

Commissioner Resource Guide

Acquainting newly elected port commissioners with
Washington's public ports and their Association



March 2010

This guide is designed for newly-elected port commissioners or someone considering serving as a commissioner for one of Washington's 75 public port districts.

As a port commissioner, you are responsible for the current operations and future direction of your port. This public policy task is complex and challenging and requires considerable leadership skill.

The Washington Public Ports Association's (WPPA's) **Commissioners' Resource Guide** provides an overview and basic information about the responsibilities of a port commissioner and discusses the importance of efficient and effective port management.

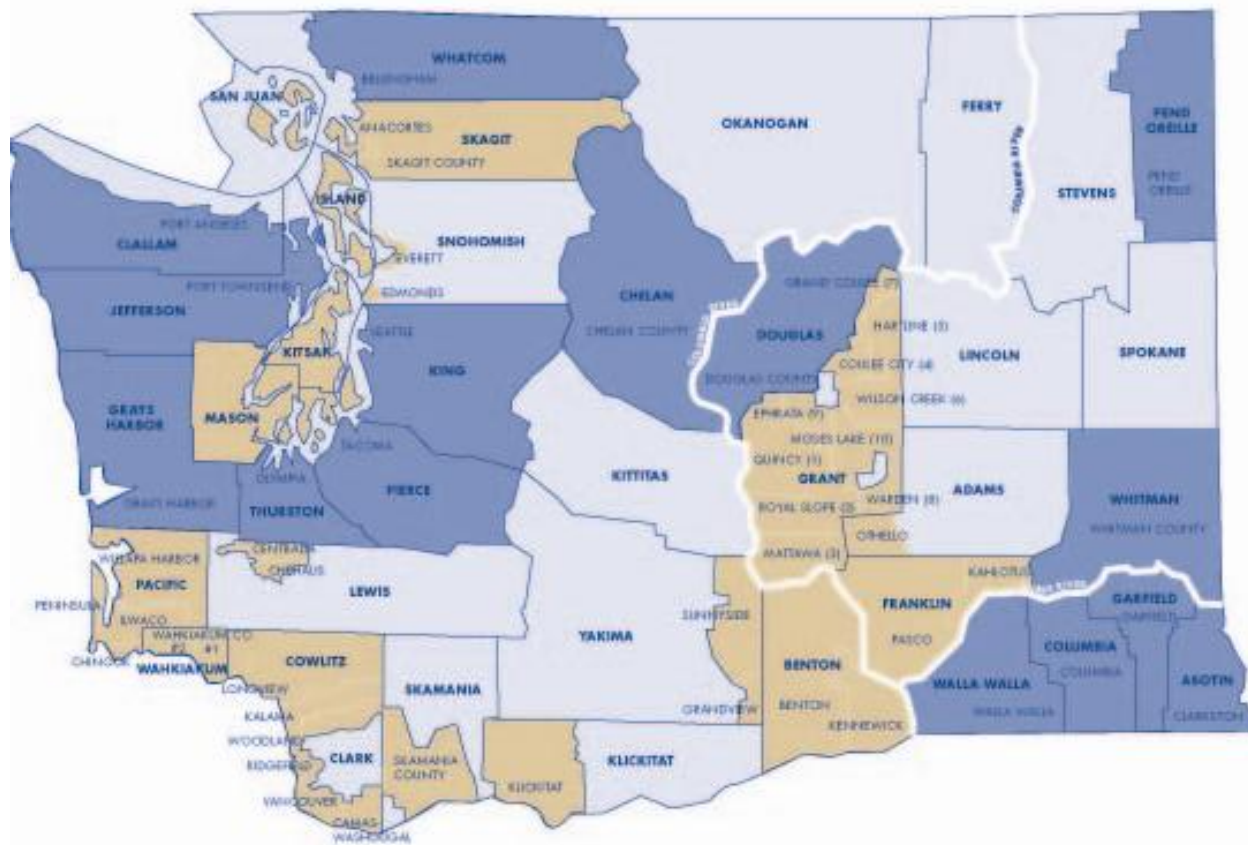
It also provides information about ports in general, port district authorities, management and techniques you can use to improve your performance as a port commissioner. Another document for commissioners, WPPA's [Environmental and Land Use Handbook](#) on environmental issues, is also available from the Association as a resource on those issues. And you'll find many other useful documents on our website.

NOTE: This is a general overview. For specific reference, refer to your [Knowing the Waters](#) guide and the *Laws of the State of Washington* [RCW Title 53](#) regarding Port Districts.

