Just two months after Washington achieved statehood, Anacortes boosters and promoters began surveying and clearing land in an effort to turn the frontier village into an incorporated city. By February 1890, 200 axmen had already changed the landscape: “The sunlight strikes through the jungle,” proclaimed the Anacortes Progress. “Beautiful building sites and natural highways brought to view.” What couldn’t be used as building material was burned.

From offshore, a New York Sun writer witnessed the destruction of the old growth wilderness: “A line of fire in blazing brush heaps, stumps and logs visit the shore for nearly two miles and through the lurid light, the huge giant fires of the yet unsubdued forest seem to dance and totter like the ghosts of those the fire is slowly consuming.”

From these ashes rose the Anacortes we love today. The voracious clear-cutting profoundly impacted several prominent citizens who, for the rest of their lives, made it their mission to preserve the island’s most beautiful sites. It is because of them — and those who followed in their footsteps — that today’s Anacortes has more park land per capita than virtually any other city in the United States. It’s an extraordinary legacy.

The 1890 incorporation effort died in a lawsuit, but citizens persevered and on May 19, 1891 Anacortes became a third-class city. Founded with big dreams, this boomtown (pop. 2,300) was expected to be the “New York of the West,” with city limits the size of Boston’s. That dream was deflated with the failure of a major railroad to locate its terminus here, followed closely by the Panic of 1893, a nationwide depression.

Despite these setbacks, citizens created a city government, built a City Hall with fire and police headquarters and built a fine school. They built roads, water and sewage systems and other amenities of a city. One by one, canneries and mills opened, providing jobs and fueling the economy at the turn of the century, as the Shell and Texaco refineries did half a century later.

Today, civic leaders continue to work with citizens to make sure that Anacortes remains inviting and vital for generations to come.

At left, from top: Anacortes in 1891, as a painter saw it from a downtown hotel room; Anna Bowman’s proposed plat for the City of Anacortes (which he had named for his wife, Annie Curtis Bowman); engineer Steven D. Temple and a team of surveyors at the foot of O Avenue in 1890; and Old Town looking east from I Avenue and 8th Street in the summer of 1890, with the unfinished Anacortes Hotel on the right. The historic photos are from the Anacortes Museum’s Wallie Funk Collection.
City Government

In its 125 years, Anacortes has tried many small variations in its form of government; Mayors have been elected by years to serve 1, 2 or 4 year terms. Some weren’t elected mayor, but were elected to City Council. Some are chosen by other councils to hold the title of mayor and preside at council meetings for a year. A few were appointed to six year terms by the Mayor and confirmed by City Council. They still have a strong role, shuffling as city manager (as today’s mayor does), but others covered mostly ceremonial duties while a full-time city manager ran the city. In all, 45 people have served the Anacortes Honoray Mayor, serving terms that have ranged from one month to 20 years. City Council’s role has been more constant over the past 125 years (although councilors’ terms also have ranged from 1 to 4 years). The council still approves budgets and passes ordinances, has the final say on zoning regulations and master plans, and approves the mayor’s appointments to boards and commissions. Today’s Mayor and City Council are aided by a 7-member Planning Commission, which serves as an advisory board. The Commission conducts hearings and makes recommendations on land use permit applications and reviews proposed changes to the Comprehensive Plan, city zoning code, subdivision code and Shoreline Master Plan. Planning Commission members are appointed to six year terms by the Mayor and confirmed by City Council.

Who was the first elected Mayor of Anacortes?

Although you get a point if you answered Frank V. Hogan, the first mayor in 1891, Van L. Griggs, the first mayor in 1890, or George F. Kyle, who was elected mayor in 1881, doing your research is the real test. Why? Because Kyle never served. A fellow citizen selected Anacortes’ inaugural mayor, and another election was held. In that contest, Edward W. Hogan secured his place in history as the first Mayor of Anacortes in 1891.

The first mayors’ portraits were assembled from Anacortes Museum collections, Anacortes American articles and mayors’ families. The mayors’ portraits were meant to be exhibited in City Hall, but were sold later on. If you know who is missing a portrait, please get in touch.

The Mayors of Anacortes 1891-2016

Above are members of the 2016 Anacortes Planning Commission. Left to right: Carl Oppel, Antler Muffie, Jeremy McNeil, Christine Cabeal-McGrath, Adam Forward, Grace Poulter and Mark Lawntreet. Below is the 2016 Anacortes City Council with the Mayor. Left to right: Eric Johnson, Ryan Walters, Brad Adams, Erica Pickett, Mayor, Laurie Gere, John Archibald, Liz Louwetta and Matt Miller.
The Anacortes Fire Department was founded Feb. 21, 1890 by citizens who, legend has it, were awakened to their helplessness by a fire at Mrs. Hawthorne's house. The first meeting at P.B. Titcomb was elected president of the fire company. By the end of the first year, 72 subscribers, V.F. de Vries became the first president. The Anacortes Fire Department remained in the hands of volunteers until 1911.

