

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY OBSERVER REPORT

Port of Tacoma Commission meeting

October 15 2020; 12:00 – 2:00 p.m. Remote meeting

Notes by Rosemary Powers

Commissioners met in executive session from 11:00 am to 12 and reconvened for the public meeting at noon. All five commissioners were present: President John McCarthy, Don Meyer, Kristin Ang, Deanna Keller, Dick Marzano.

Following opening rituals, the commission accepted the agenda, approved the consent agenda, and asked for public comment. There were no comments submitted nor any comment time requested. There have been very few comments from the public at any meetings I have observed since the decision to hold remote meetings in response to the pandemic. The chair does ask for public comment, and agenda published prior to the meetings include the statement above regarding how to request an opportunity to address the Commission. Agenda for the Commission meetings are made available at the port website at <http://portal.veconnect.us/p/portoftacoma> usually about a week in advance of the meetings. With archived remote meetings, members of the public can view these sessions at their convenience. For those interested in providing comment to the Commission, the following guidelines apply:

Public comment guidelines for in-person meetings of the Commission are available at

<https://www.portoftacoma.com/sites/default/files/PublicCommentGuidelines.pdf>

Guidelines for public comment for remote meetings:

“Members of the public may submit written comment via email to comment@portoftacoma.com. Written comments received by 9:00 a.m. PT, . . . (the day prior to the regular third Thursday Commission meeting) will be distributed to commissioners. To deliver public comment via telephone during the public comment portion of the meeting, please email comment@portoftacoma.com. Subject line “Speaker – Public Comment”, please provide your name, the telephone number you will be calling from, and the agenda topic you wish to speak to. You will be contacted with instructions. Public comment time is limited to up to three minutes per individual.”

Executive Director Report:

Eric Johnson reviewed items to be considered at today’s meeting, and noted that a number of study sessions are tentatively scheduled over the next two months to continue developing the Port Commission’s Strategic plan. Foundational goals for this planning process include:

- Community Connections (partnerships and engagement);
- Economic Vitality (leadership in economic development in Pierce County);
- Environmental Stewardship (exceeding regulatory obligations and pursuing environmental sustainability);
- Organizational Health (build org culture with strong ethics, that prioritizes fiduciary role, embraces diversity/equity/inclusion, with employee satisfaction;)
- Transportation Advocacy (partner with other entities to advance critical transportation infrastructure for maritime and regional economy).

Actions taken at this meeting included:

- Acceptance of a major environmental cleanup settlement with Tacoma Power,
- A decision authorizing the issuance and sale of a revenue refunding bond, and

- Consideration of a proposal to purchase a \$2,000,000 property (1.7 acre) located within the Port of Tacoma's "Strategic Area" that also presumes some environmental clean-up actions related primarily to activity from a nearby property.

Conversation among commissioners included a strong statement about environmental cleanup by Commissioner Keller (echoing Commissioner Ang's past commentary). "The use of public funds to clean up private industry contamination is bothersome.....(In the future) we need to make sure the Port is indemnified with regard to that."

Regarding the sale of a major revenue refunding bond, discussion revealed differences about the benefit of paying down debt vs. maintaining funds for strategic projects without further borrowing (during a time when rates are low). The revenue proposal was approved.

Regarding the proposal for property purchase with potential need for environmental clean-up, commissioners raised many questions, and requested an opportunity to consider the property proposal within executive session as soon as possible to explore sensitive issues. Noting that acquiring other properties with environmental problems has cost the Port a great deal in the past in mitigation costs, commissioners agreed that they need to seek a balance between the timely seizing of opportunities for strategically located property purchase and moving responsibly regarding indemnification, property value assessment, and any property purchase in general.

Committee reports

Economic Development Fund Committee: Small grants to entities developing projects of mutual benefit. Have approved interlocal agreement with City of Sumner -- project dealing with Stewart St. Bridge for help with widening. Also some intersections improvements to Highway 410 with some improvements in City of Lakewood and City of Puyallup. If approved program for 2021 budget, grant applications will be made available as soon as possible.

Tribal Liaisons Committee: No update for this but have sent letter to Tribe a couple weeks ago to request a meeting on projects affecting both jurisdictions, expecting response in near future.

Issue Briefings

Economic Development Board (EDB): Bruce Kendall of EDB provided an overview of their regional and international activities and noted the importance of the Port to their work. They included a reflection on their more recent stated commitment to furthering diversity, equity, and inclusion. For the EDB, the focus has been primarily on large businesses, which are traditionally not very diverse. A commitment to diversity requires shifting a focus to recruiting businesses of all sizes, and outreach to minority-owned businesses no matter what their size.

Strategic Planning: Eric Johnson gave an overview of the work being done on the Port's Strategic Plan. Those interested in the Port's next few years should visit the meetings page on the Port Website at <https://portoftacoma.multiscreensite.com/#Welcome> and follow areas of interest.

Mr. Johnson also reported on the Settlement of Litigation related to the Fair Campaign Practices Act that acknowledged the Port had unintentionally violated the fair campaign Practices Act several years ago. After a long and convoluted process, that first determined no violation, a new interpretation of law led to a settlement of \$34,000 dollars for the Port and split attorney fees with several other entities. All are happy to have this issue behind them.

Following a few comments and announcements the commission meeting ended at 2:08 pm.