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WASHINGTON PUBLIC PORT DISTRICTS



DETAIL OF SAN JUAN, ISLAND, KITSAP AND MASON COUNTIES



Port History

Most of Washington's early port facilities were privately owned. Whoever owned the waterfront amenities controlled the movement of people and goods in that area, and the cost of such movement. In many regions, a private monopoly existed and prices were established accordingly.

Waterfront monopolies in Washington were first broken in 1889 when the new State Constitution provided that the beds of navigable waters belonged to the people, and the Legislature could designate which places would be harbor areas. It also provided a system for leasing waterfront tidelands and uplands in those areas.

In September 1911, the Port of Seattle became the first autonomous municipal corporation in the nation to engage in port terminal operation and commerce development.

The formation of the Port of Grays Harbor soon followed.

The Port District Act of 1911 allowed the people to establish port districts and elect commissioners to administer the districts and oversee their development and operation. Many were established and the facilities that they developed were owned by the public, and the people who used them were free of the problems created by private monopolies.

Washington's public port districts were originally authorized to provide maritime shipping facilities and rail/water transfer facilities. Since then, many additional authorities have been granted, such as

building and operating airports (1941); establishing industrial development districts (1955); developing trade centers (1967); and developing economic development programs; and promoting tourism (1980s).

While many port laws have changed since 1911, the most important provisions still remain. Because they are public, but must operate in a proprietary way much like other types of business, public ports have a unique set of governmental authorities, which enable them to respond quickly to specific economic development needs of their communities.

Port District Formation Timeline

1911	Seattle and Grays Harbor
1912	Vancouver
1913	Bremerton
1915	Kennewick
1917	Brownsville
1918	Tacoma and Everett
1919	Kingston
1920	Kalama and Silverdale
1921	Allyn, Bellingham and Longview
1922	Olympia and Illahee
1923	Grapeview
1923	Port Angeles, Manchester and Waterman
1924	Port Townsend
1925	Keyport
1926	Anacortes and Mabana
1927	Dewatto
1928	Ilwaco, Peninsula and Willapa Harbor
1929	Tracyton
1933	Indianola
1935	Camas-Washougal
1940	Pasco and Ridgefield
1941	Klickitat
1948	Shelton
1949	Edmonds
1950	Friday Harbor
1951	Poulsbo and Hoodspport
1952	Walla Walla
1954	Chinook
1958	Benton, Clarkston, Columbia, Garfield, Wahkiakum #1, Chelan County, Douglas County, Mattawa, Royal Slope, Quincy and Whitman County
1959	Orcas
1960	Grand Coulee and Coulee City
1961	Kahlotus, South Whidbey Island, Woodland
1964	Skagit County, Skamania County, Sunnyside
1965	Ephrata and Moses Lake
1966	Othello, Wahkiakum County #2, Warden
1967	Coupeville
1972	Tahuya (<i>dissolved in 2007</i>)
1978	Pend Oreille
1986	Centralia, Chehalis and Lopez
1988	Grandview

Port Fast Facts

- There are 75 public ports in Washington State.
- Washington has the largest locally controlled port system in the world.
- 42 ports operate industrial areas.
- 41 ports operate recreational piers/marinas/docks.
- 31 ports operate airports.
- 16 ports operate marine terminals.
- In 2007, one in three jobs in Washington was related to trade.
- Washington is among the top exporting states in the United States, after California and Texas.
- Together, the Ports of Seattle and Tacoma are the third largest container load center in North America.
- About one-third of U.S. grain exports move in the Columbia/Snake River system to world markets.
- Washington constitutes only 2 percent of U.S. population yet handles 7 percent of U.S. exports and 6 percent of the nation's imports.
- Foreign exports directly and indirectly account for an estimated 25 percent of Washington's Gross State product.

About Washington's Port Districts

Ports provide the public a direct way to own and manage important community assets such as waterfront land and airport facilities. Ports are also the only public agency whose primary mission is to promote economic development, and with it businesses and jobs.

The formula for creating Washington's public ports has been consistently successful: public investment (when private investors cannot or will not provide financing) equals competitive facilities, which generate direct and secondary employment, revenue, and taxes for further development of a community.

Economic Development

As municipal corporations, Washington ports are limited to powers specifically granted by the Legislature or reasonably implied from those granted powers. Ports primarily provide four types of facilities: industrial areas; recreational marinas/docks; airports; and marine terminals. They also have the authority to:

- Buy, lease and sell personal property and real property.
- Build and operate sea walls, jetties, piers, wharves, docks, boat landings, warehouses, storehouses, elevators, grain bins, cold storage plants, ice plants, bunkers, oil tanks, ferries, canals, locks, tidal basins, bridges, subways, tramways, cableways, conveyors, fishing terminals, rail and motor vehicle transfer facilities, belt line railways, roads and highways.
- Develop lands for industrial and commercial needs by dredging, filling, bulkheading, providing and improving waterways.
- Enter into public works contracts.
- Operate trade centers and export trading companies.
- Establish and operate foreign trade zones.