The Anacortes Fire Department bought its first “auto fire truck,” a Republic, in 1914. The first on record as an active but also served as an honorary fireman. The volunteer fire department came under city jurisdiction when Anacortes was incorporated in September, T.H. Anderson became chief. Throughout the department’s history, the department has provided service to the citizens of Anacortes, from fire suppression to emergency medical services. The city has four fire engines, one quint, one rescue vehicle, four ALS ambulances and one mass casualty incident trailer.

In 2014, the AFD responded to 2,564 emergency medical calls and 390 fire suppression/hazardous materials-related emergencies. The Fire Station No. 1 on 13th Street and the Norman Brown Fire Station on Sunset Avenue both operate 24/7. The March Point Fire Station operates from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

In 2015, the Fire Department employed 24 full-time staff: one chief, one assistant chief, one division chief, an administrative assistant, an firefighter, and 11 firefighters/ladders and EMTs. A maximum of six firefighters/EMTs are available during the day and four at night. The department also has a dedicated cadre of four volunteer firefighters/EMTs who respond from home or work.

The city has four fire engines, one quint, one rescue vehicle, four ALS ambulances and one mass casualty incident trailer.
Paving the Way to Success
Public Works — Providing Essential Services for our Community

H

acking city streets out from the wilderness began in earnest in 1890 as the community prepared for incorporation. Infrastructure has always been essential for economic development, and the need for it was a key reason that citizens were so eager to found a city.

While gravel was costly in 1890, Anacortes had an abundant free paving material — old growth trees — and Bowman’s Mill busily carved Old Town’s forests into planks (the planking of P Avenue is pictured at left). By May, the soon-to-be city had 31 blocks of planked streets. 27 blocks of graded streets and 31 planked crossings.

In 1902 the planking was torn up and the main street was graveled. Also that year, P Avenue was renamed Commercial Avenue. According to local folklore, the change was instigated by the daughters of Councilman (later mayor) William G. Beard. The girls found the name “P” to be vulgar and they urged their father to change it to protect them from the embarrassment of uttering it.

In 1914 Commercial Avenue was paved in asphalt. Pictured below left, the patented paving process included a rare sight for Anacortes of an African American construction crew.

In 1948, the city’s maintenance shops, (at left) by May, the soon-to-be city had 31 blocks of planked streets. 27 blocks of graded streets and 31 planked crossings.

In 1956, some streets running perpendicular to Commercial were literally double as a sandbox for Kurt Lopeman, 5. From top right: Storm water issues came a head with flooding in 1956. The street overlay program and another $500,000 for work on select intersections and for bike lanes on South March Point Road.

Today, the city’s street network consists of more than 105 miles of roadway. Aside from SR 20 (which, as a state highway, is not under city control), the city is responsible for 10 miles of collector arterials, 16 miles of parallel streets and 77 miles of local streets. The highway’s “average daily traffic” is more than 15,000; the arterials up to 15,000 ADT; the collectors up to 8,000 ADT and the local streets less than 4,000 ADT. In 2016, $1.1 million is budgeted for the street overlay program and another $500,000 for work on select intersections and for bike lanes on south March Point Road.

Below, Andrew Klingman of the city’s Street and Traffic Division prepares signs for installation about 10 years ago (Anacortes American Collection). At bottom, Mayor Laurie Gere and Engineer Technician Steve Lange at the D Avenue paving project in 2016.

Public Works manages the construction and maintenance of streets, sidewalks, water lines, sewer lines and storm water lines in the city, as well as the purification and distribution of the region’s water supply. Public Works is responsible for the maintenance, repair and construction of all city-owned buildings; the purchase and maintenance of the vehicles and equipment fleet for all city departments; and the management of activities within public rights-of-way.

Public Works employs a professional staff that is dedicated to providing first-class service. The teams include Fleet Services, Solid Waste, Streets & Utilities and Water Distribution.

The column of photos at right shows street and drainage problems faced by Anacortes during the 1940s and the first solutions. In that era, the community launched major efforts to update civic infrastructure. The success of these efforts was a major factor in Anacortes’ selection as an All-America City in 1961.

Today, the city’s drainage system comprises about 122 miles of storm water conveyance systems, 100 detention and treatment systems, and 82 outfalls to Guemes Channel and to Burrows, Padilla, and Similk bays.

From top right: Storm water issues came to a head with flooding in 1956. A bulldozer removes the promenade strip from the center of 6th Street near J Avenue. Behind it is the Anacortes Hotel (demolished in 1989). City surveyor Will Henderson checks measurements in preparation for K Avenue paving in 1962.

