



## **CHARLESTON COASTAL AND OCEAN LIFE CENTER PROJECT DESCRIPTION—DRAFT # 3**

### **Introduction**

The small, but vibrant, ocean port of Charleston Oregon is at the strategic hub of a large number of maritime, recreational, cultural, estuarine enhancement, marine research, and fisheries activities. Charleston serves as a gateway to some of Oregon's most spectacular state parks and most diverse coastal environments. Summertime visitors increase the area's full-time population of nearly 6,000 to over 30,000 people. Despite its location well off of the Highway 101 corridor, there are more than 1.2 million annual visits to the three state parks in the area. Additionally, Charleston is an important and productive center of maritime activity. The Charleston Marina is home to a large fishing fleet that enjoys immediate access to some of the West Coast's most productive waters. Thus, at its heart, Charleston is a fishing village and its residents are proud of its heritage as an important fisheries resource.

For many years, a unique number of public and non-profit agencies have, for the most part, interacted informally within the Charleston area. Nevertheless, they have collaborated on a number of important studies over the past dozen years. These studies have included The *Coastal Environments Learning Network Feasibility Study* in 1995 sponsored by the South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve and the Bureau of Land Management, The *Coos Head Eco-Tourism Facilities Feasibility Study* completed in 1998 for the Oregon International Port of Coos Bay and the Coos Head Ad Hoc Coalition, the *Co-Location Feasibility Study for the Sough Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve and the Charleston Merchants Association* conducted in 2005, the *SSNERR Administrative Office Relocation Assessment* completed in August of 2006, and the *Charleston Marina Complex Vision and Master Plan* conducted by the Port of Coos Bay and completed in April of 2007. In addition, the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw are currently in the process of preparing a master plan for tribal facilities on a forty-three acre site on a former military site on Coos Head. Together, these studies represent a substantial investment in planning for the future of the Charleston area. However, progress has been slow in implementing the various visions presented by these studies due, in part, to a lack of resources and/or a community consensus on how best to proceed.

In April of 2008, Governor Kulongoski formally designated an Oregon Solutions project in Charleston in recognition of the opportunity to boost the local economy through a new collaborative process. Thus, a broadly representative group of Charleston area interests has begun collaborating in producing a vision and implementation plan for creating a new "Coastal and Ocean Life Center" along Boat Basin Drive in Charleston. The organizations involved in this collaboration include the following:

### **The Oregon International Port of Coos Bay**

The Oregon International Port of Coos Bay is a major public land manager and economic force in the community of Charleston. The Port operates the Charleston Marina complex as well as a 12 acre shipyard facility located at the mouth of Joe Ney Slough. The Marina complex includes a range of facilities to support water based commercial and recreational activities on approximately 30 acres of filled land. This includes docks, and moorage, an RV park, storage for fishing equipment, marine supply shops, other retail space, public amenities and other goods and services for fishers and mariners. The Port has interest in expanding its land base in Charleston in order to advance its economic development objectives for the area.

### **Oregon Institute of Marine Biology (OIMB)**

One of Charleston's largest public employers is the Oregon Institute of Marine Biology, a teaching and research facility of the University of Oregon with roots in Charleston dating back to 1931. OIMB attracts students, scientists, and visitors from throughout the world. Research grants brought in to OIMB have been estimated to create forty-two direct jobs for every million dollars granted to the institute. The University's property is approximately 140 acres in size and includes coastal forest, rocky intertidal, sandy beaches and salt marsh. The marine laboratory currently has 61,506 square feet of indoor space in 26 buildings comprising administrative space, a library, 5 teaching labs, 3 dorms, 11 residences for visiting scientists and graduate students, research labs for 6 resident faculty members and their students, a dining hall with kitchen, a dock house, research space for visiting investigators, and various kinds of common-use laboratory facilities available to visiting scientists and student groups. A computer-controlled seawater system pumps high-quality water from the mouth of Coos Bay on incoming tides, and the seawater is fed by gravity into all research and teaching laboratories on campus. The boathouse auditorium and adjacent residential quarters have some historical importance due to their original use as a Coast Guard lifeboat station established in 1914. OIMB also leases a small area of shorefront property from the Oregon International Port of Coos Bay across the street from the OIMB campus. OIMB maintains a small dock, boathouse and public display area on the parcel. Although quite small, the leased parcel is strategically located along the Charleston waterfront adjacent to a seafood processing facility, the Charleston fishing fleet, and will serve as a key gateway to other project elements. Importantly, this site is the location of Phase I of this project described later in this document.

