



CASCADIA
Community Planning Services
375 Hudson Street, Suite #204
Port Townsend, WA 98368
Phone: (360) 379-4688
Facsimile: (360) 379-0885
Email: cascadia@olypen.com

MEMORANDUM

To: Port Commissioners & Staff
From: Eric Toews, Dave Robison & Bill Wise, *CASCADIA Community Planning Services*
Date: June 25, 2008
Re: Stakeholder Interview Sessions – Summary of Key Comment Themes

I. PURPOSE & PROCESS SUMMARY

Purpose

The purpose of this memorandum is to briefly review the strategic planning effort to date, and to summarize and synthesize the recurrent themes of comment heard during the stakeholder meetings recently concluded.

The Process & Context

On April 17 and 25 of this year, the Port Commission and key management level staff held two intensive work sessions to discuss and formulate a strategic planning process and preliminarily identify key issues facing the Port over the coming five (5) to ten (10) years. From these sessions, both Commissioners and senior staff recognized the critical need to involve key stakeholder groups in the planning process at the earliest possible opportunity. On May 7th, the Commission ratified a process to solicit input from the following stakeholder groups that are either directly or indirectly dependent upon Port operations and facilities, or play an essential role in the economic health of the community:

- Local Governments;
- Non-Profit Organizations;
- Airport Users;
- Port Employees;
- Moorage Tenants;
- Recreational Users & Environmental Groups;
- Marine Trades; and
- Port-Related Businesses, Downtown Businesses & Local Chambers of Commerce.

Before requesting participation from these groups, it was determined that a “Community Kick-Off Meeting” should be conducted to explain the purpose and context for the planning effort to the stakeholder groups and interested citizens. In addition to sending out letters of invitation to key members of all 10 stakeholder groups, public notice of the kick-off meeting was also provided through the Leader and via posters displayed at key locations on Port properties.

The meeting was held on the evening of May 21 at the Port Townsend Yacht Club, with over 70 representatives of stakeholder groups and citizens attending, as well as Port Commissioners and senior staff.

The meeting afforded an important opportunity to:

- Describe the Port’s core mission and responsibilities under state law (i.e., Title 53 RCW);
- Explain how the wholly voluntary “strategic planning” effort is different from other state mandated planning processes for both ports, cities and counties;
- Present information concerning the Port’s financial situation and prospects; and
- Explain the strategic planning process and how stakeholder can be involved throughout the process.

Those in attendance at this kick-off meeting were also provided with a list of eleven (11) written ‘stakeholder’ questions to contemplate in advance of the individual stakeholder group sessions – with the option to either provide written comments or oral input during the stakeholder meetings.

II. STAKEHOLDER SESSIONS – KEY COMMENT THEMES

Overview of the Stakeholder Sessions

The individual stakeholder meetings were held over a two-week period between June 3 and June 13, with at least one Port Commissioner and senior Port staff member being present at each session to listen and observe. Attendance and participation in these group sessions varied widely, with some sessions virtually unattended (e.g., Local Government and Port-Related/Downtown Businesses) and others very well attended (e.g., Moorage Tenants, Airport Users and Marine Trades). Due to scheduling conflicts, the City did not attend the original Local Government session. In consequence a follow-up session was conducted on Friday, June 13 to obtain feedback from city representatives. Meeting notes from all stakeholder group sessions are contained in Appendix “A” to this memorandum. Copies of all written responses to the 11-question stakeholder questionnaire have been included within Appendix “B.”

The general format for the stakeholder meetings was as follows:

- Introductions & ground rules;

- Discussion of meeting expectations;
- Opportunity for prepared stakeholder reports;
- Facilitated open forum; and
- Next steps/closing.

Lead facilitator, Bill Wise, attempted when possible to train the dialogue towards the 5-10 year strategic planning timeframe, though discussions at times focused on matters of more immediate concern to constituent groups. In a number of instances, issues and concerns raised by participants in one meeting were not necessarily echoed by comments recorded during other sessions. As a result, a careful reading of the information and material in Appendices A and B is necessary to obtain an accurate understanding of the points raised during each session.

Key Comment Themes

A number of important issues and recurrent themes of comment emerged from multiple stakeholder sessions, and must be carefully considered as we move into the next phase of the planning effort:

Fix Aging Infrastructure First – In several sessions, concern was expressed that the Port had in recent years pursued new projects and facilities development, while neglecting existing and aging infrastructure. Generally, a strong preference was expressed for “maintaining what we have” as a first priority, and only considering the expansion of existing facilities or the development of new facilities thereafter.

Fair & Transparent Budgetary Practices & Facilities Management – Many commentators insisted that the Port must dedicate revenues generated by particular Port facilities to the maintenance and operation of those facilities (e.g., moorage fees for maintenance of moorage facilities). These participants expressed intense dissatisfaction that revenues generated by one facility could be redirected to new projects or maintenance of other facilities, while the facilities that generated the revenue in the first instance received inadequate repairs and maintenance (e.g., A and B Docks). Many concerns were raised over recent rate increases and the opinion was expressed that it is not obligatory for the Port to maintain rates that are comparable to other Puget Sound markets.

