

A UNIQUE & EVOLVING COMMUNITY

A VISION FOR THE
BALLARD CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

JANUARY 2012



Ballard Chamber of Commerce

www.ballardchamber.com



Acknowledgements

The Ballard Chamber of Commerce Visioning Project was completed during the summer and fall of 2011. Led by the Chamber's Board of Directors and staff, it was shaped by the ideas, insight, and passions of the Ballard business community. The Chamber is grateful to everyone who participated, whether through interviews, focus groups, casual conversations, or by participation in other Chamber activities.

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Focus Group Participants

Sue Allegra, Chamber of Commerce
Jillian Andrews, Dawson & Gerbic, LLP
Jalair Box, Ballard Greenways
Peg Brown, Viking Bank
Sara Chapman, Deep Sea Fishermen's Union/prop. owner
Tracey Cruise, Washington Federal
Hilda Cullen, Nordic Heritage Museum
John Davis, Annie's Nannies
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Candace Kesterson, Umpqua Bank

Gordon Lagerquist, Lagerquist & Morris AIA
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Michelle Rosenthal, Garvey Schubert Barer
Ginny Ruffner, Artist & Ballard Ave property owner
Susan Schneider, Artist/Art Teacher
Konnie Suther L. Ac, Ballard Health Center
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Carlye Teel, Ballard Northwest Senior Center
Monique Tran, La Tienda
Caryn Truitt, Cookies
Nicole Vandermeulen, Camel on Design
Laura Walden, Swedish Medical Center Ballard
Susan Ward, BalMar
Eugene Wasserman, North Seattle Industrial Assn.
Robert Whaley Ph.D., New York Fashion Academy
Marcia Ann Wiley, Wileyware

Stakeholder Interviews

David Bentler, Method Group
Lekh Burns, re-soul
Lowen Clausen, Ballard Building & Athletic Club
Dan Cowan, Tractor Tavern
Mark Durall, Olympic Athletic Club

Inez Gray, Habitude
Bruce Helm, Olsen Properties
Jason Hughes, Soncboom
Rayburn Lewis, MD, Swedish Medical Center
Steve Mako, BalMar

Beth Williamson Miller, Chamber of Commerce
Nicole Miller, Blackbird
Michelle Rosenthal, Garvey Schubert Barer
Monique Tran, La Tienda



City of Seattle – Office of Economic Development

Karen Selander, Business Services Team

City of Seattle – Department of Neighborhoods

Rob Mattson, Neighborhood District Coordinator
Heather McAuliffe, Ballard Landmark Historic District



BDS – Planning & Urban Design

Brian Douglas Scott, Ph.D., Principal
Dwyn Armstrong, Project Associate
Lauren Joyner, Urban Designer
Tyler Brewer, Research Assistant



"In 2012, the Ballard Chamber will continue reaching out to local businesses to better inform its understanding of our evolving community and how the organization can redefine and restructure itself to better serve Ballard."

We encourage you to participate in these future endeavors and to become a working part of the Ballard Chamber. Your membership and volunteer efforts will make the difference. Contact us and we can help you find a spot to best utilize your skills, energy, and interests."

BALLARD CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

2208 NW Market Street, Suite 100
Ballard, WA 98107
206-784-9705

info@ballardchamber.com

Scott Ingham, Chamber Co-President
Greg Swanson, Chamber Co-President
Beth Williamson Miller, Executive Director
Sue Allegra, Administrative Assistant



Strategic Directions

To address the challenges described on the preceding pages, the Chamber Board of Directors met several times during this visioning process, including a focused retreat in December 2011. The following is a summary of key questions, conclusions, and strategic directions from the visioning process:

Key Questions:

- Is SeafoodFest going to be managed in-house or contracted out in the years ahead?
- How will the Chamber prioritize staffing for non-SeafoodFest activities (i.e., BURP, Art Walk, Golf Tourney, Membership, Admin, Programs, Advocacy)?
- Will the Chamber offer staffing for promotions & marketing efforts (integrated with In-Ballard)?
- Will the Chamber explore the feasibility of a Business Improvement Area in 2012? How will it staff this effort?
- Will the Chamber continue to use its reserves to achieve the objectives above?
- How will the Chamber adjust staffing levels to reflect the decisions above?