### **The South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve (SSNERR)**

Another unique public institution in the area is the South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve (SSNERR). The SSNERR is a 4,800 acre natural area located in the Coos estuary with offices and an interpretive center four miles south of Charleston. The Reserve was designated in 1974 as the first unit of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS), a network of estuarine habitats protected and managed for the purposes of long-term research, education, and coastal stewardship. The South Slough NERR is affiliated with both NOAA and the Oregon Department of State Lands.

### **The Coos Watershed Association**

The Coos Watershed Association is a local non-profit organization formed in 1993 for the purpose of convening people and organizations that have an interest in the conditions of the Coos watershed. The association helps landowners decide how to effectively manage and restore the watershed's natural systems. In addition, the association serves as a resource for attracting significant grant funds to assist in restoration activities.

### **The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODF&W)**

ODF&W maintains a local field office that it leases from the University of Oregon on the OIMB campus along Boat Basin Drive. The office houses twenty-three staff members including biologists, wildlife and marine support positions. Additional future growth is anticipated in ODF&W activities at this site although the current space is seriously overcrowded.

### **The United States Coast Guard**

The Coast Guard has a long and historic presence in the Charleston area including one of the original life boat rescue stations dating back to 1914, part of which is now OIMB's Boathouse Auditorium. The Coast Guard continues to maintain housing, office and operational facilities in the Charleston and Coos Bay/North Bend areas. Of particular significance to this project, the Coast Guard maintains two residential structures with 10 housing units, a communications facility, plus an aids to navigation station on 3.67 acres situated along the harbor front and nestled between the main OIMB campus and the Boathouse Auditorium. Although public access is restricted to the Coast Guard property, OIMB has a right-of-way in front of the Coast Guard property and along the waterfront between the main campus and the Boathouse Auditorium and surrounding university property.

### **The Charleston Merchants Association**

The Charleston Merchants Association is an active volunteer organization that supports the local business community by providing visitor information services and other business support activities. The Association operates a popular visitors center from May through September near the intersection of Boat Basin Drive and Cape Arago Highway.

### **Charleston Community Enhancement Corporation**

The Charleston Community Enhancement Corporation is an all-volunteer organization dedicated to the improvement of the Charleston community through community clean-up projects and a variety of other activities aimed at improving the living and working environment for Charleston area residents and employees.

### **Coos County**

Charleston is an unincorporated community and thus relies on Coos County for many of their public services along with the Port and special districts. Coos County also maintains several important public properties in the area including the nearby 89 acre Bastendorf Beach Park and campground, the Charleston public fishing pier, and the property leased to the visitors center.

### **Oregon Parks and Recreation Department**

Three Oregon State Parks in the Charleston area account for more than 1.2 million annual visits and provide a full diversity of coastal and marine environments along with spectacular scenery and recreational activities. In order of proximity, they are Sunset

Bay State Park featuring beautiful sandy beaches protected by towering sea cliffs; Shore Acres State Park which is perched on rugged sandstone cliffs high above the ocean and features lushly planted gardens with plants and flowers from all over the world; Cape Arago is a scenic headland jutting into the Pacific Ocean. Long used by Native Americans, Cape Arago was first sighted by Europeans during one of Sir Francis Drake's expeditions in the late 1500s. In addition, State Parks maintains an interpretive area at the Simpson Reef Overlook just south of Shore Acres. At this location visitors can observe a large variety of marine species along with spectacular views of Shell Island and other rocky shoreline habitats.

### **The Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw**

The Confederated Tribes recently acquired forty-three acres on Coos Head, the site of a former U.S. Navy and Air National Guard station and an important ancestral site. The property includes open areas with extensive views to the north. The tribes are making plans to build a new tribal headquarters on this site along with other facilities which will require infrastructure improvements.

### **The United States Bureau of Land Management**

BLM manages over 100 acres of land on Coos Head and along Bastendorf Beach. The lands on Coos Head that are managed by BLM include undeveloped forested and wetland habitats that are situated between the properties managed by the University and those recently acquired by the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians. BLM ownership extends to the base of Coos Head and includes dune and ocean shore habitats.

Other participants and interested parties on the Charleston Oregon Solutions Team include Co-conveners Senator Joanne Verger and Representative Arnie Roblan, the Governor's Economic Revitalization Team, the Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission, the Oregon Sea Grant Program, administrative representatives from the University of Oregon, local citizens, and representatives from the offices of Congressman Peter DeFazio, Senator Ron Wyden, and Senator Gordon Smith.

