

Report for LWV of Port of Bellingham Commissioners Public Meeting

January 18, 2011

Meeting attended by Mary Ellen Woods and Martha Mills

PUBLIC MEETING CONVENED AT 3:00

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Marina Fees

Six members of the charter boat industry (Brian Pemberton, Allison Horn, Gary Brock, Curt Bagley, Sandy Brock, and Rick Sail) commented on the proposed new fees for boats in the marinas, stating that the fees for commercial fishing boats and charter boats should not favor the fishing industry but be the same for all commercial operators. Comments mentioned the large amounts of money spent by the charter industry in the community for office space, repairs and other services for boats, taxes, employment, and spending by clients in the community for hotels, meals, skippers, and crew.

In addition, Roger Van Dyken, former legislator and commercial fisherman and now charter operator, spoke in favor of equal rates for all commercial boat operators. He said that half of the charter fleet as ceased operations due to the economy.

ACTION ITEMS

ENVIRONMENTAL

1. Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) Aquatic Lands Harbor Leases. The commissioners approved the leases, which are continuations of existing leases for the outfall pipes from the Georgia Pacific plant during the GP cleanup. There was mention of WWU, so perhaps this is property that WWU will have after the cleanup.

WORK STUDY SESSION – UPDATES ON FOLLOWING ITEMS:

[Note: this is a very brief summary, there are 13 pages of notes if anyone wants more information on a topic]

1. Construction Contracts for 2010

The Facilities staff summarized the 31 construction projects during 2010 in 13 categories, describing the costs, any change orders, and the final cost of each major project. The projects ranged from \$26,000 to \$26 million, with a total spent of \$38.6 million and less than 2% total overrun in expenses, which is excellent. The largest dollar project is at the airport for terminal expansion. The commissioners had questions about how contractors know about upcoming construction projects, the staff assured them that the news is well distributed in the community.

2. Marina Moorage Model

The Marine Services staff is preparing a study of the proposed fee models as well as measuring all the different types of slips in all the PoB marinas in order to have accurate data. The staff has been meeting with all interested groups and presented a great deal of factual information about fees, different commercial fishing boats, comparisons with other marinas, the fees for lockers paid by the fishing industry at all the marinas, and various proposals for fees. The commission will have to make a decision at the February 15 meeting in order to meet the April 1 deadline to change the fees.

3. Little Squalicum Creek Shoreline Restoration

This project is in the design stage and is next door to Mount Baker Plywood. The goal is to restore salmon habitat in the creek.

4. The Waterfront District

The Master Plan was completed in September and a draft development contract and plan for next spring/summer is under review. The waterway cleanup is planned for two phases, the first in 2012.

5. Index Industries Tenant Improvements

Of the 110 possible LEED environmental points, the project presently has 65, which is a gold rating. The present building is not insulated, the design will make it light and airy, with no changes to the office design within the building.

6. Marine Life Center

The Real Estate staff described the history of the center with many facts about attendance and fees. The Port has provided a subsidy of \$40,000 annually for many years. The center receives contributions of \$22,000 in admissions and donations, which just covers its expenses. Other organizations are being approached about assisting, but in these economic times, additional assistance

is not expected. In 2010, 18,114 visitors attended with a \$2 admission fee, compared to 71,000 visitors when there was no fee about 10 years ago. Various options were discussed at length.

7. RFP/Qualifications for the Blaine Boatyard

A RFP was published on January 3, 2011. Westman, the present operator, does not want to continue. Staff is working on finding a replacement.

8. Industrial Revenue Bonds

British Petroleum (BP) is the biggest user of the bonds, but has recently called \$205 million in bonds, so the Port is losing \$205,000 in anticipated revenue. After the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, BP wants the Port to waive the fee on some bonds that BP is holding but hasn't officially called. Tax-exempt bonds need to be 25-50 basis points lower than the commercial rate to sell.

E. D. Sheldon said that an economic development plan is to be presented at the February 15 meeting.

9. Port's new Website

The former website was developed in 2005 and now is difficult to maintain. The new website meets the State of Washington retention requirements, as well as better serving customers. The project cost \$45,000 and began last July. There are 250 pages of content on the new site. In December, 13 Port employees were trained how to maintain and update the site.

The airport section receives the most hits, so more was put into that section, including smart forms so the public can contact the airport about noise issues.

Several functions were mentioned:

- There is a "request for speakers" function.
- it will be easier to figure out which Port employee to contact on an issue.
- how to pay moorage fees.
- A "notify me" feature for requests for new information about an issue, a meeting, etc.
- Employment section for jobs.
- An ADA feature for the blind will describe photos on the site.
- Information may now be printed from the site.
- Emergency alerts: there are dark sites that can be turned on in an emergency or blank pages that can be filled in.

Launch is the first week of February.

Commissioners asked about putting audio recordings of the meetings on the site? Agendas and minutes will be available on the site. E.D. Sheldon commented that once the public requests something, it will have to be done. The problem is that you may not hear everyone well on the audio, so better equipment will need to be installed. There was discussion about video recordings, noting that meetings seem to get longer with video because there is more posturing. The E. D. said that Seattle and Tacoma have video and the equipment is expensive. The commissioners agreed to add audio to the site.

Facebook and other new public information tools were also discussed. The city presently has a Facebook feed, the Port could consider one as well. The majority of computer users now release via that medium. There is a blog at the site for information distribution.

The E.D. said that given the budget, the site is very good, especially compared to the amount paid by Seattle for their site. The Port will pay \$3000/year to the web server to host and maintain the site.

ADJOURNED

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING SCHEDULES

Airport Advisory Committee – Thursday, March 17, 2011 at 9:30, BLI Conference Center, Bellingham International Airport.

Marina Advisory Committee (MAC) – Thursday, January 25, 2011 at 6:00 p.m., Squalicum Harbor Office, Marina Square, 722 Coho Way.