A street paving project on Q Avenue doubled as a sandbox for Kurt Lopeman. Photographed by Wallie Funk in August 1966. At left is the city’s maintenance shops, across an unpaved Q Avenue from today’s City Hall, in 1966.

Below: Andrew Klingman of the city’s Street and Traffic Division prepares signs for installation about 10 years ago (Anacortes American Collection). At bottom, Mayor Laurie Gere and Engineer Technician Steve Lange at the D Avenue paving project in 2016.

“Please change the name of the main street,’ they pleaded. ‘It’s an embarrassment telling our friends we’ll meet them at Eighth and P.”

— Wallie Funk
Pictures of the Past

Wallie V. Funk
Pictures of the Past

![Historic photos are from the Anacortes Museum’s Wallie Funk Collection.](image-url)
Anacortes Police Department
Ensuring Public Safety. Earning Public Trust.

Anacortes in 1891 was a wide-open boomtown, bursting with speculators, promoters and dreamers. One of the tasks of the brand-new city government was to impose law and order, and Richard E. Trotton was appointed City Marshal at the first City Council meeting. His salary was $70 a month, and his annual budget was $1,690. On June 17, 1891 Richard Nelson became APD Case No. 1 (Police Justice William V. Wells slapped him with a $5 fine for drunkenness). All but 4 of the first 40 APD cases involved intoxication, disorderly conduct and/or disturbing the peace. In the city’s early years, livestock at large was a common complaint, as was excessive speed (presumably with a 4-horsepower vehicle). By 1909 the city had “Blue Laws” to curb wild behavior.

During Prohibition (1916-1933), police were busy enforcing the ban on alcohol sales and consumption. Below, officers proudly display a captured still wagon “Black Maria.” Selenthin headed the police force 1923-1953. Edwin Luther Rowland (above right) was City Marshal in 1902. The last City Marshal (and first Police Chief) was Al Sellenthin, pictured at right c. 1926 in the police car/paddy wagon “Black Maria.” Selenthin oversaw the effort to meet more than 140 policy goals. Core values are service, excellence, integrity, courage and professional standards.

Growing Pains

Before the days of police cars and 2-way radios, officers on patrol were summoned by a signal light and a ring of the curfew bell. In the 1940s, the pay was $110 a month for 10 hour days, with one day off every 2 weeks. On weekends when the port was filled with fishing boats, officers kept the 4-bed jail full of rowdy men. If inmates were too noisy at night, firefighters who slept at the station reportedly quieted them with a hose). By 1959 the pay was $270 a month for 6-day-a-week shifts.

Some notable firsts:

1892 — First recorded police shooting
1909 — First traffic fatality
1925 — First radio-equipped police car
1926 — First set of fingerprints taken by APD
1930 — Police get first uniforms
1940 — New Ford “prowler” with radio, siren, spotlights
1952 — New police station on 12th. Cost: $125,000
1958 — First officer training program
1971 — 911 goes into effect
1981 — First female officer, Kathy Donnelly
2000 — New police station/court. Cost: $4.2 million

The department hit a rough patch in the ’60s and ’70s, with a series of suspicious deaths in town and internal strife. APD got onto a solid footing under Chief Mike King, hired in 1984. King oversaw improvements in standards including updates to the 911 system and records management, and the construction of the new police station. He hired Capt. Bonnie Bowers — now Chief Bowers — who oversaw the effort to meet more than 140 policy and procedural standards, which earned the APD accreditation from the Washington State Association of Sheriffs.

APD’s mission is to contribute to the overall improvement of the quality of life in the City of Anacortes by reducing danger from criminal activity, by identifying those who are most in need of help and providing assistance, and by working in partnership with the community to achieve common goals. Core values are service, excellence, integrity, courage and professional standards.

“Any time your first contact with a police officer is positive you’re ahead of the ball game.”

—Chief Bonnie Bowers. 2015
Anacortes American

The Anacortes Police Department provides patrol and emergency response service within City Limits — about 1.5 square miles — and to the Swinomish Indian Reservation by contract. Under the direction of Police Chief Bonnie Bowers, the Department is divided into three sections: Patrol, Detectives and Administration. APD has 25 commissioned officers: one chief, two captains, one detective sergeant, two detectives, three patrol sergeants and 16 patrol officers. The 2016 budget is $5.3 million.

Each year Anacortes Police officers respond to more than 10,000 calls for service, with an average response time of less than 5 minutes. About 14 percent of the calls are for property or violent crimes serious enough to qualify as “reported crimes” under the FBI Uniform Crime Report.

APD is supported by about 70 Auxiliary Patrol members and other volunteers. The department maintains 19 marked police cars, five detective staff cars, one animal control vehicle, and two Auxiliary Patrol Vehicles.