- Provide environmental enhancement, protection, and public access.
- Provide air and water pollution control facilities.
- Provide tourism-related facilities.

Trade and Transportation

Washington not only benefits from trade but is dependent on it. Two-way trade is defined as exports that do not originate in-state and imports that do not necessarily remain in-state, but "pass through" one of the state's ports to their final destinations. This pass through trade totaled \$111 billion in 2004.

Port infrastructure and the efficient movement of cargo is imperative since 75-80 percent of Washington's trade is discretionary cargo, meaning that it could move through other gateways. This discretionary cargo creates family-wage jobs in transportation and trade support services, and generates business and tax revenues which would not otherwise exist in our state. Fortunately, our state's leaders are addressing the urgent need to expand system capacity and fortify the \$111 billion in discretionary trade passing through our state.

One way Washington is maintaining its com-

petitive edge is by addressing long-term transportation needs. Getting goods to our ports is only part of the challenge. More than 70 percent of the goods that arrive at Washington's ports are destined for ports south and east of the state. The ability to move freight into and through the state - freight mobility - is a priority for leaders at all levels.

The Columbia/Snake River navigation system is also extremely important to the state because one-third of U.S. grain exports move through it to world markets.

Some ports also operate limited railway facilities, such as short-line railroads. Whether they're providing toll bridges, tunnels, highway approaches, canals, locks, subways, tramways, ferry service or passenger watercraft, rest assured ports are in step with efforts to improve transportation within and throughout the state.

Environmental Protection

Washington's public ports are working to protect and enhance our state's natural environment.

Located in areas traditionally used for heavy industry, ports today are cleaning up pollution from past activities, re-claiming vacant industrial land, and exercising tight environmental control over use of our public lands.

Washington's elected port commissioners must balance the region's strong environmental protection goals with the reality of global competition, and with continued pressures to decrease - or at least not increase - tax revenues.

Because they operate at the interface of land and water, ports tend to be located in sensitive

estuarine areas, and frequently develop property in traditionally industrial areas. As a result, port districts are becoming adept at blending federal, state and local environmental mandates. For example, Washington's ports have become leaders in cleaning up contaminated sediments in urban harbors.

In addition to environmental cleanups, ports are working to preserve the environment. To date, thousands of acres of wetlands and sensitive aquatic areas, at dozens of port sites have been preserved, created or enhanced.

As one of many examples, the Port of Everett created a 12-acre habitat peninsula on Jetty Island in Port Gardner Bay. The berm protects a sheltered, shallow salt marsh.

Ports also recognize the importance of public access to port lands. Ports have built shoreline access facilities and trails, boat ramps, viewing areas, and interpretive exhibits.

The Washington Public Ports Association has prepared a [handbook](#) for commissioners and staff that focuses on fundamental environmental and land use laws and programs. Organized in a straightforward manner, the handbook offers a general explanation of the federal, state and local system of environmental and land use laws that govern most port district development.

Port Administration and Finance

Port District Formation

A port district can be established in Washington State by a vote of the people who live in the proposed district. At this initial election, voters approve a port's boundaries and first board of commissioners.

Port districts may include all or a portion of a county, but cannot include territory in more than one county (except where two or more ports are consolidated under special laws). If less than countywide, they may under certain conditions annex an abutting area that is not in a port district. Two or more districts within the same county may consolidate. Port districts can jointly build, maintain and operate facilities, or undertake joint action with another governmental agency.

Governance

Washington's ports are municipal corporations of the state and are classified as special purpose districts. Their mission is to build and operate facilities to foster trade and economic development.

Although all ports operate under the same state laws (mainly [RCW Title 53](#)), each is locally controlled and focused on local priorities.

The port commission is a quasi-legislative body that establishes policies to guide the port district. These policies might involve adopting plans, establishing policies, purchasing or disposing of real estate or other property, setting rates, adopting budgets, levying taxes and many others.

Most port commissions consist of three elected, nonpartisan commissioners. A few commissions have five members. Most port commissioners serve a six-year term. Port of Seattle and Port of Tacoma commissioners serve four-year terms, as do commissioners in several smaller districts that have voted to shorten terms.

Taxes

Since the primary purpose for ports is to promote economic development, they often build and then sell or lease warehouses and office buildings. The businesses that use them generate local jobs.

In order to pay for construction and infrastructure (such as power, water, communications and roads), ports have the authority to levy a tax of up to \$0.45 (45 cents) per \$1,000 of assessed value of taxable property in the port district.

