewhere county-wide. Part of the disparity may also be due to the relative youth of the local working population – who are currently working at an earlier stage of their careers.

Out of more than 1,600 net new in-town jobs created over the last decade, nearly 600 were in retail, accommodation, and food services – followed by a gain of 350 in construction. By comparison, fewer than 100 jobs each were added in higher wage sectors of manufacturing and professional services.

The Battle Ground area has benefitted from improved retail and service options now available locally. The only major retail category still missing is home improvement.

However, a rebalancing to go after higher paid family wage jobs has yet to materialize. As one stakeholder notes, Battle Ground is “missing the corporations that employ 30 or more people.” Attracting these firms or growing high wage businesses from the ground up will reduce the need for long commutes – especially to Oregon.

Two market issues will be important to address in positioning Battle Ground to become more competitive for higher wage and traded sector employment: identifying shovel-ready sites (ideally of 20+ acres meeting CREDC Tier 1 requirements); and providing some inventory of shovel-ready properties in closer proximity to the I-5 freeway corridor.

- **Limited Control Over Community Livability.** While the ability to serve a large trade area extending beyond city boundaries offers business, employment and tax benefits, it also can engender conflicted loyalties. A local business that draws the majority of customers from outside Battle Ground becomes more attuned to doing what it takes to serve the non-resident even when that may compromise in-town livability.

Accommodating traffic and parking, for example, may represent a priority greater than local walkability. Expanding the commercial area along the highway corridors becomes an easier and more profitable experience than improving the relatively small existing downtown core on Main Street. As one stakeholder put it: “Mayberry is at risk.”

This situation is not unique to Battle Ground. Somewhat similar issues are faced by Vancouver which serves the entire county for many commercial, professional, and governmental functions – also a community with multiple commercial districts. It is less problematic for more self-contained communities like Ridgefield, Camas and Washougal with greater flexibility to shape their own destiny.

- **Lack of Cohesive Town-Country Vision.** Limited control over community livability is exacerbated when there is a clear divergence between in-town and surrounding rural area interests. A review of demographic trends indicates that there is considerable variation across the greater Battle Ground area in terms of rates of growth, age of residents, household incomes, home values, and commuting time to work.

Not surprisingly, these differences are also evident in lifestyle choices and support for public services. One stakeholder commented on what was described as “intolerance for diversity and resistance to change.” Another noted that “new people don’t work here and aren’t involved.”

This lack of a cohesive vision for the greater community has become most evident with recent school levy failures. A stakeholder describes the “struggle in Battle Ground to pass school bonds – a community polarized.” The City of Battle Ground and areas at the southern end of the district experiencing high growth have been most supportive while more rural areas with stable or declining enrollments have been less supportive.

- **School Funding & Facility Concerns.** Inability to achieve reasonable consensus over district-wide school funding means that many school facilities are not adequate to fully house students without portables and/or are in need of substantial modernization to better meet current educational requirements. As a community stakeholder notes, the Battle Ground area has “high quality schools, but now over capacity with dated facilities.” The perception if not the reality of divisiveness over schools affects residential choices – as new subdivision developments, especially for more upscale properties, gravitate to less urban school districts elsewhere in Clark County.

There is a related potential weakness in the below-average college graduation rates of Battle Ground’s adult population. To some extent, this appears to be offset by strong participation in community college and vocational programs along with some apparent preference for local firms to train their own on the job. This may prove to be more of a competitive issue in the years ahead as employers shift to an ever-more tech-savvy workforce.

- **Recreational Value Not Captured.** While Battle Ground is centrally located as a gateway to outdoor recreation, the consensus among those interviewed is that local businesses are not capturing much of this potential. Visitors reportedly pass-through Battle Ground with little to attract or capture them on the way to or from their ultimate recreation destination.

A holiday bazaar the first weekend in November draws a lot of visitors. Events like Harvest Days draw well, but mostly from North County.

- **Too Few North County Regional Partnerships.** While Battle Ground business and service providers draw customers from a geographic area much larger than the city alone, there reportedly are few North County governmental or non-profit organizations available to advocate for this greater market area on a coordinated basis.

A regional approach may be further complicated by the many claimants to the “North County” name. North County is often taken to include Ridgefield and La Center as well as the Battle Ground area, though the I-5 communities are oriented as much to north Vancouver and Woodland as to Battle Ground – especially for retail services.