### **The Vision**

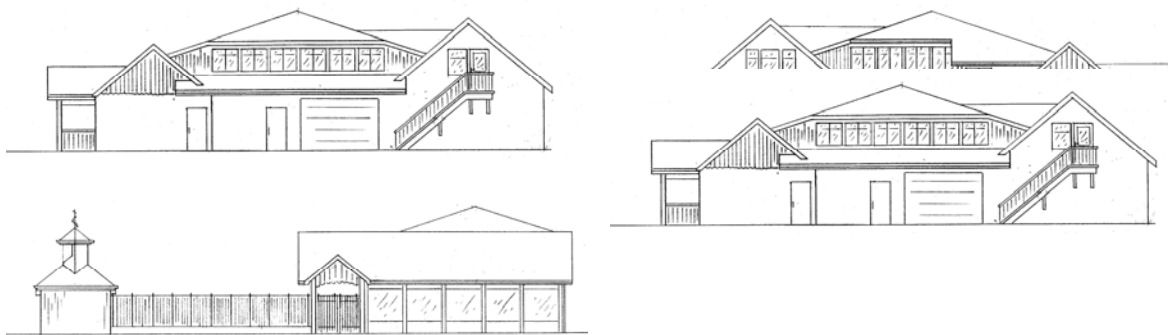
The partners in the Charleston Oregon Solutions project will collaborate toward the creation of a multi-dimensional and multi-user development focused on promotion and stewardship of area ecosystems encompassing the coastal, ocean, watershed and estuarine resources in the Charleston and Coos Head vicinity. The Charleston Coastal and Ocean Life Center will include existing public and non-profit organizations currently operating in the area along with potential foundation and private sector investments that will join to create an unparalleled combination of visitor attractions, educational services, offices, research facilities, public meeting spaces and spin-off economic development opportunities. In addition, the project will bring economic vitality to the Charleston community through the retention and expansion of both public and private sector jobs in marine related activities and visitor services. Finally, infrastructure improvements will

be designed to facilitate pedestrian and vehicular traffic, improve storm drainage, and add to the attractiveness of the village atmosphere.

This vision will be achieved in three phases on properties nearby or adjacent to the Oregon Institute of Marine Biology.

### **Phase I:**

OIMB is taking the lead on constructing and staffing a public outreach and display facility in Charleston, **the Charleston Marine Life Center**. Preliminary architectural plans for the project have already been completed, and the estimated cost for the entire project will be approximately \$395,000. Current plans for the facility include a marine mammal gallery with a killer-whale (orca) skeleton as its centerpiece; displays on sustainable fisheries and marine resource conservation; large, built-in seawater tanks that highlight the diversity of local marine habitats and organisms and a shallow tidepool touch tank. A second-story display area will include a large 3-D map showing natural areas that may be visited in the Charleston/Cape Arago region and displays on the natural history of these spectacular local ecosystems. Three views of the proposed structure are shown below:



Conceptual Design: Butch Schroeder, North Bend

The dockside property on which this project will be constructed is leased by the Oregon International Port of Coos Bay to the Oregon Institute of Marine Biology through a long-term legal agreement that has been in existence since 1982. The lease renews automatically every 10 years as long as OIMB continues to use the attached docks for scientific and educational purposes, maintains a salmon ladder that the public can observe, and maintains displays of living marine animals that are open to the public.

The Port of Coos Bay has recently adopted a capitol improvements master plan that includes pedestrian and streetscape improvements leading from the Charleston commercial district to the Marine Life Center project.

## **Phase II:**

The Port of Coos Bay has a long-term interest in expanding its presence in the Charleston community and creating new economic development activity as part of its basic mission. The Port's objectives combined with the pressing office space needs of several of the partner agencies creates a unique opportunity for building an interim office facility that can ultimately be converted for business incubator space and/or Port office facilities. To this end, the Port has commissioned a team of professionals to explore potential development opportunities that could satisfy both the project's short-term needs and the Port's long-term objectives. This team includes a property appraiser, architect, and business incubator consultant.

While the Port continues to explore property options, the Port's architect has met with agencies that have immediate office space needs. These include the South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve, the Coos Watershed Association, and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Preliminary estimates suggest that these agencies are in immediate need of approximately 13,000 sq. ft. combined with 29,000 sq. ft. of site improvements for a total property need of 1.25 to 1.5 acres. Conceptually, these three agencies would enter into short to mid-term development agreements with the Port for new offices on Port property with the understanding that they would vacate the building upon completion of Phase III of the project as described below. The vacated building would then become available to the Port for expanded economic development opportunities such as marine related business incubator space, other marine research activities, and/or Port or other office uses. Any property equity interests invested by the agencies in Phase II would be purchased by the Port as part of the development agreement for re-investment in Phase III.