More Pro-Active Environmental Stewardship – A number of commentators in multiple stakeholder sessions expressed the desire for the Port in collaboration with stakeholder groups to become an acknowledged regional leader in environmental protection and stewardship. Comments in this vein encouraged the Port to get ahead of the regulatory curve and adopt and implement policies to protect the environment and to publicize our stewardship successes as a marketing tool.

Pursue Sustainable Economic Development Opportunities – Most participants were not supportive of the Port pursuing all forms of economic development. Rather, there was widespread agreement that the Port must only promote “sustainable” economic development opportunities that provide “family wage jobs” while safeguarding the community’s existing character and unique quality of life. Many commentators expressed the opinion that the Port should seek to serve County residents first, rather than catering to business interests and customers outside the local area. The Port Commission may wish to give consideration to crafting a new mission statement to reflect the Port’s commitment to supporting the local maritime community.

Improve & Maintain Communications, Public Relations & Customer Service – Numerous participants in multiple meetings expressed appreciation for the opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns to the Port. They also clearly indicated a desire to increase opportunities for customer and citizen involvement. However, more than active listening is demanded. There is an expectation that the Port will follow-through upon what it hears with a refocused mission, formalized policies, and active implementation. A number of other key components to improving both the perception and reality of the Port’s place in the community include:

- Improved public outreach efforts and informational materials (e.g., newsletters);
- Increasing the presence of senior Port staff at the Boat Haven; and
- Ongoing customer service training for Port employees.

III. CONSULTANT COMMENTS ON THE PROCESS

The consultant team offers the following observations on the stakeholder meetings:

- The Port serves a diverse constituency: Organized groups like the Marine Trades and Moorage Tenants participate and respond in a manner very different from less cohesive and less structured interest groups (e.g., environmental and recreational users);
- Attendance and participation of organized stakeholder groups was impressive: Organized groups tended to offer the most deeply felt opinions of the Port, and clearly have specific issues that they feel very strongly about;
- Discussion was easy to stimulate in all groups: Although some single-purpose groups had difficulty identifying the broader issues facing the Port;
- Stakeholder groups may not reflect all of the concerns of the community as a whole: Stakeholder groups that are self-selecting (i.e., invitation or open invitation) may tend to be a less accurate indicator of overall community concerns; nevertheless, they provide much more focused input about what the major issues may be regarding a particular area of concern or Port facility; and

- Senior Port staff are not viewed favorably by some key constituents: A perception stated directly in some meetings, and more subtly in sidebar conversations during the process, was that senior Port staff seem arrogant and unresponsive to their needs.

To augment the input received during the stakeholder meetings, the Port may wish to consider conducting a random survey of Jefferson County residents at some future point in this process. Random surveys can often provide a more accurate picture of how the overall community feels on a specific subject or set of issues, provided such a survey is not overly complex and does not require a great deal of effort for citizens to complete.

IV. NEXT STEPS – SWOT ANALYSIS & CAC FORMATION

The next step in the process is for the consultant team to undertake a draft “strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats” (SWOT) analysis using this document as a starting point for identifying key issues facing the Port. This analysis will require independent research and focus on the changes in both the external environment (City, County, Puget Sound region, national) as well as internal changes to the Port organization and services provide by the Port. There are likely many factors at play that will influence the future of the Port community and organization. External forces, like acts of nature, changes in demographics, technological advances, globalization of the economy, just to name a few, are largely outside of our control. Yet how the Port chooses to respond to them, as a community and as a public agency, will be important to improving the satisfaction of Port tenants and users of Port facilities, and maintaining the support of the general public.

Concurrent with the internal SWOT analysis, the Port Commission should establish the criteria and process for selecting participants to serve on the Community Advisory Committee (CAC). Ideally, the CAC should have between 12-15 members and reflect a balance of stakeholder perspectives at the table. It is recommended that staff and the consultant team bring forward a list of recommended community representatives to the Port Commission at its first regular meeting in July for review and discussion.

V. CONCLUSION

The Port of Port Townsend is at a critical crossroads. The Strategic Plan process is intended to help facilitate community discussions about the Port’s mission and vision for the next 5 to 10 years. The Plan is intended to provide a blueprint for the Port to address important policy issues and capital improvements needed to implement the community’s vision for its future. What kind of port should the Port of Port Townsend be? How is the Port of Port Townsend different from other ports found throughout the Puget Sound region? What is the Port’s role in the larger community? What is our shared community

vision for economic development? These are the kinds of questions we will be exploring with the CAC, Port Commission, and community as we work together to prepare the Strategic Plan to guide Port decision-making in the coming decade.