A weakness cited by multiple stakeholders is the absence of a Port district covering the Battle Ground area. With Port districts in Vancouver, Camas-Washougal, Ridgefield and Woodland, the Battle Ground area is the only part of the county without a similar entity to fund and promote industrial and related economic development opportunities.

ADDRESSING STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

Too often, a community will aim to capitalize on its strengths while ignoring or downplaying the weaknesses. Yet left unaddressed, a community's weaknesses may serve to undermine or compromise the very strengths that make for a worthwhile place to live, work and invest in the first place. A solid community vision will build from strengths while also addressing weaknesses.

OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

Strengths and weaknesses reflect current conditions: What got us to where we are today? The following assessment of opportunities and challenges is more forward looking – focused on the next question of *“Where are we headed over the next 10-20 years?”*

Unlike strengths and weaknesses which tend to be inward focused, opportunities and challenges reflect not only conditions specific to Battle Ground and Clark County – but also external forces related to statewide and national policy, even to emerging global market trends.

OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities represent future potential conditions that typically – though not always – build on existing community strengths. The opportunities identified with this SWOC flow directly from the review of demographic and economic trends together with input from stakeholder interviews. In total, six potential opportunities are outlined with this SWOC assessment:

- **Battle Ground High School Site Redevelopment.** This listing of opportunities begins with a very tangible project that may well be considered as a **“game changer”** – affecting the very nature of the community. If there is a potentially transformational game-changer for Battle Ground, it probably lies with the planned future redevelopment of the Battle Ground High School site situated near the NE quadrant of the 100% corner in town – the intersection of Highways 502/503. With an approximately 120 acre site, 80-100 acres could become available for redevelopment.

As one community stakeholder comments: “The really BIG opportunity is the long-standing proposal to move the high school.” Preliminary planning has been underway for some time; the best funding opportunity may arrive about 2026 when the school district becomes eligible for State of Washington construction assistance.

This catalyst project could serve to enliven several of the other opportunities noted with the rest of this SWOC report. For example, a mixed use residential and employment village might be developed to accommodate entrepreneurial, artisanal, tech-forward and recreation businesses – in a setting with open space and perhaps trail connections to points beyond. Properly phased and developed as a public-private partnership, it could also provide significant funding to support new state-of-the-art Battle Ground schools. And from a transportation perspective, relocation of the high school would help to relieve congestion at the SR502/503 intersection.

- **Entrepreneurial / Artisanal Culture.** While Battle Ground has its share of national and regional chain stores and service providers, the community also demonstrates considerable entrepreneurial and small business talent. Examples cited range from the construction firms based in Battle Ground and surrounding area to equestrian ranches and wineries to the craft shops clustered on or near downtown’s Main Street.

These are often the type of businesses that don’t necessarily require freeway access or visibility. They thrive on the strength of their reputation for quality craft, artistry and service. For some sectors – notably construction – this reputation is further enhanced by the networking and workmanship ethics of a tightly knit faith community. The area’s “cluster of construction-related firms” is also noted by an outside observer as benefiting from being “located at the urban fringe close to development activity.”

At a time when traditional chain store retailing is experiencing unprecedented stress due to technological and competitive change, there is renewed opportunity to bring these artisanal qualities more to the fore. This can occur with small shop businesses ranging from microbreweries and tasting rooms to Battle Ground crafted hand-made goods catering both to residents and visitors.

The Battle Ground experience can be further enhanced by building quality places to gather, shop, dine and recreate – whether in the downtown area as with redevelopment of the Battle Ground High School property in newer commercial areas to offer more mixed use and pedestrian-friendly amenities – as with Battle Ground Village and the Millcreek Brewery/theater area.

- **Family Wage / Tech-Forward jobs.** Despite the challenges of being situated away from a freeway and the presence of extensive wetlands, there are opportunities for Battle Ground to become a more significant player in the capture of higher wage industrial and professional office-related employment. This might occur as part of a two-prong approach: development of smaller quality business and office park settings (as at Battle Ground Village); coupled with an initiative to provide larger 20+ acre shovel-ready industrial and business park properties on the 502 corridor closer to the I-5/219th interchange.

The second prong of this opportunity is likely dependent on future expansion of Battle Ground’s urban growth area (UGA) to the west. This could occur in partnership with Clark County, Ridgefield and La Center as a more intentional initiative to implement the Discovery Corridor concept – with Battle Ground as a potentially integral player.

