

## LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY OBSERVER REPORT

### Port of Tacoma Commission Meeting 12/17/20

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. No in-person attendance was 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). No one requested an opportunity to make public comment at this meeting.

All commissioners were present: President John McCarthy, and commissioners Kristin Ang, Deanna Keller, Don Meyer, and Dick Marzano. The Commission met in executive session at 10:45 am to discuss a possible real estate purchase and a potential litigation, with no decisions made nor planned for today's public meeting. The public meeting began at 12 noon and concluded at 2:34 pm.

**Strategic Planning:** Following the usual opening formalities, President McCarthy opened a strategic plan study session related to Mission and Values. This is an ongoing discussion, and no decisions were made today. The discussion, however, offered a window into the differing priorities and concerns of Commissioners about the future direction of the Port. The focus of the most energetic discussion at this session concerned the mission of the Port as an economic engine (good paying job creator, regional maritime cargo operator) and as an environmental steward. Commissioner McCarthy preferred that the mission focus on the Port's economic role as the priority, with environmental stewardship as a strong value. He expressed concern about diluting the Port's priority mission by expecting the Port to be a regional leader in environmental concerns.

Commissioner Ang offered an impassioned statement on the importance of environmental stewardship as a primary mission focus, arguing that our economic reality depends on ecology, and said that "this is not about tree huggery." Rather, she argued, "those who are able to create a synergy of environment and economy will be those who succeed." She stated that the primacy given to job creation in the 1950s at the Port brought in chemical companies who externalized the costs of clean-up which the Port is continuing to remediate on a day-to-day basis. She emphasized the importance of the Port's role as an environmental steward of this land and sea, and of its relationships with others (especially the Tribes). For Ang, to not feature environmental stewardship as an priority aspect of mission would not reflect what the Port claims about itself as a leader in the "intersection of industry and nature."

Commissioner Meyer noted that the powerful goal of creating prosperity takes the Port beyond the relationship of environment and economy in the land and water of the Tide Flats to a consideration of the Port's relationship to a farmer in eastern Washington who seeks to export grain. Meyer stated that for him "creating prosperity and environmental sustainability" are important words to include in any mission statement.

Commissioner Marzano noted the importance of considering what someone in Roy might expect to hear as the Port's mission, and "jobs" would clearly be at the top of the list. He expressed

concern that the Port should be cautious about assuming too big a role on environmental issues county-wide, as in monitoring what others should be doing.

Commissioner Keller agreed with the importance of environmental stewardship as a mission priority, and stated that the Port should strengthen partnerships in carrying out this mission, as the Port itself does not have all the financial resources to deal with either mitigation efforts or new sustainable approaches that will require multiple investments.

This discussion is part of the strategic planning process that began in Spring 2020 and is expected to be finalized at the end of the first quarter of 2021. The previous strategic plan was adopted in 2012 and updated in 2014, before the formation (with Port of Seattle) of the Northwest Seaport Alliance (NWSA) in 2015. Given the direction already determined for this major joint-port marine cargo operating partnership, the current strategic planning process asks the stakeholders in the Port of Tacoma to review and discuss the Port's mission as an engine of local and regional economic development and as an environmental steward of the lands and waters themselves (as commissioner Ang argued).

Anyone interested in following the development of the Port's planning for the years ahead 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>.

### **Workforce Development**

Following the strategic plan study session, at which no decisions were made, the Commission heard two presentations related to Workforce Development. This is an area that has emerged as a strong need for Port investment in the years ahead. Michelle Ledbetter presented an overview of the plans for the Puget Sound Skills Center offerings for high school and post high school and discussed the potential of manufacturing skills training in maritime, transportation, distribution and logistics. Katie Condit (CEO of Workforce Central), provided an overview of this service to Pierce County job seekers. The discussion following both of these presentations demonstrated the commission's interest in future collaboration for promoting Port-related job readiness.

### **Executive Director's Report**

Executive Director Eric Johnson provided a brief report noting that plans for the new administrative office space have been slowed due to the pandemic, and that discussions are ongoing about what space might best meet the administrative needs as well as being welcoming for trade delegations/events and providing options for promoting workforce development. Whether and how all these possible features can be included remains under study.

### **Commission Actions:**

The commission voted to:

1. Accept the Port of Tacoma Hazard Mitigation Plan, which is a general plan required by FEMA for Port eligibility for most federal grants. The Port collaborates with multiple agencies on these responses, and agreeing to this plan does not commit any funds at this time. Individual mitigation projects must still come before the commission for approval.
2. Authorize the Port of Tacoma's Executive Director or designee to enter into a Personal Services Agreement with the World Trade Center Tacoma (WTCT) for 2021 trade services. Financial commitment is \$122,500 for 2021. Commission members praised the current leadership for their success in strengthening trade relationships, expressed regret at the constraints in Pierce County and the City of Tacoma regarding support at this time,

and requested a follow-up discussion in May-June of 2021 to assess status and needs of the WTCT work plan for the year.

## **Committee Reports**

### **1. Commission member committee involvement**

President McCarthy reviewed the general commitments of the five commissioners to committees of the Northwest Seaport Alliance, the internal committees of the Port of Tacoma, and many outside organizations and task-forces on which the Port has a required or invited membership (over 40 committees in total). Given the difficulties of some groups meeting at all over the period of the pandemic, and many groups meeting remotely, members agreed to continue their current assignments for the coming year to build stronger connections (especially the newer members of the commission). Commissioner Meyer encouraged consolidation of committees with similar oversight, noting the need for staff time to service the committees, and the potential for too much bureaucracy.

Commissioner Ang proposed an additional internal Port committee—**an equity committee**, as an important accountability mechanism related to the equity resolution approved in an earlier meeting. She referenced the establishment of a statewide Office of Equity by Washington Legislature in 2020, the Puget Sound Regional Council’s intention to develop a regional equity strategy, the stated equity commitment of the Economic Development Board, and the inclusion of an equity focus in the Port’s strategic planning. When asked about the effect of this proposed committee on staff resources, Director Johnson noted that since this is part of the strategic plan, it will need staff time regardless, and having a commission-led committee would be very useful to vetting accountability measures and ensuring continued strategizing.

Commissioner Keller proposed an internal Port **committee on workforce development**, given the importance being placed on this role for the Port. The Commission agreed to consider approving both at the next regular meeting.

### **2. Tribal Liaison Committee.**

The Port of Tacoma Commission and the Puyallup Tribe of Indians have communicated by letter over the past few months, but have not yet been able to arrange a joint conversation during the pandemic. There are many issues of mutual concern, from bank and shoreline stabilization to dredging and harbor deepening, as well as restoration efforts such as the Lower Wapato Creek Habitat Project (see <https://www.portoftacoma.com/wapato>).

Following a few announcements, the meeting adjourned at 2:34 p.m. An archived copy of the meeting is available on the meetings page at <http://portal.veconnect.us/p/portoftacoma>, with keyword December 17, 2020.