

Port of Port Townsend
Chair Pam Petranek, Commissioners Pete Hanke, Carol Hasse
P.O.Box 1180
Port Townsend, WA 98368

David Seabrook
2340 West Valley Rd
Chimacum, WA 98325

January 17, 2023

Re: Potential acquisition of Short's Family Farm

Dear Chair Petranek,

I am in favor of the concept that the Port acquire the Short's Family Farm for the reasons I outline below. As an introduction to my comments I offer an observation from the visionary Albert Einstein:

"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking that created them."

Our current problems include challenges that can seem overwhelming and are perhaps this is why they're often excluded from organizational strategic planning. I argue that consideration of such big picture issues are of vital importance to our local near-term future. A brief overview of what our problems include:

- "Climate change" including global warming, sea level rise, drought (including in regions of prime agricultural production), changes in precipitation patterns, flooding, wildfires and smoke pollution. The 8 hottest years on record have occurred... in the last 8 years. There is growing evidence we have already passed some tipping points.
- Resource depletion: The term "overshoot" describes how human consumption of resources has exceeded supply and is unsustainable. There is evidence that the era of cheap, readily available supply of oil is over. Energy is the "master resource", as its supply dwindles we should expect price volatility and conflict. History provides many examples of how civilizations collapse when they exceed resource limitations.
- Ecosystem damages from human land use patterns, including depletion of topsoil and mass extinction of species. The Earth's population has recently passed 8 billion people.

We have known since at least the 1980's that global warming is a problem but despite efforts, no progress has been made to reduce our global greenhouse gas emissions. In fact emissions increased in 2022. Our current global human civilization depends on a complex of interdependent systems, many of which show signs of vulnerability. The risk of cascading systems failure is real and increasing. In short, we are facing a crisis, it's time to respond accordingly.

I contend that critical systems adaptation planning makes most sense at the local level. To mitigate the risk of failure in our vital food system it would be advisable to develop local capacity for production, processing, storage, marketing and distribution. There is solid potential that the Short's Family Farm could be renovated to accomplish such economic development. Ideally we could use the property to develop sustainable local Ag capacity and to demonstrate how we can transition away from using fossil fuels as the primary energy source for local Ag. Experimenting with transitional models will be difficult within the existing economic paradigm that treats food as a commercial commodity subject to the vagaries of market capitalism. This is why the Port's leadership will be so important. Some will say now is not the time for experimentation but when is the best time to explore new models? I argue that the best time is before a crisis occurs. To quote Milton Friedman:

"Only a crisis - actual or perceived - produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable."

I am hopeful that with The Port's leadership a plan can be developed that provides for needed ecosystem conservation and restoration while also providing opportunities to develop local capacity within our local food system. It makes sense to me that a resilient local food system should be viewed as a "public good". The leadership of a responsible public organization will be a key requirement, I believe, in taking this step forward. (If not the Port, who?) I am hopeful that other public agencies and organizations will partner with the Port to help make the project a success. I encourage the Port to provide bold and innovative leadership.

Thank you for your time, and for considering the need for a robust and resilient local food system.

David Seabrook
davidseabrook@pacifier.com

**Public Comment on the Potential Short Farm purchase by the Port of Port Townsend
January 17,2023 Chimacum Grange**

Good evening, commissioners and staff. My name is Peter Newland. For the last fourteen years my wife Robyn Johnson and I have lived on the shores of Tarboo Bay near Quilcene. The quest for provisions requires that we pass by the Short Farm on a regular basis. On my way here this evening I noticed that the flood waters have receded some but still cover a great deal of the acreage.

My biases and beliefs are formed by a fifty-year career in the construction and development industry in Snohomish County. During that time, I also served two terms on the Snohomish County PUD. Those twelve years 1985 – 1996 taught me a great deal about public policy and the rewards and challenges of public service. I hold appreciation for what it is like to sit in your chairs.

During my time in office, I was what today is called a budget hawk. My first wife was fond of saying that “I cared more about the public’s money than our own”. Some hyperbole but mostly truth.

Certainly, my caring is what brought me here this evening. Like you I have more questions than answers.

- As yet, there is no appraisal of value.
- We have not seen a detailed concept or plan for what the Port might do with this investment of public money.
- There is no hint of what the return on investment might be.
- There has been no examination of alternative sites that might perhaps be better suited for a robust agricultural investment by the Port.
- The Port, as I understand it, has existing underutilized assets. Perhaps it would be beneficial that any new Port initiative first be concentrated on those.
- We know the Short Property is compromised, and development of industrial agricultural uses are burdened by a restrictive easement held by Jefferson Land Trust. County zoning regulations and environmental requirements also pose potential constraints.

Without a specific proposal accompanied with an environmental checklist and perhaps an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) it seems risky to proceed apace.

Never in my fifty years in the construction and development business, nor during my time as a PUD Commissioner, did I ever proceed on a “buy now, figure out what to do with it later” basis. It is simply not a prudent way to proceed.

And this is surely a case where it would be prudent to know a lot more before a purchase is consummated. I can not tell if this is in the public’s interest or not. It seems like, for some reason, this decision is being rushed. As they say, “haste makes waste”!

“As long as we are talking recklessly here” was a phrase that the great poet, William Stafford, sometimes used to introduce a topic for discussion. He meant it as an invitation to open up and think more broadly.

In that vein...

1. Why not, renew the option of the property for an additional 12 months?
2. Why not, pay the Short Family a reasonable, nonrefundable monthly option fee that is tempered by their continued use of the land and that is applicable to the purchase price?
3. Why not, in the interim, gather all the information needed for the Commission and the Public to make a wise and truly informed decision about a purchase?

Thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts.

Peter Newland
pnewland@whidbey.net
425-754-0700