Conclusions:

- Ballard has a diverse and rich heritage.
- Ballard is vital, unique, and complex.
- Ballard needs to be branded and promoted as the multi-faceted place that it is.
- Ballard needs a cohesive business community that works together on:
 - Marketing & Promotions
 - Physical Environment
 - Economic Development
 - Cleanliness & Safety, and
 - District Organization & Management.
- The Chamber must become more broadly connected, but also more strategically focused to address these needs.

What We are Going to Do:

- **SeafoodFest:** Continue to produce SeafoodFest as the signature event for the Ballard community.
 - Increase community involvement in planning and managing SeafoodFest.
 - Explore ways to contain the time SeafoodFest takes away from other Chamber priorities (consider an outside event manager).
 - Retain quality control for SeafoodFest's entertainment, branding, vendor selection, and other features.
- **Other Chamber Programs:**
 - Ensure that more than half of the Chamber's resources go to non-SeafoodFest activities.
 - Prioritize Membership Services, Events, Marketing, Advocacy, & Administration (in this order).
- **Marketing & Promotions:** Reach out, support, and collaborate with the In Ballard Merchants Association's marketing program.
- **BIA Formation:** Explore the feasibility of forming a Business Improvement Area to stabilize funding and expand services.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since its inception in 1927, the Ballard Chamber of Commerce has seen the neighborhood grow and change. From a bustling lumber and maritime district, to a busy "downtown" with streetcars and interurban trains in the 1950s, through a difficult transition in the '70s and '80s when the nighttime environment was sketchy, and on into a thriving and eclectic business district that is widely known as a hip place to be. At the same time, Ballard's identity is complex. It remains a maritime industrial center, but it's also a trendy nightlife destination. General merchandise retail struggles, while boutique shopping flourishes, and the population grows.

In the summer of 2011, the Chamber responded to these ongoing changes by reaching out to the Ballard business community to take stock of the district and of the Chamber's role in helping the district succeed.

What We Heard:

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- **Marketing & Promotions:** Reach out, support, and collaborate on marketing programs with In Ballard Merchants Association and others.
- **BIA Formation:** Explore the feasibility of forming a Business Improvement Area to stabilize funding and expand services.



Mission:

TO SERVE THE MEMBERSHIP
AND BENEFIT THE COMMUNITY
BY PROMOTING AND
ENHANCING COMMERCE
TO ENSURE THAT BALLARD IS
A THRIVING PLACE TO
LIVE, WORK, AND PLAY.

"The Chamber must become more broadly connected, but also more strategically focused."

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BACKGROUND

Ballard

Ballard’s commercial roots are in the lumber and maritime industries. Despite its annexation to Seattle in 1907, the area maintains many of the characteristics of a “city within a city,” and continues to host a wide range of industrial, maritime, service, and retail businesses.

Prior to the 1950s, the business district was largely centered on Ballard Avenue, with the *Main Street* feeling of a small town. It featured streetcars and interurban trains, as well as a wide variety of businesses including general and specialty retail, industrial, manufacturing, and maritime support. The focus of commerce began to shift toward Market Street in the 1930s, but (like most older commercial districts) Ballard lost significant anchor retailers like JC Penney in the 1950s. Although general clothing stores remained on Market Street into the 1980s, by then Ballard had gained a reputation as a rough place to be at night.

The Ballard Landmark District was formed in 1976 to preserve the historic buildings along Ballard Avenue. During the 1990s, the City of Seattle’s Department of Neighborhoods worked with the community to complete the Ballard Neighborhood Plan, which is often credited with the increased residential density now found in the core. At the same time, the Ballard Merchants Association managed a sidewalk cleaning program and local advertising. Today, sidewalk cleaning is contracted directly between individual businesses and a long-time provider, and the In Ballard Merchants Association was formed to provide cooperative advertising.

Ballard Avenue’s renaissance began in the late 1990s as vacancies started to fill, and the mix of businesses shifted from taverns and small-scale manufacturing to more trendy bars, artists’ studios, and specialty shops. The Ballard Farmer’s Market has grown into a popular year-round European-style street market on Ballard Avenue. A boom of mixed-use condominium development along Market Street and Leary Avenue accompanied these business changes until the residential real estate market slowed in 2008. Safeway and QFC built new grocery stores during this period and Trader Joe’s moved into the new Ballard Blocks commercial development at the district’s southeast edge. A new Ballard Library and Ballard Commons Park opened in 2005. Swedish Medical Center completed a new office building and emergency room on its Ballard campus in 2010.