This money pays for development costs and maintenance of port facilities. That's important because infrastructure is expensive. In some areas, development of a container loading or unloading terminal can cost up to \$1 million per acre.

Besides development costs, day-to-day operations and maintenance of these facilities requires a dependable and ongoing supply of funds.

Taxes provide some support, but ports also generate revenue through lease-rental and other fees, proceeds from bonds sold for capital project construction, and grants and gifts. Overall, most port revenue (84 percent, on average) is generated by these types of fees.

Elected port commissioners levy taxes when a community needs to gather resources to invest in itself. As elected officials directly accountable to the public, it is a decision carefully balanced on public participation, current resources and future economic development.

In 1911, the Washington law that first authorized citizens to form port districts also authorized an annual property tax levy of \$2 per \$1,000 on the assessed value of taxable property within the district for general port purposes. These funds provided start-up money for facilities and operation of new ports and built a dependable reservoir of funds for construction and operation. Since 1911, the Legislature has reduced port property tax authorization to \$0.45 (45 cents) per \$1,000.

It's important to note, however, that the majority of ports do not use their maximum allowable levy (95% overall).

A December 1995 study by the Washington State House of Representatives found port districts have, by far, the lowest rate of tax increase of any general purpose or special purpose government.

Most ports strictly limit the use of funds derived from property taxes. Generally these taxes are reserved for capital repair and replacement, port infrastructure (water, sewer, roads), debt payment on bonds and environmental cleanup.

Ports can also authorize special property tax levies for dredging, canal construction, land leveling or filling purposes. These levies are rarely used and must be approved by the majority of voters within a port district. They may not exceed \$0.45 (45 cents) per \$1,000.

It's important to remember that ports pay sales taxes on their purchases and Business and Oc-

cupation (B&O) Tax on services they provide to their customers. Those who lease port property pay a special tax called a "leasehold tax," which is about equal to a property tax, as well as B&O and sales taxes to state and local governments.

Industrial Development Districts

Ports may form Industrial Development Districts (IDD) and levy taxes to fund development of these areas. These levies are extremely valuable, since they're a source of funds for economic development and growth within the district.

IDD tax levies cannot exceed \$0.45 (45 cents) per \$1,000 of assessed property value and cannot exceed 12 years. If a port district wants to levy this tax for one or more years after the first six years, the port must publish notice of its intention. If enough voters protest the levy, a special election must be held and it must pass by a majority.

Service Fees

When ports build a facility and then lease it to others, they collect fees and charges for the building and land. Examples include airport landing fees, moorage fees at marinas, and fees for using piers and equipment to load and unload ships.

Bonds

Ports are authorized by law to issue a variety of municipal bonds, which are used almost exclusively for capital construction projects and are paid for by property taxes. Revenue bonds are issued to build a facility where the revenues generated by the project service the debt directly.

In order to develop a project, it's some-

times necessary for a port to create a Local Improvement District (LID). After adhering to strict guidelines and complying with federal restrictions, a port can set up a special assessment to issue industrial development revenue bonds.

These don't generate revenue for the port, but they do provide a way to help finance development, operation or expansion of industry in the district. No taxes or port funds are used to retire these bonds.

Grants and Gifts

Ports use a variety of grants and gifts, like property, to support infrastructure development. Although the federal government doesn't have a formal program to provide ports with direct financial assistance, some ports have received indirect assistance through federal agencies like the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Washington's ports also receive financial help from the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), the Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB) and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT).

The Port Commission: Overview

The port commission, like a city council or county commission, is a quasi-legislative body that establishes policies to guide the port district. These policies or decisions might involve adopting plans, establishing positions and setting employment policies, purchasing or disposing of real estate and other property, setting rates, adopting budgets, or levying taxes.

Port commissioners set the policies that guide the development, growth and operation of all the port's facilities and functions. They provide for the hiring of professional staff charged with carrying out and administering established policies. Members of the port commission are themselves accountable for their action under many of the state's civil and criminal laws. They're also accountable to the people since they must stand for reelection at the end of their term and, in extreme cases, can be subject to recall by the voters.

Public Disclosure - Campaigning

Elected officials and public employees are prohibited from using the facilities of public office to help pass or defeat any ballot measure or to support or oppose a candidate's election.

Individuals are free to express their own personal views regarding a candidate or ballot proposition, if it does not involve using the facilities of a public office or agency. The law does not prevent a public agency from making facilities available on a non-discriminatory equal access basis for political meetings, or making an objective, fair presentation of facts relevant to a ballot proposition if that is part of the normal and regular conduct of the agency.

Meetings

All regular and special port commission meetings are open to the public. Commissions may only conduct business in open public meetings for which appropriate notice has been given. If the meeting is a regular meeting, and that date has been set in the port's bylaws or by resolution, there is no need for additional notices once the date has been adopted.