Look for opportunities to introduce technology to traditional sectors like construction and dairies – as with the internet of things (IoT). And due to the growing preference (especially by Millennials) for living, dining, shopping and recreating closer to where they work, give more attention to encouraging mixed use concepts that incorporate master-planned residential, commercial, industrial/office and open space elements.

- **Recreational Economy.** Of the opportunities identified, this is perhaps the least well formed – at least at this time. Think of what Bend has done to become the central gathering and then jumping off point for Central Oregon recreation – or what Hood River and Stevenson have done for the Columbia River Gorge.

There are three elements that will need to come together incrementally and concurrently – identification of destinations served, promotion, and development of in-town dining, shopping, lodging and environmental amenities that support the destinations served. While much of the area’s pass-through tourism is destined to further removed locales as in the Gifford Pinchot or to the river(s) and reservoirs extending up toward Mt. St. Helens, added attention to developing destinations closer to home may also be warranted – as with ag- and wine- and equestrian-based tourism.

- **Greenbelt Amenities.** The reality is that the pervasiveness of Battle Ground area wetlands will lead to more hop-scotch or leap-frog development with less efficient infrastructure delivery and higher cost for new development. As in “turning lemons to lemonade,” the *flip side* opportunity is to create amenity value with a systematic greenbelt plan to offset much or all of the existing development cost and hassle.

This presents two additional potential benefits for the Battle Ground area – preserving a less dense pattern of semi-rural, semi-urban development and creating a clear greenbelt buffer between Battle Ground and surrounding urban areas. This could be reinforced by trail system access to wildlife, parks, and recreational amenities. Aggressive implementation likely will need to be accompanied by new planning and acquisition mechanisms as for public easement acquisition, mitigation banking, and transfer of development rights. This type of strategic approach will prove even more important if Battle Ground looks in the future to expand its UGA west and south.

- **North County Port / Regional Partnership.** Organizations like the City, School District, Chamber and service clubs are already active in Battle Ground. However, more may be needed to plan, market and implement a broader North County economic and community development agenda.

The solution most often suggested by stakeholders would involve the creation of a Port district – a key opportunity as Ports in Washington are represented statewide with broad economic development capabilities extending well beyond their original maritime-related functions. As a Battle Ground stakeholder suggested, “the port is the economic engine to draw industry.”

However, Ports are not the only option as Washington state offers other vehicles such as park districts, public development authorities, and public facilities districts. Non-profit entities might also be considered as have been created, for example, with the Camas-Washougal Economic Development Association – a partnership led by two cities and one port district. Achieving buy-in from a broad range of constituencies – with trust often built over time – will be essential for any organizational path that is selected.

A community business leader emphasizes the need to “solidify the relationship between church and community.” Another individual focuses on the need to “provide a bridge between the old and new groups” in the area. And another: “Plan for growth – a community feel with opportunities for play.”

An outside observer suggests how important it is to “play to your strengths.” And from a key insider, simply: “Think big!”

CHALLENGES

Challenges represent potential future conditions – some not yet even on the horizon – that could effectively undermine the strengths and overturn opportunities presented with this SWOC. Six challenges are flagged for consideration and associated risk mitigation:

- **Transportation / Utility Infrastructure Funding.** As described with the Infrastructure Forecast (attached as an Appendix), the City is well aware of its transportation and utility-related infrastructure challenges. There is good understanding of the technical fixes required; however, securing funding seems more daunting. With respect to transportation, Battle Ground does not anticipate securing sufficient funding to overcome limitations in the local street grid.

For water, there is a plan in place to develop an approximately \$37.4 million Paradise Point wellfield with Clark Public Utilities, with Battle Ground responsible for \$8.5 million and project timing as yet uncertain. Transferring municipal water service to CPU remains an option, especially if area development outpaces the capacity for new wellfield construction.

For sewer, the need is for a second force main connecting to the wastewater treatment system at a cost of \$34.3 million and with subsequent longer term expansion of the treatment facility potentially estimated to be in the range of another \$32.5 million. While the pipeline is expected to be eventually paid for by growth, initial funding may depend on increased sewer rates.

- **Path for Educational Re-Investment.** Perhaps the #1 issue affecting not just the City but the greater Battle Ground area is the need to reach some reasonable level of community-wide consensus as to an approach for school facility improvements that can work for both fast- and slow-growing portions of the school district. While this is primarily a school district responsibility, other individual and organizational leadership may be required to re-frame the purpose and the approach to delivering educational services needed today.