Chamber of Commerce

Founded in 1927, the Ballard Chamber of Commerce has approximately 350 members today. The Chamber has three primary areas of activity: special events, membership programs, and advocacy. Membership programs include monthly luncheon meetings and business after-hours events for networking and community development. The Chamber’s web



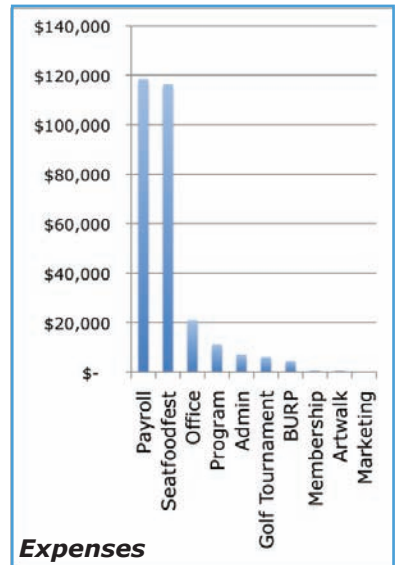
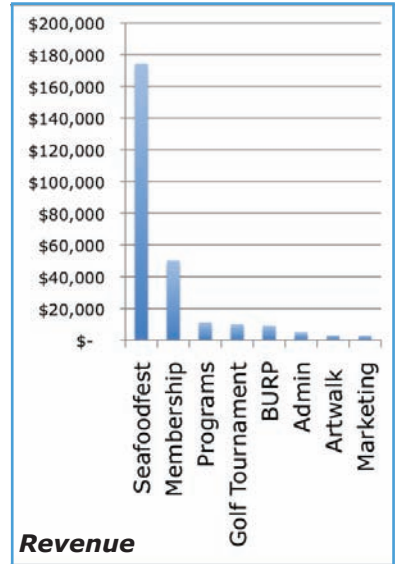
Conclusions – The State of the Chamber

Ballard is a thriving business district, with residents and business people who cherish its diversity, unique character, and sense of community, but also worry about its future. During the community discussion groups, the most common topic was Ballard’s uniqueness. Its wackiness. Its Ballardness. The very essence of Ballard is its multi-faceted character that is nearly impossible to describe. Its realness.

Everyone wants to promote Ballard and bring in additional business, without losing the community’s distinct local character in the process. People value the maritime industrial sector for its economic impact, heritage, and character-defining presence, but also recognize inherent tensions between 24-hour industrial activity and residential uses, as well as the tensions between freight movement, customer parking, and bicycling. Businesses welcome new residents in the commercial area, but also acknowledge challenges with parking and nighttime noise. A bustling Ballard Avenue nightlife scene gives way to a quiet daytime atmosphere that is a challenge for mainstream retail.

There are also issues within the business community. The diversity of the business mix means that individual business needs don’t blend easily into a uniform whole. Seeking to fill a need for regional marketing, the In Ballard Merchants Association created an on-going campaign including advertising, banners, an on-line business directory, and promotional events. These work well for some businesses, but don’t fill the needs of others. Confusion exists between In Ballard promotions and Chamber initiatives such as the Ballard Artwalk, Ballard Urban Picnic (BURP) and Halloween Trick-or-Treat. In Ballard’s marketing efforts have been quite successful, but the sustainability of this all-volunteer effort is in question. During the visioning process, many expressed a desire to see the Chamber and In Ballard work more closely together for a coordinated, stable, and ongoing marketing program.

SeafoodFest is a signature event for Ballard and the centerpiece of the Chamber’s annual work program. At the same time, SeafoodFest is a major production that consumes much of the Chamber’s attention each year. SeafoodFest is a major revenue producer for the Chamber, but some feel that it keeps the Chamber from other important priorities. Because of the time-consuming nature of SeafoodFest, BURP, Artwalk and other events, the Chamber is perhaps more of an event management organization than a Chamber of Commerce. This might be fine if the budget was working and business needs were being met, but neither is the case. The Chamber is losing money at the same time that businesses are clamoring for more services.



SeafoodFest is by far the Chamber’s greatest source of revenue, but it also consumes most of the Chamber’s resources — both staff time and direct expenses.



