

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY OBSERVER REPORT

Port of Tacoma Commission, January 21, 2021

Observer: Rosemary Powers

The regular monthly Port of Tacoma Commission meeting was held remotely in accordance with the governor's proclamation 20-28 as extended. All commissioners were present --John McCarthy, Kristin Ang, Deanna Keller, Don Meyer, and Dick Marzano. After opening the meeting, The Commission met in executive session at 10:45 am to discuss a litigation matter, and to consider the minimum price for which a parcel could be sold or leased. No decisions were made at this session. The Commission reconvened in open session at 12 noon with no in-person attendance permitted. The public was invited to follow live streaming or attend by phone (information provided with the agenda along with directions for participating in the public comment period).

After unanimous approval of the consent agenda, the commission invited public comment. Only one person offered comment. John Page, Director of Career and Technical Education for Tacoma Public Schools, provided information to commissioners about career education opportunities (such as the Tacoma Tideflats Certificate and pre-apprenticeship program with the Seafarers International Union) and scholarships related to preparing students for positions in Port-related careers and encouraged continued collaboration.

Director's Report:

Executive Director Eric Johnson reported that the first draft of the Strategic plan is planned for February 18. He said that Port staff and commissioners Ang and McCarthy had participated in a productive meeting with members of the Puyallup Tribe, with discussion of the deepening of the Blair Waterway and progress on the Wapato Creek Habitat project. They hope to schedule regular monthly communications if possible to ensure good communication. Johnson also reported that work on the high priority Highway 167 project is presently frozen by the State of Washington due to lower income related to reduced driving during the Pandemic.

Election of Officers:

The Port Commission follows a yearly rotation of officers, and 2020 president McCarthy presented the 2021 slate which was unanimously approved, with Richard Marzano as President, Don Meyer VP, Deanna Keller, Sec., Kristin Ang 1st Asst. Sec., and John McCarthy as 2nd Asst. Sec. All expressed gratitude to McCarthy and especially to technical staff of the Port for making the remote meetings as effective as possible. Marzano presided over the remainder of the meeting.

Commission Action

1. *Extending Personal Services Contract with Strategic Planning Consultants.* As the contract was approved before the challenges of Covid, Port staff and consultants needed to pivot from in person to remote interactions, resulting both in additional hours of contact and in unexpected delays. (e.g. a planned in-person meeting with experts became 40 remotely-conducted individual interviews). The online Open House intended to encourage public engagement has done that more than expected (with over 4000 people visiting the site). Creating this resource in lieu of public meetings required a pivot as well, and pandemic conditions led to other delays. Consultant and Port Staff commitment to completing the plan includes the following deadlines during the next few months: Feb. 18 (draft plan); March 18 (Final Draft Plan consideration), April 15 (Draft Document for approval). Request for \$50,000 for extended project approved unanimously.

Note to readers: Anyone interested in following the development of the Port's strategic plan can find online information and opportunities for engagement at <https://www.portoftacoma.com/about/strategic-plan>. They are also invited to complete the online survey at <https://portoftacoma.multiscreensite.com/#Survey>.

2. *Parcel 15 Clean -up project* (former sawmill and log yard operated by Portac, Inc) with request for funds to implement clean-up including three requests to Commission: a) to enter into an agreement with WA State Department of Ecology for the clean-up, b) to authorize use of \$1,000,000 to implement this phase of clean up (an approach to reducing effects of ASARCO slash and toxic pentachlorophenol) and c) to authorize \$50,000 for design. Port staff noted that Portac, Inc., has paid a “walk away” settlement of \$8,600,000, making Port responsible if costs of clean up should exceed that amount). Staff expect that costs of cleanup will be covered by this settlement and did not ask for any Port funds in this request. Commission approved all requests after discussion.
3. *Lower Wapato Creek Habitat Project* A large portion of the commission meeting was devoted to presentations and requests related to this major Port project, a mitigation project of fish and wetland habitat restoration. This nearly 18-acre project (with about 10 acres habitat and 8 for forest buffer) is located at 1131 E Alexander Ave in Tacoma (between 12th St. East and Highway 509 near Alexander Ave). Main aspects include a) replacing fish barrier culverts under 12th St. E with a bridge (that will encourage fish passage), and b) relocating Wapato Creek at this site from a ditched system to a meandering stream and wetlands, involving estuarine/wetland habitats and forested upland buffer (projected 35-40,000 trees and scrubs, with many conifers).

This project has been in planning since 2011 (with full completion expected by 2033), involves conversations and cooperation with multiple jurisdictions, and benefits the port specifically in providing significant mitigation credits for future projects on Port property. Commissioners applauded the project for the evidence of collaboration and environmental stewardship, and noted the opportunity for sharing goals of habitat restoration on the Wapato Creek with the Puyallup Tribe of Indians.

Staff requested authorization for project and for Executive Director to enter into agreements and execute easements; specifically:

1. Approval of entering into Interlocal Agreements with the City of Fife and WSDOT to create a conservation easement for the site to be protected in perpetuity;
2. Agreement to transfer property (as surplus property) along 12th St. E of approximately 33ft by 1000 ft to the City of Fife for future right of way and utility needs, and transfer of the bridge and its future maintenance to Fife once the bridge is open and available to the public;
3. Approval of authorization of \$12,170,000 for the project (Master Identification # 101449.01) with a total authorized amount of \$14,095,000 (includes large contingency of \$2.1 million based on volatility of construction industry). Since large quantity of soil will be removed in creating the meandering stream, this material can be held on Port property for future use by WSDOT in the Highway 167 project, which will be a credit in lieu of cash for part of the Port's contribution to that project.

Discussion involved preference to see draft of ILAs before they are executed, questions about impact of the 167 project being frozen right now, how many mitigation credits the Port is likely to receive by undertaking this project, what provisions are being made for maintenance of the site, the importance of keeping the public informed of progress on this important restoration project, and query about access for the public in the future (not expected for the full site, but the 33ft right of way will initially

be graded and constructed as a grassy area that will permit access to viewing the site). Following discussion, commission voted unanimously to approve the requests, with staff to follow up on information requests.

Committee reports:

There were no committee reports. Executive Director Johnson noted that the two committees listed on the agenda – Workforce Development and DEI committee, have been proposed by commissioners Keller (Workforce) and Ang (DEI). He stated that both of these resonate with the directions emerging in the strategic plan, and requested commission leads on the potential for these committees if desired. President Marzano requested that interested commissioners contact him and the Director.

There were no issue briefings or announcements, but commissioners noted the importance of maintaining democratic institutions in the face of extremism, and mentioned how the celebration of MLK day earlier in the week served as a reminder of the important role of the Port as an engine of economic justice and promoter of real wage jobs.

The meeting adjourned at 2:35 pm.