This initiative will also need to involve those without children in the K-12 system – ranging from those involved in home schooling to seniors and empty nesters without children at home. The entire community is at risk if schools are not adequately funded. The longer this issue remains unresolved, the greater may be the impact on residential choices and on achieving consensus for other North Clark County priorities.

- **Employment Lands In-Town & Near I-5.** As the flip side to the opportunity, two distinct challenges related to lands for jobs are presented. The first is for more active inventorying and marketing of in-town shovel-ready industrial and commercial sites – those that can be made ready for development within 6 months or less.

The second aspect to this challenge is to look for more significant 20+ acre sites (meeting the CREDC Tier 1 definition) that can be developed closer to the I-5 corridor. This will be important long-term if Battle Ground is to secure larger employers.

Moving on the first priority is more likely the best short-term option and, if successful, will build momentum for a more intensified high wage jobs strategy. Failure to move on either front will likely mean that Battle Ground area employment will remain largely concentrated in lower wage and smaller scale retail and related service industries.

- **Destination Packaging.** The challenge for North Clark County is to build both the visitor attractions and the promotion of those attractions at the same time. This requires organizational capacity for marketing and entrepreneurial capacity for investing in the full range of attractions and services – centered on Battle Ground as the hub or jumping off point.

While regional cooperation with the SW Washington Convention and Visitors Bureau (or Visit Vancouver USA) will be important, there will probably need to be some complementary and more localized visitor promotion entity – whether through the Battle Ground Chamber of Commerce or similar organization. Consideration might also be given to linking up with the Cowlitz County side of the River to more effectively promote loop tours through Cougar, use of reservoirs for boating and then back through the Yale Valley to Woodland.

Absent a cohesive strategy for destination marketing and attraction development, it is doubtful that market penetration and value capture will be shifted much from what occurs today.

- **Wetlands & Urban Sprawl.** For many communities, wetlands and urban sprawl are treated as separate issues. For Battle Ground, they go hand-in-hand, each issue exacerbating the other.

With about 40% of Battle Ground’s geography comprising wetlands, the need to develop around and mitigate has created a leap-frog pattern of development with inefficient infrastructure delivery – requiring more land to be devoted to urban residential and employment development than would otherwise be the case. A status quo pattern of encouraging urban sprawl reinforces this property-by-property approach to wetland delineation and mitigation – raising the cost of providing housing and making employment lands less competitive in the regional marketplace.

One stakeholder clearly understands the liability created with “wetlands everywhere – thwarts development.” The countervailing opportunity may be to reposition wetlands from a position of liability to asset.

However, this approach likely cannot happen property-by-property. Rather, a more coordinated community-wide approach involving wetland replacement and mitigation banking should be pursued.

This approach also requires active cooperation of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, state and county regulatory agencies. Absent this coordinated approach, future development will be more costly, Battle Ground will be less competitive for investment, and the development that does occur will require more land with less efficient delivery of transportation and utility infrastructure.

- **Go-It-Alone Culture.** While perhaps always a part of rural America, a go-it-alone (or DIY/do-it-yourself) ethic has captured the attention and buying power of urban America

over the last couple of decades. This is exemplified by internationally recognized brands like Home Depot, Lowe's and IKEA.

As probably most consumers know, doing it on your own can be rewarding and self-empowering but also time consuming and frustrating. Similar opportunities and challenges are noted on a community-wide level.

The rural town-country ethic of the Battle Ground area fits well with a go-it-alone culture. As a stakeholder notes, this is a place where you "pull yourself up by your bootstraps."

A self-reliant approach may be further reinforced by faith-based organizations focused more on building from within than by reaching out to the broader community or getting too involved politically. This culture is also fostered by lack of North Clark County organizational capacity as Battle Ground and the smaller communities in the trade area each tend to fend for themselves.

While this self-directed approach has been of benefit for some locally networked businesses (as with construction), it has also made it more challenging to address issues that cut across property or jurisdictional lines. Examples include issues ranging from school funding to transportation investment to wetland mitigation.

Going forward, the cost of doing business and living may increase if opportunities for shared effort and collaboration are missed. This could put the Battle Ground area at a competitive disadvantage vis-a-vis other communities in Clark County where there is a more of a culture emphasizing collaborative initiative.