TOP VALUES / FEARS / WORDS

TOTAL RESPONSES

- Change / Growth31
- Community / Small Town / Home28
- Sense of Place / Unique / Ballardness17
- Diverse17
- Eclectic / Whacky17
- Comprehensive / Balanced16
- Street Disorder / Crime / Homeless12
- History / Historical12
- Personal Connections / Relationships11
- Daytime / Nighttime differences10
- Independent8
- Parking4
- Outreach / Communication4
- Multi-generational2

SUMMARY

- Uniqueness71
- Sense of Community55
- Fear of Change31
- Street Disorder / Crime / Homeless12
- Daytime / Nighttime differences10

Participants in these community discussion sessions commented on what they value about doing business in Ballard, described Ballard in a single word, and shared their biggest fears for Ballard. A brief summary of these responses by topic appears at left. Next, participants discussed issues facing Ballard, provided ideas for what should happen with various initiatives, and shared their visions for Ballard moving forward. These are summarized below.

IDEAS & VISIONS

ESSENCE OF BALLARD

- Vision for Ballard
- Ballardness
- Magic in Diversity
- Respect Past / Embrace Present / Reach Out to Future
- Embrace Positive Change
- Support Local
- Be sure to Honor both Youth & History
- Invest in Community

PROMOTE BALLARD – IN MANY WAYS

- Promote Ballard
- Bring People to Ballard
- Cross-Promotions for Ballard Visitors
- Local Shopping
- Holiday Decorations
- Coordinated marketing is good, but need Look / Feel
- Retail Feedback
- Ask Retail what they Need
- 17th of May (Sytende Mai) - Norwegian Constitution Day

TRANSPORTATION & PARKING

- Advocacy on Transportation
- Speak up on Parking Regulations
- Moderate Parking Enforcement
- Parking Program
- Parking & Shuttle
- Seek consensus on Bike Issues
- Pedestrian Zone?

INDUSTRY

- Retaining Industry is Key
- Need Industry Voice

BALLARD AVENUE / MARKET STREET

- Connect Ballard Ave & Market St
- Ballard Avenue is Key (Retail / Restaurant / Nightlife)

PARKS / PUBLIC SPACE

- Parks & Public Space Programs

VISIONS FOR THE CHAMBER

- Define Chamber
- Engender Dialogue
- Chamber as Relationship Building Organization
- Create Partnerships
- Participation & Discussion are Key
- Both Business & Resident Communications
- Need More People / Staff / Money



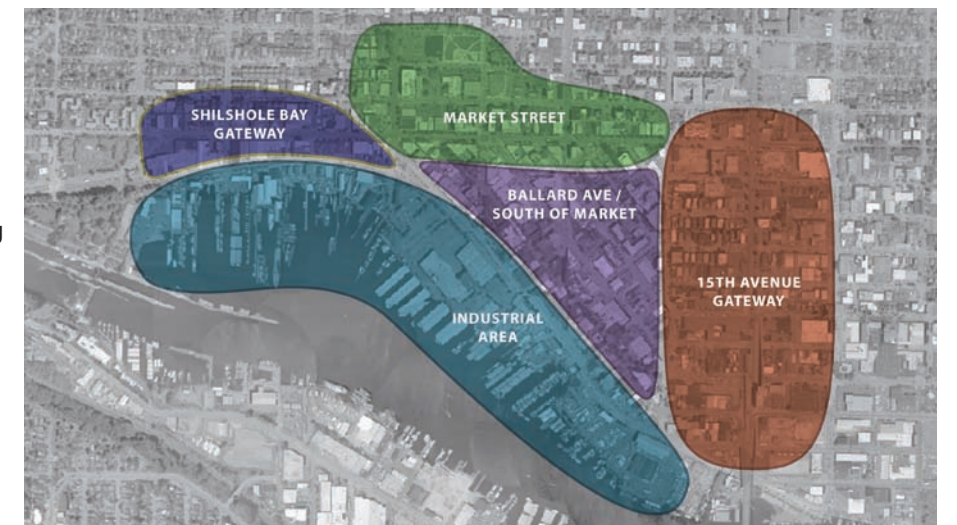
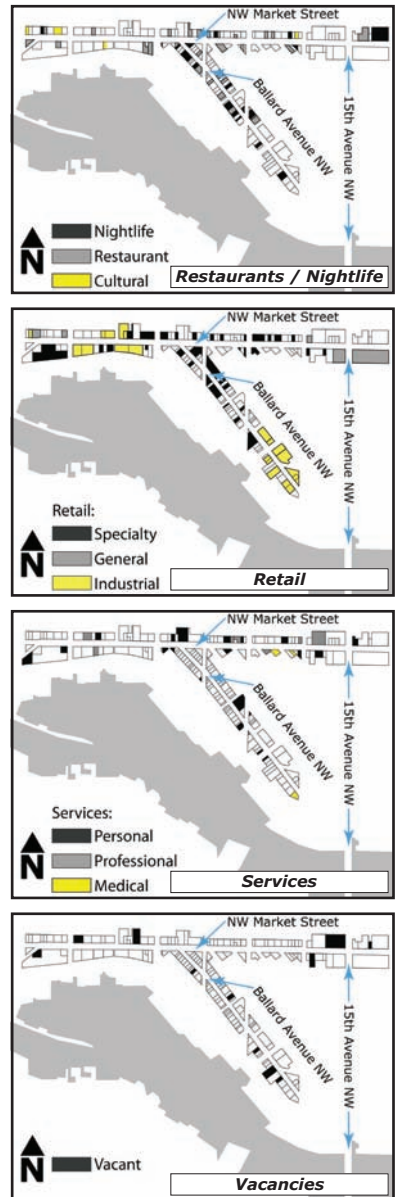
site features a business and membership directory and promotes local businesses and events. To advocate for the Ballard business district, the Chamber staff communicates directly with various City of Seattle departments, local and state elected officials, as well as industrial representatives and other business groups. In 2010, the Chamber worked with the City's Office of Economic Development to feature several Ballard businesses in the citywide "Only in Seattle" marketing program. Destination marketing also includes a special Ballard section developed for inclusion on the Seattle Convention and Visitors Bureau's web site, as well as promotion of the Chamber's special events.