Any meeting other than the regular meeting set by the bylaws is considered a special meeting for which notice to the media must be given at least 24 hours in advance. State law prohibits private meetings by port commissions or other public bodies.

Public Records

Minutes of regular and special port commission meetings are open to public inspection, and the majority of port records are available for public review. A port can be required to reproduce its records upon request of a member of the public. Citizens also have the right to review books, minutes, electronic records, or other documents prepared by the port.

Port Responsibility

The State Auditor has ultimate responsibility for a port's fiscal and legal matters. While field auditors review the financial records and minutes of the port, questionable matters may be referred to the Attorney General. If the port is found to have been acting outside its powers or there appear to be conflicts of interest, the matters can be litigated and corrective action may be taken by the State.

Conflict of Interest

Conflict of interest is clearly defined under Washington law by specific statute. This law prohibits a port commissioner from having any interest in a contract to which the port is a party - with limited exceptions. A contract includes any kind of agreement involving sales, leases or property purchases. Certain remote interests in contracts are not consid-

ered conflicts of interest. For example, a contract with a nonprofit corporation of which a port commissioner is a non-salaried officer would not be considered a conflict. However, the fact that the interest is there must be noted in the port commission's minutes. For more information on these topics, please consult WPPA's legal handbook, review the statute at issues, or talk with the port's attorney.

A Commissioner's Job Description

- **Planning, Goal-Setting, Evaluation**

The port commission helps plan the port's future, and then guides port activities in that direction. This planning process involves the port commission, executive director, port staff, customers and citizens/voters. The process usually includes identifying a port's mission and goals and developing strategies to achieve them. The port commission is ultimately responsible for evaluating and updating the planning process.

- **Port District Policy Making**

The port commission develops and adopts port district policies to implement port goals and govern the many facets of port district operations. These include developing guidelines for long-term economic development, establishing positions and employment policies, and adopting budgets.

- **Budgeting**

The port commission approves and adopts an annual budget. Some key budget decisions include authorizing and adopting tax levy amounts, adopting policies, approving purchases, and disposing of or distributing supplies, property, and equipment.

- **Designating the Port's Executive Director/Manager**

The port commission is responsible for recruiting, hiring and evaluating the performance of the port's chief executive. The commission delegates responsibility to this port administrator, then respects that delegated authority.

PARALLEL LEADERSHIP

Port Commission

Governs:

guides

directs

Decides what

Requests information

Considers issues

Creates, reviews and adopts policy

Reviews and monitors plans

Monitors progress

Contracts with personnel

Approves evaluation criteria, procedures

Reviews and approves budget

Represents public interests

Executive Director/Manager

Administers:

operates

manages

Decides how

Seeks and provides information

Provides recommendations

Recommends and carries out policy

Implements plans

Reports progress

Supervises hiring process, practices

Supervises and evaluates personnel

Formulates budget

Acts in the public's interest

Guidelines for New Commissioners

A port commissioner is responsible for both the current operations and future direction of the port. This public policy task is both complex and challenging and requires considerable leadership skill.

These guidelines are written primarily for newly elected commissioners, but may also be useful to experienced commissioners and staff. They provide an overview and some basic information about the responsibilities of a port commissioner and discuss the importance of efficient and effective port management. They also provide information on planning, policy development, and management techniques that can be used to improve commissioner performance.

The Starting Point

The legal authorities of Washington Public Port Districts are established in [Title 53](#) of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW). The powers are described in [RCW 53.08](#).

In addition, each port should have a mission statement, goals and objectives, and general operating policy. Developing a port mission statement, goals/objectives, and general operating policy is the responsibility of each port commission. These documents should be available from the president or secretary of the port commission or the executive director/manager. Sometimes this information is included as part of the port's handbook for commissioners.

Basic Commission Functions

Planning

The basic function of a port commissioner is to help plan the port's future and then guide the port's activities in that direction. Planning is an essential activity for the port, yet it is often overlooked because it is hard work, time-consuming, and competes directly with other management activities. Planning enhances the ability of the port to adapt to changing conditions, reduces the chance of lost opportunities and minimizes crisis in management situations.

Planning is a long-term process that involves the port commission, the executive director/manager, the port's staff, customers, and citizens/voters.

Planning begins with the creation of a mission statement and is followed by the development of broad but quantifiable goals and objectives for the port. All too often, a lack of direction by a port commission can be traced to the absence of a mission statement and stated port goals and objectives. Successful development of a mission statement and port goals and objectives will be the direct result of a joint effort by the port commission and the executive director/manager to identify the major activities of the port for the future.

During the planning process, the port should address the following questions:

- What community needs can the port address?
- What potential opportunities are available to the port?
- Which opportunities are consistent with the port's physical, environmental, and economic limitations?
- Which opportunities are within the power and authority of the port?
- What are the important impacts of feasible alternatives?

From this question, study, and analysis process comes the mission statement, and quantified goals and objectives of the port. An example of a port goal might be to develop an 80-acre, light industrial park by 2015, or to add 100 moorage spaces to the marina by 2016. Such quantifiable goals permit the commission to determine if the port is making progress toward achieving its goals.

A [Comprehensive Plan Guidelines](#) handbook can be found on the WPPA website.

Port Policy

After port goals and objectives are identified, the commission must develop a strategy or the policy for implementing these goals. Policy is nothing more than a well-thought-out statement of the method or general approach to achieve an objective. In other words, policy is an effective way of defining boundaries of acceptable action in pursuit of objectives. An example of a policy for a port seeking to promote development of a large industrial park might be to limit promotional activities to 10 percent of the port budget.

To be effective, the commission must not only develop port policy, but formalize it in writing and distribute it to all with decision-making authority. Policies must be evaluated often to see that they are leading to goal attainment. If not, they should be modified.

Port policy simplifies decision-making. It can be compared to a road map to be followed to a given destination. Policy helps clarify the thinking of all and facilitates consistent decisions. It replaces doubt with certainty and transforms an objective into a cause.

Commission Management Techniques

Besides planning and policy development functions, port commissioners face a variety of other tasks. Successfully handling this workload requires good management techniques. The following techniques can lead to more efficient use of time and better and more informed decisions.

Stick to the Commission's Duties

Commissioners often want to get involved in every activity of their port district, but not everything needs port commission input and/or action. Port commissioners should not micro-manage the port. The day-to-day management of the port is the executive director's or manager's responsibility. To have an efficiently run port, the commissioners must learn to delegate responsibility and respect delegated authority. Let the executive director/manager and port staff function in their areas of authority. Do not meddle in staff affairs. Spend time working on commission areas of responsibility— getting the job done at the policy level.

Set Port Commission Priorities

Not every issue needs the port commission's attention. Simply stated, some issues are more important than others. Manage time by first establishing a set of priority issues for the port and then seeking to resolve each issue based on its importance. Priorities should be reevaluated whenever new issues emerge or conditions change.

Establishing priorities contributes to better overall decision-making. It gives important order to a complex management task and is a starting point for action.

Understand the Issues

Few people have the ability or luck to be right much of the time without a full understanding of the problems that face them. Preparation prior to commission meetings is the key ingredient to successful commission action. Research the issues and take the time to adequately prepare. Seek input from fellow commissioners and the executive director/manager.

Communicate Effectively

A key factor in effective port management is communication. The linkage is a two-way system! The executive director/manager must communicate with the commissioners on a regular basis between formal commission meetings, and commissioners must communicate with the executive director/manager between formal commission meetings. This latter linkage is extremely important since commissioners obtain information from constituents and others who may not be likely to communicate with the executive director/manager.

Obtain Additional Input

A port commissioner must recognize his/her limitations. No one person has all the information and insight to make the right decision all of the time. Getting things done right and on time often requires added resources. Working closely with the executive director/manager and his/her staff, citizen groups, and other interested parties can increase the commission's ability to resolve issues. Often, the study of an issue by an assembly of interested people results in a more informed decision. Commissioners must take full advantage of opportunities to work with others when studying and analyzing an issue.

In order to function effectively, external or advisory committees must know specifically what to do and when to complete a task. In order to maintain communications with the commission and to ensure timely completion of committee activities, a single commissioner should be an ex-officio member of each committee. Commissioners, when working with appointed committees, must use their own role wisely as elected officials and should strive to make maximum use of the external/advisory committee's expertise.

It is important to remember that the commission will make the ultimate decisions, taking into account the well-being of the entire port; the external or advisory committee's role is to advise the commission.

Follow Through

Good intentions are the beginnings of action. Follow-through makes it happen. Many times commissioners are well-motivated, but do not follow through, push for action, or move for closure; therefore, nothing happens. The onus for action always remains with the port commissioner. Exert leadership and personally follow issues through to action.

Conclusion

In order for any port to function at peak efficiency, there must be a teamwork relationship between the commission and the executive director/manager and among the commissioners themselves. These teamwork relationships are critical!

Port commissioners are required to make informed decisions about many complex issues. The position of port commissioner is both difficult and challenging. To be successful, a commissioner must quickly and clearly perceive what he/she personally and corporately can and cannot do. A commissioner must understand the legislative authority of the commission and powers of the port, know the ports mission, goals and objectives, and the general operating policy. He/she must recognize that planning and policy development are the basic functions of the port commission and then diligently work at those tasks.

A commissioner can improve his/her effectiveness by: delegating responsibility and respecting delegated authority, establishing priorities, obtaining additional input to resolve issues, sticking to the job, doing the necessary homework, and following through. These guidelines can make the term in office both productive and personally satisfying.

Based on a briefing paper by Thomas J. Dowd, FCIT. Mr. Dowd was a Sea Grant Port Industries Specialist and Affiliate Professor (Port/Marine Transportation Management) with the School of Marine Affairs at the University of Washington. He is now retired. A portion of this information presented in this paper has been adopted from an earlier publication, "Oregon Port Commissioners: Suggestions for Effective Port Management" (Oregon State University Extension Service - circular 976) with the kind permission of Oregon State University.

Common Sense for the Commission

- **Port Commissioners are public servants** and must follow the laws concerning port districts in Washington State as outlined in Title 53 of the RCW.
- Port districts are local governments and as such must **comply with the Public Disclosure Laws and the Open Public Meetings Act**.
- The Commission should **develop ethics policies** for accepting public gifts, working with public groups and using port property. The policies should follow those recommended by the State Auditor's Office for all public officials.
- Although port staff can be helpful in learning port issues, actually operating the port is the most efficient use of staff time. **WPPA offers [seminars and meetings](#)** on the most current issues that concern ports as well as a New Commissioner Seminar specifically focused on learning the ins and outs of this public service commitment.
- The Commission should **designate an official port spokesperson**. It is important that each commissioner respect the designation. A cohesive message allows for better public understanding and a more effective port.
- **Public arguments** within the port **diminish the public's confidence** in the port's leadership.
- Each port is responsible for effectively telling its story. **Keep the public informed** of the activities and purposes of the port on a regular basis.
- The Commission is responsible for the hiring of the port director and the port auditor. All other **staff hiring and supervision falls under the direction of the port director**.

How to Run and Participate in a Port Commission Meeting

Meetings are the heart of citizen government. They are how we decide collectively what kind of port communities we want and how we will achieve our goals. Successful meetings don't just happen, they are the products of careful planning, a sound structure, a logical decision-making process and a value system that fosters open, honest discussion to produce results that everyone can support.

While administration and management are usually one-on-one, behind closed door activities, governance is generally open and on the record. The public evaluates the performance of its elected officials to a great extent by what happens at meetings. The public perception of the local government as an institution will also be determined not only by what the board or council decides, but by the manner in which those decisions are made.

Public Meetings Provide Opportunities to:

Give and get information, state positions, and engage the public in decision-making; applaud good work and build a team; provide a legal forum to make decisions to move ahead; and communicate and reinforce key messages to citizens, the media and port customers.

Before the Meeting

The key to a good meeting is good planning. Delegate meeting details to a specific person, either a staff member or another commissioner. Set an agenda that clearly states what specific actions the board will consider. The agenda must be mailed in advance of the meeting to key port audiences. The media should be a part of your mailing list. Focus on key messages and let people know why they should care about the agenda.

Know the rules. Read materials and understand the issues. Be clear on the scope of discussion, know why the issue is being discussed, and what action is needed. Gather facts before the meeting, but do not be afraid to ask questions that will enable you to make the best decision at the meeting.

During the Meeting

The chair is critical to a successful meeting because he or she sets the tone and pace of discussion. The chair's responsibility is to:

- Enforce ground rules (i.e., speak when recognized, speaking limits.)
- Structure and control discussion (ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak up.)
- Focus the group and stay on task.

- Help review the pros and cons and weigh trade-offs.
- Summarize the discussion and move the board to a vote.
- Articulate decisions.

Board members have the responsibility to contribute ideas and opinions constructively. Be direct and clear. Consider how port messages are received by the media, public and staff. Different perspectives build good dialog and solutions and constructive disputes are OK, but do not denigrate other ideas. Consider a compromise, if possible.

Results of the Meeting

If items on the agenda are controversial, know the background and your public relations response. Is there a prepared statement or designated spokesperson? If a discussion leads to an Executive Session item, how will it be handled and how will the end of discussion be signaled? Consider, also, the permanent record and the media. Will you be able to live with the headline? Conversely, what signals will silence send?