FROM SWOC TO FUTURE SCENARIOS

Moving forward from this SWOC, an important next step will involve the consideration of reasonably plausible alternative scenarios for Battle Ground to consider with the community visioning process. This SWOC is intended to assist with background information for the consideration of alternative scenarios and their implications for the future.

There are three remaining questions that this SWOC may be useful to address:

- Out of the current strengths versus weaknesses and prospective opportunities versus challenges, what might be the **best economic bets?**
- Focusing more specifically on the discussion of opportunities versus challenges, **what can local initiative affect?**
- And what criteria might be considered as a useful **checklist to assess economic and community vitality?**

These remaining questions are now briefly considered, in turn.

BEST ECONOMIC BETS?

Unfortunately, there is no clear-cut answer to this question. However, there are some good bets to put on the table for discussion as the visioning process proceeds. What is shown by the listing to the right comprises suggestions resulting from the trends analysis and stakeholder interviews.

Some of these best bets are eminently doable today. Others will involve more of a stretch – depending in part on the scenario (or economic path) that Battle Ground decides to most actively pursue.

WHAT CAN LOCAL INITIATIVE AFFECT?

This next question can be answered a bit more directly. Of the six identified **opportunities**, virtually all can be capitalized on by local initiative catalyzed by consensus and action as through the implementation of a Battle Ground Community Vision and Action Plan. Whether or not each individual opportunity is worth pursuing has yet to be determined.

Some opportunities are also dependent on external market, policy and/or funding support if maximum potential benefit is to be realized. For example, an aggressive move to identify and then market suitable lands for higher wage employment will require the active support of other key governmental and non-profit players – notably Clark County and the Columbia River Economic Development Council (CREDC).

Creating a recreational economy requires support of visitor promotion organizations – most likely both in Clark and Cowlitz County. And creating meaningful greenbelt opportunities while allowing development to proceed in a more efficient manner will require supportive actions from federal, state, and county-level agencies.

Of the listed **challenges**, all depend on local initiative to create initial momentum. However, the challenges of securing employment lands closer to I-5, destination packaging and more proactively addressing *win-win* options to better address wetland mitigation and urban sprawl all will depend on outside support, most likely beginning with Clark County.

Best Bet Opportunities

High Wage Employment:

- Construction tech
- Niche manufacturing
- Professional offices
- Multi-tenant office or business park
- Cowork space

Artisanal:

- Ag-tech
- Farmers market
- Local food hub
- Specialty grocery
- Craft cooperative
- Microbrewery
- Tasting rooms
- Family/visitor dining
- Boutique lodging
- Construction tech research (w/WSU-Clark)

Consumer Retail:

- Home improvement
- Local + internet retail

Residential

- Attached single-family
- Multi-family (market rate & affordable)
- Mixed use

Community Services:

- Community center
- Sportsplex / YMCA
- Walk/bike/equestrian/motorbike trail network
- Social services

These challenges will be influenced in large part by external factors. However, consensus-driven local initiative will at least indirectly help to sway outside players in the direction of supporting Battle Ground’s economic and community development vision.

A unified community with a strong story to tell will be in better position to obtain state and federal funding support as well as private investment. In short, a united front offers much better odds of success than if the community comes across as indecisive or uncertain of its own strategic priorities.

VITALITY CHECKLIST

This SWOC discussion ends by briefly outlining an economic and community vitality checklist that might be considered in the review of alternative Battle Ground scenarios for the future.

The list highlighted to the right is not intended to be definitive. Rather, it is a **starter list** – subject to modification as needed to best fit the interests and objectives of the diverse stakeholders involved in the remainder of this Battle Ground community vision and action plan process.

Economic & Community Vitality Checklist

- ✓ Builds from strengths
- ✓ Addresses weaknesses
- ✓ Capitalizes on emerging trends & opportunities
- ✓ Meets day-to-day needs of city residents
- ✓ Serves as a hub for NE Clark County
- ✓ Means jobs & good incomes close to home
- ✓ Offers a full menu of retail & service choices
- ✓ Attracts business investment
- ✓ Builds diverse housing meeting community needs
- ✓ Creates cultural & amenity value
- ✓ Generates revenues to support public services
- ✓ Makes Battle Ground a community of choice

BATTLE GROUND'S INFRASTRUCTURE FORECAST

TRANSPORTATION



Today's Weather



Forecast

Strengths and Weaknesses:

The City's transportation system is made up of two overlaid systems with different goals. SR 502 and 503 are controlled by the State with a focus on passthrough traffic. Local roads are intended to convey traffic within the City, but lack a strong local grid. Federal and state funding of roads has declined and the City has limited options to increase funding beyond the existing Transportation Benefit District. As a result, funds for local road improvements and maintenance are lacking.