## **Phase III:**

Completion of the **Charleston Coastal and Ocean Life Center** is the ultimate goal of this project and is envisioned as Phase III. Completion of this phase will require several years of planning, fundraising, and federal assistance. Currently, the preferred site for this phase is the 3.67 acre Coast Guard property adjacent to the OIMB campus. After carefully examining all the available alternatives, the Coast Guard site has consistently emerged as the only property in the Charleston area that meets all of the long-term objectives of this project. Site attributes include stunning water views, proximity to the OIMB campus, adequate buildable area, available infrastructure, access to sea water, and public accessibility. These attributes notwithstanding, the Oregon Solutions Team recognizes that relocating a federal military facility presents a complicated and time-consuming task. At a minimum, replacement Coast Guard housing would need to be secured and funded, Congressional authorization obtained, and various regulatory and environmental issues addressed.

With these issues in mind, the Oregon Solutions Team has begun a comprehensive Phase III planning effort led by the University of Oregon's Office of Campus Planning and Real Estate and funded by several of the partner agencies. A work plan for this effort is being finalized by the University and the South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve which has available planning funds. Key to the success of this phase, assuming the Coast Guard site remains the preferred option, will be the identification of property and financial resources to construct replacement Coast Guard housing and related facilities.

Ideally, other public property will be identified that can be offered as a land exchange to the Coast Guard.

One candidate location for such an exchange is Port property currently zoned for future mixed use development on the east side of Coos Bay directly across from downtown Coos Bay. Federal assistance for infrastructure funding to this site could benefit multiple parties and provide further leverage for both the replacement of Coast Guard housing and new economic development opportunities.

Upon completion, the Charleston Coastal and Ocean Life Center will provide office space for a number of local public and non-profit marine-related agencies, research facilities, public displays and visitor information services, meeting rooms and classroom space. Necessary site improvements will include ample parking for employees and visitors, outdoor gathering and observation spaces, trailheads, and related infrastructure improvements. Potential tenants and space allocations for the multi-use building include the following [space allocations are placeholder numbers only and subject to change based on U of O study]:

- OIMB public display areas supplementing the educational facilities in phase 1. This may include expanded interpretive information on marine life, additional freshwater and marine aquaria, video presentations, map displays and directions to local ecotourism sites, live viewing stations possibly including nearby rookery and underwater camera feeds, and related marine information totaling approximately 5,000 sq. ft.
- Offices for four OIMB staff to manage and plan the displays (600 sq. ft.)
- Office and public area display space for twenty-four Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife staff to replace existing offices along with public counter area, wet lab space, library, training and meeting area space, storage, showers, walk-in freezer, and lunch room ( 6,000 sq. ft.)
- Offices for the Coos Watershed Association. This space must be sufficient for up to five personnel and eligible for “green certification” (LEEDS certification for the entire building may be an important criterion).
- Administrative offices for the South Slough National Estuarine Marine Reserve sufficient for at least eight staff members (1,000 sq. ft.)
- Office space and access to a classroom for the Oregon State University Sea Grant agent who will focus on community development (800 sq. ft.).
- Classroom, meeting rooms, and event space for agency tenants and other local agencies such as the Coos Bay Power Squadron, a local non-profit that trains mariners and provides event space for other non-profits (2,000 sq. ft.)
- Joint administrative, wet-lab, research and storage space (1,000 sq. ft.)
- Common area space, rest-rooms, meeting rooms, hallways, etc. (20%)
- Other elements could include:
  - public information on fishery management, condition of local species, current technologies, and other fisheries information of interest to the public.
  - General public information on local tourism activities including access to local marine life tours.
  - Information about the Coast Guard, its history in the area, and its current activities.

- Information about local shipping activities, shipwreck history, boating safety, and other maritime information.

**Proposed Next Steps:**

1. Oregon Solutions will convene the next full project team meeting on October 21.
2. The University of Oregon Office of Campus Planning and Real Estate will begin Phase III project scoping activities (phase 1) to be completed by the end of November. Phase 2 of their work will begin shortly thereafter.
3. Oregon Solutions will begin drafting elements for an initial “Declaration of Cooperation” to be signed by participant organizations in December. This initial declaration will include agreements for continuing the work of each of the major stakeholders, including continued funding for Oregon Solutions through June, 30, 2009
4. The Building Users Committee and Oregon Solutions Project Team will meet as necessary to review the details and recommendations of the University’s Phase III report and develop strategies for implementation.
5. The Port will complete its exploratory work on property availability for Phase 2, space planning for interim offices, and incubator space feasibility by June 30, 2009.
6. By June 30, 2009, a second Declaration of Cooperation will be signed by the project team members outlining the anticipated final steps toward project completion along with any necessary follow-up activities by the Oregon Solutions Team.