

Sunday, December 14, 2008 - Page updated at 12:00 AM

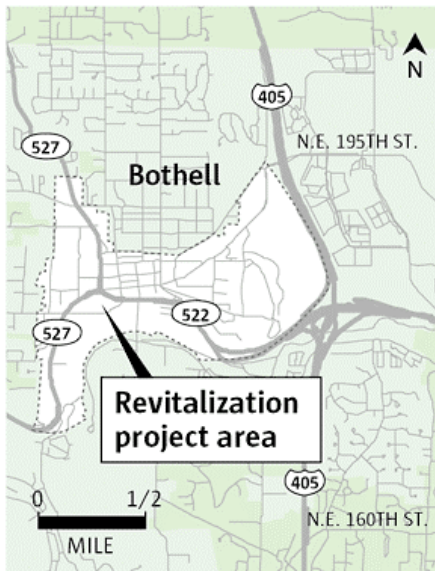
Permission to reprint or copy this article or photo, other than personal use, must be obtained from The Seattle Times. Call 206-464-3113 or e-mail resale@seattletimes.com with your request.

Bothell's economy thriving despite downturn

By Peyton Whitely
Seattle Times Eastside reporter

Downtown Bothell plan moves ahead

Despite a national economic slowdown, Bothell is proceeding with a downtown revitalization plan, including relocating Highways 522 and 527.



Source: ESRI THE SEATTLE TIMES

Even in an economic downturn, some pockets of prosperity remain.

Take Bothell.

While state, county and municipal governments are all taking economic hits, Bothell is pushing ahead with what's probably the most ambitious changes in its 99-year history. Plans to redevelop the city's downtown with the Crossroads project, creating a mixed-use area of retail and housing, are moving forward as the city prepares to celebrate its centennial next year.

Officials credit a diverse city economy, the businesses in its so-called "Technology Corridor," the University of Washington's branch campus and Bothell's central location.

Bothell City Manager Bob Stowe



"We're a lot better off than a lot of communities around us," said City Manager Bob Stowe.

The city's finances did take a hit when the City Council earlier this month adopted a \$204 million biennial budget. But that budget reflected a relatively small cut of \$1.2 million from an October projection. The new budget calls for no property-tax increases.

Another reason why Bothell is moving ahead with a major downtown revitalization: timing.

Bothell over the past several years has been taking the necessary steps to put together funding, including \$25 million from the state through a local-infrastructure program; adopting a \$230 million capital-facilities plan; and striking a deal with the Northshore School District to resolve what could be done with a key piece of downtown property.

The city also began acquiring property to pave the way for the changes.

In April 2007, it bought a 2.8-acre downtown shopping center site called Bothell Landing near the Sammamish River to allow work to move ahead on the first revitalization steps.

On Tuesday, the City Council will consider acquiring an old movie-theater property along Highway 522 that's now a car dealership. The property will be used to help reroute two highways that cut through the city.

The city is also looking at building a new City Hall at three possible locations, including the old Anderson School that's on the Northshore property. The property acquisitions are helping make possible the Bothell Crossroads project, as well as a related Highway 527 realignment.

The realignment, which is already funded, will move the city's two main highways — 527 and 522 — about a block to the south. That's expected to fix an awkward intersection, with two major state roadways and other streets running into each other in a perplexing five-way junction.

The realignment will allow for the expansion of Main Street to the west, supporting downtown revitalization, Stowe said.

After all that public work, adds Stowe, comes the major test: Whether the projected private projects will follow.

Stowe said the city has been able to withstand some of the financial problems impacting other communities because Bothell has never had an economy based on any single main factor. For example, the city doesn't have a big mall or "auto row" that provides the city with a major portion of its revenue.

But Bothell does have business parks, many of which ended up locating in a "Technology Corridor" along Interstate 405.

"We don't take them for granted," said Stowe. "It's a work force of 20,000 people-plus. Without that, we'd have a different community, without those business parks."

By redeveloping the downtown core, Bothell officials hope to expand on its tax base.

"But the motivation goes far beyond that," says Bill Wiselogle, city community development director. "The way to do it, frankly, is to capitalize on Bothell's character. I describe Bothell as having good bones. One of our challenges is not to screw it up."

Peyton Whitely: 206-464-2259 or pwhitely@seattletimes.com