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Parks and Recreation
Preserving and Enhancing our Quality of Life

With more than 3,000 acres of park and forest land, Anacortes has more open space per capita than almost any other city in America—something that is sorely needed in today’s high density urban region and our efforts to preserve our natural heritage.

The city’s first park was purchased for $500 in September, 1903 from Great Northern Railway. After the First World War it was renamed Guadalupe Memorial Park in honor of the war hero Harry Causland and other fallen sons in service to their country. The unique rock walls and structures, designed by Louis LePage, has earned the park a place on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1978 Evergreen Islands became the nucleus for what would later become Cap Sante Park. On Dec. 21, 1903, the City Council appointed its first Parks Commission. City leaders were so happy with the establishment of their first park that within a month they started acquiring pieces of property for a second park, which became City Square Park. In 1904, the City Council established the Anacortes Water Company, which acquired by visionary founders of the Anacortes Water Company, who believed that the growth of the fledgling city depended on a dependable supply of clean water. As the source of the city’s drinking water, the lakes and their watersheds are protected in perpetuity.

Today, the Anacortes Parks Department, under Director Gary Robinson, maintains approximately 23 parks, including 21 when T.C. Fairey’s Rayburn Island and Mount Erie Campground and the Anacortes Community Forest Lands are included. The department is dedicated to preserving open space in perpetuity and protects approximately 23 parks, including 21 when T.C. Fairey’s Rayburn Island and Mount Erie Campground

Anacortes Community Forest Lands

Most of what is now the Anacortes Community Forest Lands was initially acquired by visionary founders of the Anacortes Water Company, who believed that the growth of the fledgling city depended on a dependable supply of clean water. As the source of the city’s drinking water, the lakes and their watersheds were spared from development.

In 1911, the 9 acres he deeded to the city for his tomb (left), became the nucleus of a great park. The city bought another 220 acres from his estate and, in 1915, the 220-acre park how has become known as Washington Park.

Unfortunately, the only income source for managing the forests in the early years was the occasional clearing for what A.G. Van Tuyl named it Washington Park.

Sports Parks and Playgrounds

As well as natural parks, Anacortes also has plenty of facilities for residents who want to play organized sports such as soccer, tennis, baseball, football, and basketball. Volunteer Park is an incredible sight when it is packed full of youth teams on a Saturday morning during the soccer season. The city has the Ben Root Skateboard Park for older youth. Volunteer Park is an incredible sight when it is packed full of youth teams on a Saturday morning during the soccer season.

When Tonje H. Havekost died in 1911, the acres he deeded to the city for his tomb (left), became the nucleus of a great park. The city bought another 220 acres from his estate and, in 1915, the 220-acre park how has become known as Washington Park.

With money raised from lemon pie sales, Green Point (left) and Dobers Beach, soon renamed Sunset Beach, were acquired in 1922. The limestone park now has trails, camping facilities, playground, a beach and a well-loved and heavily used scenic loop road below.

In 1938 Evergreen Islands blocked the development of Heart Lake, and a decade later Friends of the Forest persuaded the city to stop clearing its forests.

In 1938 the city created the Conservation Easement Program, where citizens invested in forest lands that ensure the lands will be protected in perpetuity.

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Anacortes Public Library
Opening doors to a world of information — enjoyment

Above, the Anacortes Public Library c. 1930, was established as a Carnegie Library, funded with a $10,000 grant from Andrew Carnegie. It opened on Christmas Day, 1910. Above right, Children’s Library hours are still posted on one of the ground floor windows of the building, now home to the Anacortes Museum. Below, two photos below show the Anacortes Public Library as the community knew it from 1968 to 2001. The library moved into the old Anacortes Hospital on M Avenue in 1967, a few years after Island Hospital was built. The lower photo shows the library shortly before it was demolished in 2001.

Pictured at bottom is the beautiful new Anacortes Public Library. Completed in 2003, it is still at the heart of Anacortes on M Avenue. Bottom right, the new facility is bright and airy, and filled with local artwork.

In May 1890, when the Women’s Christian Temperance Union opened a free reading room at 2nd and Q, the Anacortes American noted approvingly: “In a new town like ours, unless a young man goes to the reading room to pass away his spare time, he is almost necessitated to go to a bar room for want of acquaintanceship.”

But the library concept didn’t catch fire until 1908, when mill owner George Vincent, hoping to start a reading room for young people, raised $500 in a few days. The town was so encouraged by the response that Mrs. Georgia B. Smith was appointed to contact the Carnegie Foundation, which was giving grants to communities to found libraries. She found that Anacortes was eligible for a $10,000 construction grant if the city raised $1,000 for books and provided $1,000 a year to operate the library.