The Chamber is governed by a volunteer board of directors, and managed by two full-time staff members — an Executive Director and an Administrative Manager. The organization's funding comes only from membership dues and special events. The Chamber's signature event – SeafoodFest – is its largest source of revenue and also the primary use of its resources. Other events include BURP (Ballard Urban Picnic), Halloween Trick-or-Treat, Ballard Second Saturday Artwalk, Mel Conway Memorial Golf Tournament, and an annual Sidewalk Sale. In recent years, the Chamber's resources have been stretched. Special events occupy most of the staff and volunteer time, but do not produce enough revenue to offset costs. The Chamber has dipped into cash reserves the last two years.

Ballard Today

Today, Ballard is thriving but also struggling with change. Ballard Avenue bustles with restaurants, boutiques, and nightlife. Market Street hosts more general retail with some vacancies, but also a substantial concentration of offices and service businesses. Residential construction is resuming. Parking is worrisome to many, as are real or perceived conflicts between various residential, commercial, and industrial activities.

An important nuance in understanding Ballard today is that the business district is too complex and diverse to be considered in a one-dimensional way. Rather, Ballard is an eclectic and multi-faceted mix of businesses and activity centers. The maps on this page illustrate this point, with five activity clusters outlined at right and several dimensions of the existing business mix on Market Street and Ballard Avenue diagrammed on the right above.



INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

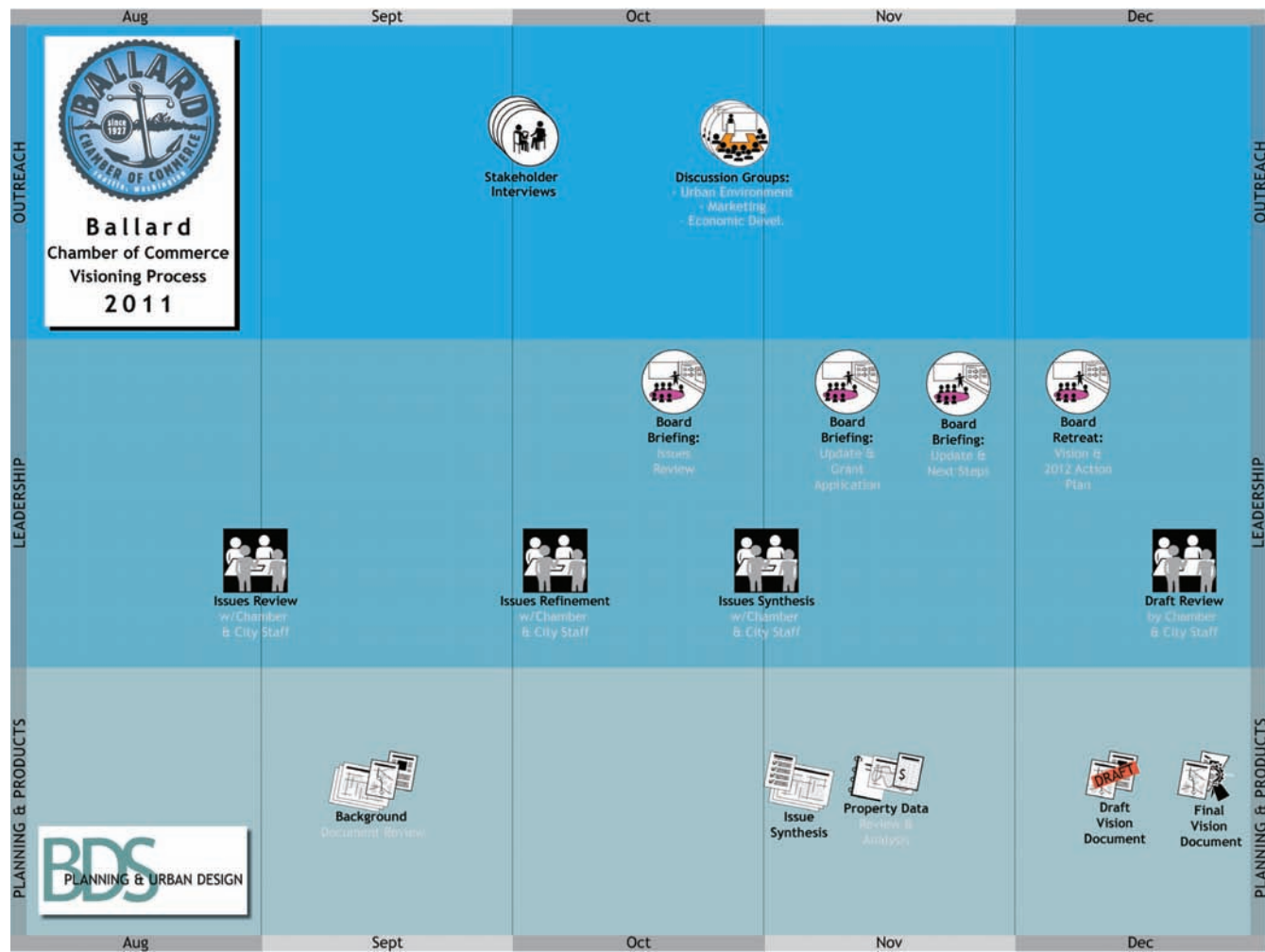
- Ballard's retail and service economy changes and will continue to change
- To be effective, the Chamber must change its behavior, messaging, and branding
- The Chamber needs to be actively and visibly positioning Ballard toward a vital and exciting future
- Ballard is large enough and complex enough to be considered, managed, and promoted as an eclectic and multi-faceted district with a variety of activity centers and business clusters
- The Chamber must find a way to partner with independent, creative, and motivated businesses

Visioning Process

During the summer and fall of 2011, the Ballard Chamber of Commerce conducted a "visioning" process (illustrated below) to assess the state of the Ballard business district and of the Chamber itself. The process was partially funded by the City of Seattle Office of Economic Development and facilitated by **BDS - Planning & Urban Design (BDS Team)**.

Issue Identification & Stakeholder Interviews

The process began with a scan of background information and initial brainstorming on key issues with Chamber leadership. Using these facts and ideas as a starting point, the **BDS Team** conducted a series of 15 interviews with stakeholders who are familiar with Ballard. This research produced a list of preliminary issues that are facing Ballard and the Chamber. These issues, listed at left, illuminated an underlying confusion about the current state of Ballard and its Chamber, as well as some troubling trends relating to the Chamber's programmatic and financial sustainability. In short, SeafoodFest is dominating the Chamber's annual activities, and overall revenues do not cover expenses.



Community Discussion Sessions

After outlining the basic issues facing the Ballard business district, and the Chamber itself, the Chamber Board of Directors agreed that these real challenges exist and that the Chamber needs to evolve. Everyone also agreed that more input from the Ballard business community was essential before any major decisions were made. To gain this input, the Chamber hosted a series of three discussion sessions in the fall of 2011, focusing on economic development, the physical environment, and marketing & promotions. About 50 people attended these sessions. Copies of the graphic recordings from these discussion sessions appear below.

