

PORT COMMISSION SPECIAL BUSINESS MEETING – Tuesday, January 17, 2023

The Port of Port Townsend Commission met for a special business session at the Chimacum Grange #681 at 9572 Rhody Drive, Chimacum, WA and via Zoom online.

Present: Commissioners Hasse, Hanke and Petranek
Executive Director Berg
Deputy Director Toews
Port Recorder Sanders

I. CALL TO ORDER (00:00:42)

Commissioner Petranek called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

Executive Director Berg led the staff presentation noting the purpose of the meeting is primarily to accept public comment and especially hear from the farming community. Documents available on the Port's website do not yet include the property appraisal. It is anticipated a Commission decision on the purchase would occur early February.

Deputy Director Eric Toews noted the vision of the Port referencing a document from October of 1926 to support local agriculture. The Port desires to partner with the agriculture community, work with jurisdictions, and scale up local agriculture production.

Eric Kingfisher, Stewardship Director of the Jefferson Land Trust, presented information about the conservation easement that follows the ownership of the land in perpetuity.

II. PUBLIC COMMENTS (00:05:55)

Tony Kastella, representing the Jefferson County Sportsman's Association, spoke about the easement on the farm for duck hunting and wants to ensure hunting is included in the listed uses including the option for game management.

Francesco Tortorici spoke about the value of the current uses, including the use of biochar.

Janet Welch spoke in support of the Port's broad thinking, but in opposition to this project without a plan. She suggested instead exploring existing Port property south of the airport runway.

David Seabrook commented (including written remarks) in favor of the project, about climate change, and critical systems adaptation planning.

Peter Newland urged extending the purchase option and exploring the most suitable property for the desired purpose (included written remarks).

Kevin Long of the North Olympic Salmon Coalition spoke in support of the Port acquisition.

Karen Page spoke about the importance of the Short Farm for its wildlife and urged maintaining wild fowl habitat.

Jean Ball had concerns about this particular property and what value the Port might bring in terms of environmental impact and economic benefit/viability.

Al Latham, Chair of the Conservation District, but speaking personally said he was employed early on at the Short Farm. Roughly 70-100 acres never floods and there is a lot of slab and benefit of existing waste storage.

Nicole Witham, General Manager of the Chimacum Corner Farm Stand, asked about the agriculture easement and is curious whether the Port would be successful in seeking Washington state funds given the funding that has already gone into the land. The community needs farm infrastructure, including USDA slaughter/processing and a food hub and distribution facility.

Diane Johnson, President of the Grange, spoke in support and urged reviewing the Grange farm survey. He concurred with Nicole Witham's comments as well as the need for cold storage.

Hannah, a farm worker, had concerns about flooding but also spoke of the positive aspects of wildlife and lack of a plan for flexibility and creativity in seeking options for agriculture production and resilience.

Martin Fredrickson, a neighbor farmer to the Shorts and direct marketer of livestock, spoke about land access and many creative solutions needed from the collective agricultural minds to keep lands as productive as possible.

Charlotte Fredrickson spoke in appreciation and support of the Port’s willingness to explore this opportunity although uncertain this is the best business move for the Port.

Jeff Kelety was curious to hear from the farmer’s desires to lease space.

Pete Langley spoke in support of the idea and was concerned about removing the property from the tax rolls and what the leasehold tax would contribute when taking this into public ownership.

Melanie Edwards, of the National Young Farmers Coalition, spoke in support of acquiring land and about opportunities of getting young farmers on the land.

Joanne Pontrello, of the Conservation Futures Committee, spoke about the Port of Skagit Viva Farms and in support of exploring opportunities.

Steve Dowdell of Gray Fox Farm, spoke in support and about access to farm land for the next generation as well as pooling resources.

Cameron Jones of the Conservation Futures Committee and of Black Lives Matter of Jefferson County spoke in support of the project and collaborating with the community on youth-based thinking -- bring this conversation into the schools.

Julie Boggs, Manager and Co-owner of Westbrook Angus, spoke in support and about the importance of conservation. The farm needs to be managed in a dryer state and be viable as farmland.

Nicole, a farmworker, spoke in support of this opportunity and exploring options for the reasons and values stated, including the farm’s importance to the quality of life.

Kevin Short spoke in support of the project and needing to let farmers maintain the creek and the flow of the water. He is sorry to have to give it up.

Commissioner Petranek thanked the public for the letters and correspondence on the project and about the next Port meetings January 25 and February 8.

Roger Short, here since 1945, spoke about the importance of building infrastructure for the community and the younger farmers. He is happy to hear the many feelings shared.

Austin Bishop, who inherited his grandfather’s farmland, spoke in support/understanding the Short’s struggle and desire to stay on the farm. He urged the Port to consider the water problem and how addressing the water would help the farmers with their land.

Eric Kingfisher, spoke of the Trust’s conservation easement and recognized the drainage situation and the Short’s efforts to maintain clear drainage and how agriculture productivity is impacted by increasing flooding. The drainage system has been maintained since 1920 by the drainage district. Arriving at creative solutions as well as maintenance of the system would benefit the agricultural productivity and further community resilience.

Alexa Helbling, former worker on Dharma Ridge Farm and now running her own vegetable farm, spoke in support of the project and the supportive farming community and the difficulty connecting to land without wealth in some way.

Commissioner Hasse spoke about the importance of access to healthy food and being moved by the passion around farming, growing food, and access to land.

Commissioner Hanke thanked farmers young and old and for their collaboration. He recognized the fast process accommodating the Short Family schedule, the Port’s stewardship of the public’s money and said forming a committee would be important to continue the conversation.

Executive Director Berg thanked the public for attending. He reviewed the Port’s limitations on using the airport for agriculture –referencing the Port of Skagit. In 2024, the Port would engage in an airport master plan.

III. ADJOURNMENT: meeting adjourned at 7:47 p.m., there being no further business before the Commission.

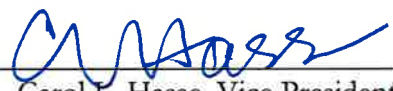
ATTEST:



Peter W. Hanke, Secretary



Pamela A. Petranek, President



Carol L. Hasse, Vice President