Recent upgrades to SR 502 extending west to the I-5 have improved traffic along that corridor. WashDOT is contributing funds to development of a new Transportation System Plan (TSP) for Battle Ground, with the potential for greater coordination between local and state transportation improvements. Moving the High School from its current location at the SR 502/503 intersection would be beneficial.

What does this mean for the future?

Battle Ground doesn't anticipate securing sufficient funding to overcome limitations in the local grid. Future development will have to work with the state highway grid, or else exacerbate existing traffic concerns. Recent upgrades along SR 502 create an opportunity for Battle Ground to extend west along that corridor within the City limits.

DRINKING WATER



Today's Weather



Forecast

Strengths and Weaknesses:

The City is facing a near-term water supply shortage. City wells are maxed out and some wells are operating below their capacity because they are clogging with natural iron and manganese. The City has a solid long-term plan in place to invest in developing the Paradise Point Wellfield with Clark Public Utilities at an estimated cost to the City of \$10M. However, timing of that project is uncertain.

Clark Public Utilities already provides some water to augment the City's supply and services areas of the City outside the core. Transferring all water service to Clark Public Utilities is an option if development outpaces new wellfield development.

What does this mean for the future?

Battle Ground has a strong plan in place to meet the community's long-term water needs.

Short-term growth in areas served by Clark Public Utilities (west and southwest of the City) is easier to accommodate than growth in the City's core, if the City wants to continue to operate its own water system.

POWER, GAS AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS



Today's Weather



Forecast

Strengths and Weaknesses:

Power, gas and telecommunications are provided by independent third parties (Clark Public Utilities, NW Natural, Comcast, CenturyLink). Service levels are acceptable and are not a barrier to new development. Some would like increased competition in broadband internet, but existing services provide a good level of coverage and speed.

What does this mean for the future?

Power, gas and telecommunications are not a significant factor in considering the future of Battle Ground.

SEWER AND WASTEWATER



Today's Weather



Forecast

Strengths and Weaknesses:

The City has ample access to wastewater treatment capacity through its membership in the Discovery Clean Water Alliance. As growth occurs, a second force main pipeline connecting the City to the wastewater treatment system will be needed at an estimated cost of \$31M. The pipeline will eventually be paid for by growth (through SDCs), but may require some initial funding through sewer rates.

The local sewer collection system may be maxed out in many locations in the next 20 years and new areas of potential development will need new infrastructure. Developers are required to fund local sewer system improvements needed to accommodate flows from their projects.

What does this mean for the future?

Battle Ground faces significant future sewer costs to fund the new pipeline. It's easiest for the City to accommodate larger developments so that they can fully fund local sewer improvements. Smaller, dispersed development may still require significant local sewer improvements with a relatively high price tag.

STORMWATER



Today's Weather



Forecast

Strengths and Weaknesses:

The City has been proactive in meeting the ambitious stormwater regulations of the Washington Department of Environmental Quality. Though the system is in good condition today, staffing levels are insufficient to maintain the City's stormwater infrastructure over time.

Current stormwater facilities are fenced off for safety reasons. Multi-benefit facilities that also serve as a community/park amenity are a future opportunity, if conflicting requirements and safety needs can be met.

What does this mean for the future?

If maintenance staffing is addressed, stormwater system considerations need not factor into the community's vision. There is a potential opportunity to integrate future stormwater facilities into parks and other community amenities.

RESILIENCY



Today's Weather



Forecast

Strengths and Weaknesses:

The City is implementing several improvements to increase City resiliency. All the City's data servers are at City Hall, where a new back-up generator will improve emergency response. Most sewer pump stations have back-up generators and there are some portable power generators for the wells. The City is working on assuring a reliable fuel supply during an emergency, partnering with local gas stations.

Efforts to date have focused on more frequent, less severe emergencies such as power outages. Risks associated with major earthquakes are mitigated by the City's lack of bridges and the lack of liquefiable soils. Seismic planning has not been a focus.

What does this mean for the future?

Working towards a more resilient community will continue to be important, regardless of Battle Ground's future.

Continued improvements to improve response to short-term emergencies are warranted, moving toward eventual preparedness for less frequent emergencies.