The ‘ladies of Anacortes’ raised the book funds in short order, but not everyone was so enthusiastic: 236 citizens signed a petition against a library, even a free one. Several City Councilmen tried to dodge the issue, forcing the mayor to send the city marshal to bring them in to form a quorum. In July 1908 City Council formally approved the library, with only a single “nay” vote.

Since it opened in 1910, the library has been a center of learning and culture, hosting readings, musical events and presentations that brought the world to the isolated community. In 1967, the library moved from the Carnegie Building (now home to the Anacortes Museum) and into the city’s old hospital building at 1210 10th St. When the city outgrew that building, it built a new 21,419 sq. ft. facility at the same site.

Opened in 2003, the new building’s soaring design includes many windows and skylights designed to take advantage of natural light. A show place, it overflows with local art.

The library has evolved to serve today’s needs, providing not only reading materials and research assistance, but also DVDs, CDs, e-books and vast online resources, information services, free meeting rooms, study rooms and public access computers.

The library offers a vigorous and varied menu of educational and entertainment programs, including story times for babies and children, summer reading programs, jazz concerts, movie series, technology training and history and travel presentations.

The library collection includes more than 147,000 physical items, including specialized jazz and maritime collections. More than 244,000 items were checked out in 2014. Open 7 days a week, it has 15 staff members and is the only library in Skagit County open Sundays. City of Anacortes residents have free access to all library materials, and non-residents may purchase a library card for $100.

The Friendshop, in the library lobby, is staffed by Friends of the Library volunteers and sells books donated by the community. Generous support from the Friends of the Library, the Anacortes Library Foundation, local service clubs and community members enhances the library budget and allows it to add new and varied materials to the collection.
Anacortes Municipal Water System

Providing quality water for residents — and for economic development

From its very start, Anacortes’ water system has been all about economic opportunity. In 1889, a few visionaries who witnessed Fidalgo Island as a railroad terminus invested $300,000 in infrastructure — including water works — knowing that economic development is impossible without a reliable supply of clean water. That future city’s population exploded from 40 to 3,000 in the first three months of 1890. Although the railroad terminus never came to pass, the first water system provided essential services for fish canneries and lumber mills that fueled the city’s economy for decades.

In the following century, wise planners and visionaries bought the system, made it a public utility and repeatedly upgraded it. They obtained the right to draw Skagit River water (a move that drew derision from upriver communities that used the river as a sump). Anacortes needs the water. Flush twice. Anacortes needs the water. — joke sign posted in upper Skagit River community: 1831

The evolution of Anacortes’ water treatment facilities: The city’s first water filteration plant (above) was built in the 1920s on Whistle Lake Road. It was replaced with a new water treatment plant next to the Skagit River on Whistle Lake Road in 1958, above right. The city’s new water treatment plant, completed in 2013, will continue to provide economic opportunity for decades to come.

Anacortes’ first water system brought untreated lake water to downtown fire hydrants — and kitchen sink — in wood pipes, including the one pictured below right. Some of the wood was repurposed in a 1990s-funded project in 1940 (above right, shown at 6th and Commercial). Before kids are pictured playing in water from a fireplug, c. 1940s. The black and white photos are from the Anacortes Museum’s Wallie Funk Collection; the image of the wood pipe is from the city’s Public Works Department.

City Water History Highlights

1889
Speculators invest $300,000 in Anacortes infrastructure, including water system.

1890
In January, Anacortes Water Co. procures franchise to bring water from “Lands Creek and Ave of Hearts Lake.”

1914
Wood pipes are installed at 6th and Commercial.

1919
City buys water system and 1,850 acres of watershed.

1920
City purchases Ranney wells built at Avon station to meet added demand.

1931
City replaces 1931 waterline.

1937
City replaces 1920 tanks, which were redone he personally would go out and blow up the Heart Lake water line with dynamite.

1943
A bottle of water containing a couple of live tadpoles and a few dead ones, together with some worms and grit, just as it was drawn from the lake, was sent to the city councilmen to look at during their meeting Tuesday night. The exhibit was sent to the city council by Dr. H.E. Frost, city health officer. Councilman W.H. McCallum stated that Dr. Frost had gone to the water company office and left word to stop the use of Heart Lake water immediately, and emphasized his request with the assertion that if this were not done personally would go out and blow up the Heart Lake water line with dynamite.

1949
NAS Whidbey augments Avon pump station to 4 MGD (million gallons per day).

1950
Whistle Lake plant capacity increased to 11 MGD.

1955
Water Reclamation plant opens, part of $4.4 million water upgrades.

1958
New City Water Treatment Plant (39 MGD) opens.

1959
Landmarks Memorandum of Agreement recognizes city’s Skagit River water rights of 0.4 MGD for 50 years.

1962
City repairs 1957 vacuum leak.

1967
Court of Appeals Validates 1966 MOA.

1971
New City Water Treatment Plant (33 MGD) opens.

1971
Councilman W.H. McCallum states that if Frost had gone to the water company office and left word to stop the use of Heart Lake water immediately, and emphasized his request with the assertion that if this were not done personally would go out and blow up the Heart Lake water line with dynamite.

1971
City replaces 1967 vacuum leaks.

1982
City Water History Highlights

1891-1916
City’s first water system brought untreated lake water to downtown fire hydrants — and kitchen sink — in wood pipes, including the one pictured below right. Some of the wood was repurposed in a 1990s-funded project in 1940 (above right, shown at 6th and Commercial). Before kids are pictured playing in water from a fireplug, c. 1940s. The black and white photos are from the Anacortes Museum’s Wallie Funk Collection; the image of the wood pipe is from the city’s Public Works Department.

1989
speculators invest $300,000 in Anacortes infrastructure, including water system.

1990
in January, Anacortes Water Co. procures franchise to bring water from “Lands Creek and Ave of Hearts Lake.”

1996
City buys Skagit River water rights of 54.94 MGD for 50 years.

1958
City Water Treatment Plant (30 MGD) opens.

1955
Water Reclamation plant opens, part of $4.4 million water upgrades.

1950
Whistle Lake plant capacity increased to 11 MGD.

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Anacortes: An All-America City

In the early 1950s Anacortes suffered a mid-life crisis. Mills and canneries were struggling and closing, and city infrastructure was aging and obsolete. Then, Anacortes resident Amelia Heilman got an idea: “Democracy is You.” Dr. Richard Foster’s well-known book for aging cities. “It was a how-to-do-it for citizens uniting with others of strong persuasion and motivation to pull their town up by its bootstraps and make important prospects a reality.”

The arrival of Shell in 1953 and Texaco in 1957 infused the community with new energy and hope. The nation’s economic growth and the opening of the Panama Canal provided new opportunities for Anacortes. The town took advantage of these opportunities and made significant improvements in the city’s infrastructure, including the construction of new roads and bridges, the expansion of the port facilities, and the development of new industries. The city also made efforts to improve its cultural offerings, with the establishment of a new library and the construction of a new park.

The culmination of these efforts was recognition from the National Municipal League and Look Magazine, which awarded Anacortes with the coveted title of All-America City. The title said it all. The text followed, with improved streets, drainage, schools, hospital and morale.

The Anacortes Community Development Study results in August 1955 identified Anacortes’ need for economic development, infrastructure improvements, and a sense of community. The report recommended a comprehensive plan to guide the city’s future development. The plan was adopted in 1957 and included recommendations for new industries, modern infrastructure, and a balanced economy.

The Comp Plan: A shared vision

The Anacortes Comprehensive Plan is a shared vision — a map of where the city should be headed in the future. Every 10 years, when it must be updated, Anacortes citizens respond with fresh numbers to the call for their ideas and opinions during extensive outreach efforts. For the 2016 Comp Plan update, more than 100 citizens participated in each of four interactive public workshops. Two on community visioning, one on the central Fidalgo Bay waterfront and one on land use alternatives.

As this effort moved forward, the city reached out to inform and involve the community through presentations and through messages in utility bills and periodicals, at City Hall, on reader boards, in emails, in direct mailings and on Channel 10. The city also maintains a web page dedicated to the Comp Plan update including planning updates, invitations to meetings, links to surveys, meeting summaries and document drafts.

A Community Action Committee of 12 citizens assisted in the development of the updated Comp Plan by facilitating public discussions, performing analysis and seeking answers to questions that arose. The CAC was supported by a Technical Advisory Panel made up of individuals with expertise in a variety of relevant areas. The CAC met 27 times by Oct.14, 2015, and produced issue papers and recommendations related to land use, housing, economic development, the environment, sustainability, community design, transportation and infrastructure.

The Comp Plan update process included: 10 workshops, 4 joint Planning Commission/City Council meetings.

Sacrifice — and Renewal

Anacortes has a tradition of designing and redesigning itself to fit the needs of the future — sometimes at the cost of entire neighborhoods.

During World War II, the Anacortes Housing Authority was created to provide housing for essential war workers, primarily Navy families from Whidbey Island. Phase I of the housing project (22 units) was completed in 1945 and Phase II in 1944. (Above left: Children playing on swings at the project’s onsite nursery.) But city needs changed, and the photo at left shows one of the units being demolished in 1962 to make room for Island Hospital.

An even bigger effort was the city’s Urban Renewal Project. Whole neighborhoods east of R Avenue ( pictured above) were walled off to make way for the new shopping mall. The land was zoned for commerce and industry, leaving the residential neighborhoods behind. The shopping mall has not developed, the industrial area has been a resounding success, providing hundreds of jobs at dozens of companies ( pictured at right).

Photo at right from Anacortes Museum’s Anacortes American Collection; other photos from the Wallie Funk Collection.

Anacortes in Action

Working together to build a better tomorrow

F
from the beginning, Anacortes citizens have been more than willing to step up and contribute their time, money and land to causes they believe in. For example, the Tugboat Arena (at right) was installed because the Anacortes Arts Commission and generous donors made it happen. The fire-damaged Tommy Thompson Trail was repaired — and quickly — with funds raised by the community.

Hawksaid, Admon, Curtis and Turi families (and many others), as well as service groups have contributed to make sure we had suitable park and green space. Other families gave up their homes to provide space for economic development opportunities for the next generation.

Someday these diaries will be the planners — those who have spent untold hours in meetings — who have worked to create a community vision for the future. This began with those who, in 1950-1951, created a city government from scratch, while envisioning Anacortes as a city of the size and type it is today. It continues today with those who participate in this Comprehensive Plan update process.

Also contributing to the quality of life we all appreciate are those who saw the city as a natural site for a major Arts Festival, or as an All-America City, and made Those things happen. And today, citizens continue to contribute in many ways — as elected officials, as members of city boards and commissions, and as active members of the foundations supporting the museum, the library and the city parks and forests.

Democracy is You
Anacortes Museum
Preserving and Interpreting Fidalgo and Guemes History

Fidalgo residents love their history. In 1898, citizens established an Anacortes History Club to reminisce about their not-so-distant but bygone pioneer days.

The impetus for a real museum began in 1949, when Elizabeth Dwolay organized the Anacortes Pioneer Banquet—an event that led to the first collection of historic artifacts. In 1950, Anacortes American co-publisher Wallie Funk wrote an impassioned front-page editorial supporting this effort and calling on citizens to preserve city history by bringing historical photos to the newspaper to be copied. Hundreds of priceless images were duplicated; many appeared in special Pioneer editions of the American and 165 select images were enlarged and exhibited (a local sensation). Finally, they became the nucleus of the Anacortes Museum’s photo collection.

The museum became a City of Anacortes entity in July 1958 when Mayor Tony Mustacich established the Anacortes History Board. The first members were Madge Stafford, Anna Bessner, Wallie Funk, Lloyd Foster and Martin Miller.

In 1968 the City Council agreed to allow the History Board and the Anacortes Arts and Crafts Festival board to share the 1910 Carnegie Library building. The artists eventually moved on, but the Anacortes Museum has remained. The building houses museum offices, a research library, photographs, archives, artifacts and permanent exhibits on the history of Fidalgo and Guemes islands, as well as regular special exhibits.

The museum also reaches out to online researchers, who can access more than 30,000 photos and records on our website.

The steam-powered sternwheeler W.T. Preston, a National Historic Landmark, came under the stewardship of the Anacortes Museum in 1983. In 2005, the Anacortes Maritime Heritage Center opened next to the historic vessel at 713 R Ave. It houses exhibits interpreting the W.T. Preston’s history and local maritime heritage.

The museum is governed with advice and direction from the city’s Museum Advisory Board. The Anacortes Museum Foundation, a nonprofit organization, contributes financial and other support.

At left, the Anacortes History Board accepts the painting “Anacortes 1891” from donor LeRoy Moyer on Aug. 6, 1965. Left to right are Wallie Funk, Doug Burton, Anna Bessner and Madge Stafford. The painting, on permanent display today, was created by a broke but talented artist who left it to cover his hotel bill.

Right, from top: The largest “artifact” in the Anacortes Museum’s collection is the beautiful 1910 Carnegie Library building, which is on the National Historical Register. Other significant artifacts in the care of the museum are a 1906 WCTU fountain, the 1905 Leadbetter Jewelers Clock, the Tommy Thompson train and the W.T. Preston sternwheeler snag boat, which is a National Historical Landmark vessel.

Below: the W.T. Preston and the city’s maritime history are interpreted at the Anacortes Maritime Heritage Center, the Anacortes Museum’s second location.
A nacortes’ first citizens had simple solutions for the trash they generated: Burn it or dump it. Trash that couldn’t go into wood stoves was piled up in backyards until it could be thrown onto nearby empty lots or into the channel or the bay. Businesses, including canneries and butchers, did the same.

The city was three weeks old when the City Council addressed its first nuisance complaint — smelly refuse in the alley behind the Wilson Hotel (which also needed a main to the bay “to remedy the evil”).

The City had arranged to dump its garbage from a dock, but citizens couldn’t use the same spot. Told not to dump on the beaches or on unbuilt streets, residents were still complaining of the lack of a dump in 1905. Soon after that, one was set up on tidelands between Commercial and O avenues at 13th Street. From then on, complaints focused on the odor — and the rats. The dump was condemned by the state sanitary inspector in 1914, but remained in use until an attempt to cover it sent thousands of rats scattering through downtown in February, 1932.

That June the City Council selected a new dump site (which was laughingly lauded for its “million dollar view”) off the edge of Oakes Avenue at the foot of Kansas. Today the site is a brand new access point for the Guemes Channel Trail.

During this era the city appointed garbage collectors, who were sworn in as deputy health officers and deputy policemen to enforce the city’s sanitary laws. Garbage collectors supplied their own rigs and collected their own pay in fees from customers.

Curbside garbage collection allowed dumps to be moved farther from civilization. By 1944, the Oakes Avenue site was getting full — and attracting too much negative attention from visitors — and the dump was moved to A Avenue and 13th Street (now an entrance to the Anacortes Community Forest Lands). After that dump was closed in 1970, the city’s trash was hauled to Gibralter Road for a time, then to Whitmarsh Landfill and Inman Landfill, until 1983. Garbage is now hauled to the Skagit County Transfer Station on Ovenell Road, loaded onto railroad cars and hauled to a landfill in Eastern Washington.

Since 1973, the city’s Public Works Department has provided solid waste removal service, including dumpster service, to more than 7,000 residential and business customers within city limits.

The city also provides curbside residential recycling and organics collection by contract through Waste Management Inc.

Solid Waste is staffed by three full-time operators and a supervisor, who operate the city’s three residential/commercial garbage trucks and one backup truck. In 2014 the city replaced its old trucks with automated collection vehicles, eliminating the “manual throwing” of garbage into trucks.

Curbside recycling collection allows customers to keep their materials out of the landfill, which is the city’s final option. Since 1982, the city’s recycling efforts have diverted more than 105,000 tons of materials from the landfill.

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Behind the Scenes
Meet some of the people who make the city run

Accounting, administration, information systems, mechanical repair, human resources, water treatment, and park and building maintenance — more than 200 people are at work on such tasks every week, making sure the City of Anacortes runs smoothly.

The images at right show some city employees at their jobs in the past decades. At the top: Diane Erholm's eyes convey the joys of counting parking meter proceeds in August, 1958. Center, from left: City of Anacortes building inspector Ray Iversen looks at plans for a structure in 1972; City Clerk Paul Flint goes over record books with his successor, Frank Kimsey, in 1955; and Tom McCrory, outgoing city engineer/water superintendent, discusses a piece of equipment with his successor, Bobby Clark, in 1967. Bottom row: A city employee hands a customer a new license plate; Urban Renewal Director Ken Kinzel looks at the project's last available building sites in 1976; and Ian Munce, who was Anacortes Planning Director for 27 years, points out a detail of a controversial apartment complex proposal in 1991.

Black and white photos are from the Anacortes Museum's Wallie Funk Collection; news clippings are from the Anacortes American. The color photos on this panel show more recent employees at their jobs, working on committees, or celebrating together.
Our ideal Anacortes is:

- Beautiful
- Sustainable
- Friendly
- Thriving
- Small
- Affordable
- Diverse
- Vibrant
- Safe
- Accessible
- Independent
- Community
- Nature
- Education
- Environmentally aware
- Progress
- Green
- Responsible
- Industrious
- Peaceful
- Environmentally aware
- Maritime
- Intillegent
- Unique
- Comfortable
- Healthy
- Small business
- Outdoorsy
- Conservative
- Accepting
- Independent
- Natural beauty
- Artistic
- Energetic
- Bikable
- Forests
- Neighborly
- People oriented
- Waterfront beauty
- Home
- Accessible
- Destination
- Charming
- Caring
- Historic
- Destination retail
- Clean
- Self sufficient
- Economy
- Smart
- Family
- Parks
- Prosperity
- Inviting
- Young People
- Middle Class
- Tourist
- Fun
- Economically stable
- Natural
- Environmentally aware
- Welcoming
- Not crowded
- Diversity
- Arts
- Picturesque
- Inclusive
- Innovative
- Privacy
- Family friendly
- Livable
- Accessible waterfront
- Business friendly
- Trails
- Prosperous
- Self sustaining
- Creative
- Quaint
- Small
- Quality
- Opportunity
- Dynamic
- Engaged
- No box stores
- Civic minded
- Modern
- Helpful
- Freedom
- Paths
- Waterfront
- Scenic
- Pristine
- Excellent
- Active
- Resilient
- Vacation
- Good weather
- Quiet
- Walkable
- Neighborhoods

Participants in the 2016 Anacortes Comprehensive Plan visioning process were asked to provide three words describing their ideal Anacortes. The size of the words pictured above reflects how many times they were cited by respondents. This panel recreates a “Wordle” graphic created by Makers Architecture and Urban Design for the City of Anacortes.