How to Aid Discussion by Asking Good Questions

- To Define Problems:**
1. "As I understand it, the problem is..." Does anyone have additional information on the issue?
 2. Would anyone care to suggest facts we need to better understand the issues?
- To Broaden Participation:**
1. We've heard from some of you. Would anyone else like to add their ideas?
 2. How do the ideas presented so far sound to you?
 3. What other issues related to this problem should we discuss?
- To Limit Participation:**
1. (To a dominating participant) We appreciate your ideas but perhaps we should hear from others. Would some of you who have not spoken care to add your ideas to those already expressed?
 2. You have made several good comments and I wonder if someone else might like to ask a question or make a statement?
 3. Since all of the group has not yet had an opportunity to speak, I wonder if you would hold your comments until a little later.
- To Focus Discussion:**
1. Where are we in relation to the decision we need to make?
 2. Would you like to have me review my understanding of what's been said and where we are?
 3. That's an interesting comment. However, I wonder if it relates exactly to our issue?
 4. "As I understand it, this is the problem..."
 5. Are there additional comments before we come to a decision?
- To Move the Meeting Along:**
1. I wonder if we've spent enough time on this and are ready to move along to...?
 2. Have we gone into this aspect of the problem far enough so that we could shift our attention to...?
 3. In view of the remaining agenda items (time we've set to adjourn) would it be well to go on to the next question before us?
- To Help the Group Evaluate Where It Is:**
1. Do any of you have the feeling we are at an impasse on this issue?
 2. Should we look at our original objective for this discussion and see how close we are to achieving it?
 3. Now that we are nearing the end of the meeting would anyone like to suggest how we might improve our next meeting?
- To Help Reach a Decision:**
1. Do I sense an agreement on these points...?
 2. We seem to be moving toward a decision that would...(chair describes decision). Should we consider what it means in terms of...if we decide this way?
 3. What have we accomplished up to this point?
 4. Would someone care to sum up our discussion on this issue?
- To Provide Continuity:**
1. At our last meeting we discussed this issue. Would someone care to review what we covered then?
 2. Since we will not complete this discussion at this meeting, what are some of the issues we should take up at the next meeting?
 3. Would someone care to suggest additional information or issues we need to consider before our next meeting?

Source: "If you only had more time, but you don't", International City Management Association

A Meeting Management Evaluation

Before you consider any tools and suggestions for improving your port's way of doing business, you should take a temperature reading on your present status. You may discover that you're doing pretty well already or, perhaps that you need some help.

YES NO

Do your meetings regularly run more than three hours?

Do you "suspend the rules" more than you stick to them?

Does your agenda regularly contain items which you vote to "receive and file?"

Do you regularly refer to matters on the agenda to the administration for "investigation and report?"

Do you have several emergency items at every meeting?

Does your agenda have an "old business" section which is always getting older?

Do many of your decisions seem like "instant replays" from the past five meetings?

Do you spend the first 10 minutes or more every meeting approving minutes from the past meeting?

Do you have trouble getting the floor at meetings?

Do you have to ask 10 clarifying questions for each agenda item?

Do you get tired of our chair before the meeting ends?

Do you have second thoughts about decisions made at most meetings?

Add up the number marked "yes" and base your score as follows:

- 0 Excellent
- 1-2 Great
- 3-6 Good, but room for improvement
- 7-9 Some help needed
- 10-12 Seek help

Source: Based on Streamlining Governing Body Meetings, International City Management Association, 1977.

Conflict Resolution Tips for Issues

Conflicts are normal in relationships, so expect that they may occur and be prepared to deal with them constructively.

Constructive conflict resolution allows problems to be dealt with in a positive way rather than being avoided or covered over. It requires the ability and willingness to figure out the real source of conflict, initiate action and communicate in positive ways until the problem is resolved.

Address the issue non-confrontationally by explaining your concerns and requesting information.

Conflicts Can Arise From:

- Unclear expectations.
- Not listening to one another.
- Having different skills.
- Having different ideas.
- Failing to appreciate differences.

What Is the Real Source of Conflict?

- Is the disagreement about fact? If so, check it out with some reliable source.
- If it's over a difference of opinion, remember that a person's opinions are often based on values and the real source of conflict might be grounded in the difference in values.
- If it's about perceptions, keep in mind that everyone has a unique way of perceiving the world.

Respect One Another's Thoughts

- Identify both your needs.
- When the other person is speaking, let him or her have your full attention. Truly listen and try not to be thinking of your response. You'll want to be heard when it's your turn to speak.
- Try to understand his or her concerns without judging.

- Be sure to check for understanding before moving on. Many disagreements are based on wrong assumptions.

Stay On the Issue

- Avoid "You always" statements followed by a recap of past issues.
- Avoid name calling. Your goal should be to defeat the problem, not each other.
- Focus on the future. Tell the other person about your concerns by using "I" statements ("I think," "I feel," "I believe"), rather than starting sentences with "you."

Know Your Objective

- What do you want the other person to do?
- What behavior would you like him or her to change?
- What are your own needs?
- Be specific. State repeatedly that you fully expect you will be able to work this out together.
- