



FACING THE LAKE

How **Kirkland** transformed its **industrial**
waterfront into a **network** of shoreline parks



At 32, Al Locke had a wife, a 6-month-old son, and one-third of a Master's degree. And in the spring of 1965, he also had one enviable dilemma. Three City Councils wanted him to manage their cities. All three envied the young City Manager's work in Bemidji, Minnesota, the college town where, in his four years there, he had helped expand the sewer system, improve the roads and transform the lakefront into a regional destination.

"I was well-liked," Locke, now 79, says.

So naturally, Bemidji's City Council wanted him to stay. The two other Councils wanted him to come.

One of those Councils was in Plymouth, Michigan, the town where for nearly a century, Daisy Manufacturing produced all those BB guns. Plymouth was an hour and-a-half from the home of Locke's

mother and from the Michigan State University campus, where he had studied public administration eight years earlier.

The other council was more than 1,500 miles to the west in an old ship-building community. It had one paved street, a debt and an unpopular austerity method of paying for it.

Tank yards, shipyards and lumberyards dominated its shoreline. Chunks of broken concrete protected it from erosion. And the road that ran alongside it, was, as Locke describes, "a beat up old road."

"Kirkland was uglier than hell," Locke says. "It was a place where you'd have to scrap and work hard to get things done. But it had potential."

That, Kirkland's citizens proved just one year earlier, when, frustrated with service cuts and a high debt, they opted for a new form of government that would be managed by a professional administrator, rather than an elected mayor.

Kirkland had one other reason for Locke to travel across the country.

"It had a lake," Locke says.

And thanks to a change in technology and zoning, that lake, the saying



The downtown waterfront before 1968.
Left photo: Bob Neir, left, and Al Locke,
right, at the renaming ceremony for
Doris Cooper Houghton Beach Park.



went, was becoming Kirkland's front door.

"Unfortunately," says Bill Woods, Kirkland's mayor from 1967 to 1973, "we had turned our backs on it."

CHANGING OF THE LAKE—

Two years before Locke became Kirkland's first city manager, Lake Washington had already begun to change. And it began to change most dramatically in the town of Houghton, Kirkland's southwestern neighbor of 4,000 residents.

In 1963, Houghton's City Council rezoned its entire waterfront from industrial to residential. That included everything south of Northeast 68th Street to what is now Kirkland's southern boundary.

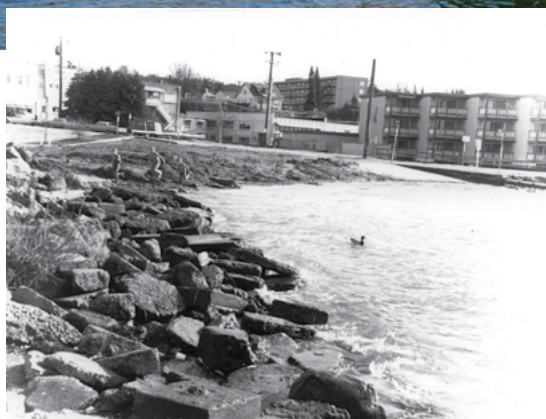
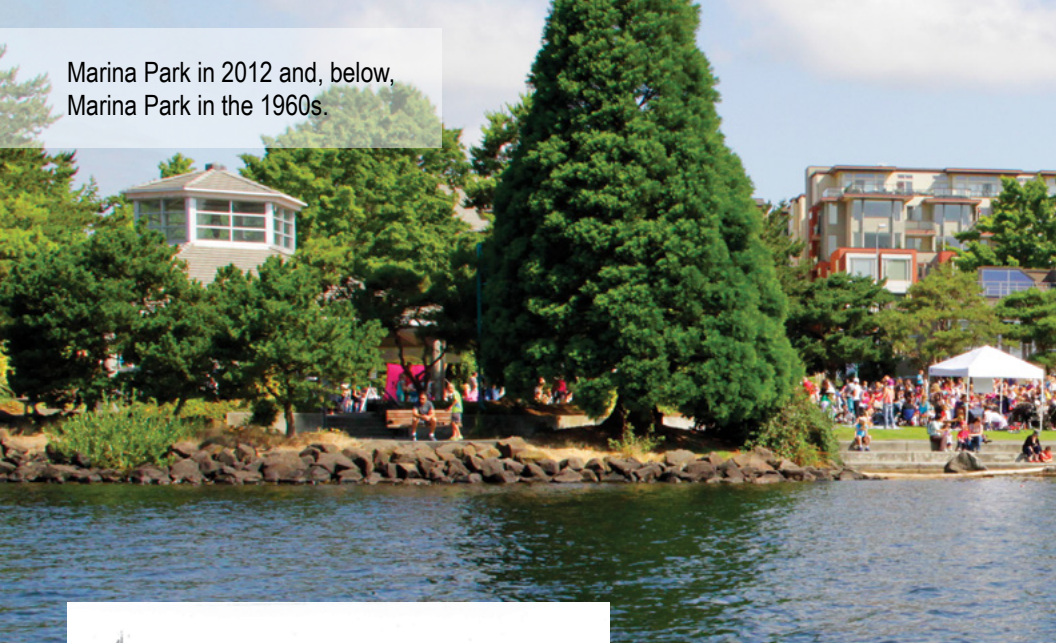
Residential developers immediately recognized the opportunity. They began converting the shoreline's tankyards, shipyards and lumberyards into three and four-story condominiums that jutted out over Lake Washington.

"Sometimes as far as 400 feet," says Bob Neir, author of "A City Comes of Age," and 22-year member of Kirkland's City Council. "All of the sudden," he continues, "people saw their waterfront vanishing. And they realized we should try to get as much of it into the public domain as possible."

Out of that epiphany emerged one of the City Council's four central

In 1968, Kirkland had
30
acres of parks

Marina Park in 2012 and, below,
Marina Park in the 1960s.



priorities that would guide its new council-manager form of government: Waterfront parks. (The other three were financial stability, road improvements and friendliness.)

"We had a lot of interviews around those

priorities," Locke says.

One of those interviews took place in Bemidji, where Council Members Al King and Lee Lanham traveled to investigate the waterfront parks Locke had helped build there.

They hoped for the same success here in Kirkland, specifically on the two acres of swampy Lake Washington waterfront the City had purchased a decade earlier in what the seller had called "one of the biggest swindles of all time," Neir writes in *A City Comes of Age*.

"[Marina Park] was a big dump," says Bill Woods, Kirkland's mayor from 1967 to 1973. "It was swampy. We dumped raw sewage into the lake. Everybody did. Lake Washington wasn't fit for swimming or boating. It was a big cess pool."



After King County's residents approved a \$118 million parks and recreation bond in 1968 that cleaned the lake, however, Kirkland's leaders began referring to the swamp by a different name. They called it "Center Waterfront."

And to build it into the Marina Park that would one day headquarter Kirkland's biggest community events, Al Locke knew the City would need money—state and federal money. Getting that would require a master plan for parks. Not just for Center Waterfront. But for an entire system of parks.

“The only thing I was focused on was getting that grant to create Marina Park.”

So on an autumn weekend in 1965, Locke marooned himself to City Hall, where he drafted a brief master plan for a city-wide park system.

"It was maybe four or five pages long," he says. "With a map."

The plan included Juanita Bay, Crestwoods Park, an addition to Everest Park, Waverly Beach and South Kirkland Park, which became David Brink Park.

"But those were just blobs," he says. "Because the only thing I was focused on was getting that grant to create Marina Park."

Locke presented the master plan to the City Council that Monday, he says.

A photograph of a child's legs from the knees down, wearing shorts with a pink and white geometric pattern. The child is standing on a wet, pebbly beach. In the background, there are waves crashing onto the shore and other people walking in the distance under a bright sky.

22

Number of open-space parcels in Kirkland

3,800

Number of community classes Kirkland offers

931

Acres of park or public open space in Kirkland



a parks STORY

45

Number of City-
owned parks in
Kirkland

16,000+

Average number of hours
volunteers devote to
Kirkland's parks every year

All seven members approved it. Two years later, the City Council presented those plans—and a \$99,000 bond—to the citizens. They approved them. Locke, then, presented those plans to the federal government. It approved them and awarded the City of Kirkland with a \$328,000 grant.

And finally, in November 1970, Kirkland presented its citizens with their first downtown waterfront park.

In 1970, Kirkland added

780

feet of shoreline to
Houghton Beach Park

“It turned out very well,” Locke says. “So the City decided to rally around the success story. And that enabled us to get the confidence of people in town to start supporting their local government.”

HOUGHTON BEACH & THE TELEGRAM CAMPAIGN—

Confidence in the coming years would be essential for Kirkland, which, through the 1968 merger of 4,000-population Houghton, had become responsible for another one and-a-half miles of Lake Washington’s shoreline. And three women were determined to protect as much of that shoreline as possible.

Judy Frolich, Deloris Teutsch and Doris Cooper all lived on the same street in the 1960s. And all three of them watched as developers converted industrial yards into residential complexes.

“I knew the waterfront was finite,” Cooper said in an April 2010 interview with the Museum of History and Industry. “And in the meantime there were



Neir, left, and Locke, observe the sign, which describes the efforts of Cooper, Frolich and Teutsch, pictured below.



what seemed like great condos going up on the waterfront blocking everything. So it was a question of you'd better get in there and get it pulled out ... or there would be no more chances."

The waterfront parcel that seemed most finite was on Houghton Beach, a park with 350 feet of shoreline sandwiched between two oil tank farms. With a lapse in attention, the women knew the little park could forever be squeezed between a pair of imposing condominium complexes.

With some work and some convincing, however, Frolich, Teutsch and Cooper believed Kirkland could purchase the oil tank farms, develop them and add another 780 feet of shoreline to Houghton Beach Park.

Money was the most visible obstacle. Shell and Standard Oil were offering their parcels to Kirkland for \$314,110. The women knew the City couldn't afford that. And their attempts at federal grants had failed.



They had other challenges: For decades, oil had been leaking into Houghton Beach's sand. And that had spawned bacteria underground; bacteria that could be unhealthy. They also faced political opposition from developers and a belief that the City should take care of what it owned before acquiring anything else.

Their strategy in 1969 was to inundate their congressional leaders with telegrams, pleading for federal and state grants.

By March 1970, they secured those grants and that September, those grants helped them secure another 780 feet of Lake Washington's shorelines for less than \$150,000.

SHORELINE MANAGEMENT ACT—

Kirkland, it seemed, was finally turning toward its front door. And in 1971, the Washington State Legislature passed a law that helped the growing city complete the turn. Up to that point, developers had been making the most of their rights to build over Lake Washington. But in 1969, the State Supreme Court ruled such practice violated the public's interest.

Two years later, the legislature affirmed the Court's opinion by passing the Shoreline Management Act. The act banned development over lakes and within 15 feet of them.

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a good price on things. We were on a land-buying binge. We were very ambitious.”

Within the next decade, Kirkland acquired or developed Crestwoods,





Juanita Bay Park, the wetlands at Yarrow Bay and Marsh Park. Its leaders expanded David Brink Park, Waverly Beach and Houghton Beach Park—now named Doris Cooper Houghton Beach Park. Kirkland’s park network more than doubled in acreage, from less than 30 acres in 1968 to more than 70 in 1980, including the addition of more than 12 acres of waterfront.

All those blobs Al Locke had scribbled onto his makeshift map a few years earlier were starting to make sense to a lot of people.

“That was fun,” Locke says. “That was very rewarding. I had no idea [those parks] would happen at the time.”

Today, Kirkland has more than 550 acres of parks, including 66 acres of waterfront parks.

And the Kirkland leader who drew them on a map more than five decades ago now has his name engraved on the Marina Park pavilion that continues to serve as a symbol of the City. The City of Kirkland renamed it in his honor—four years after Al Locke passed away.

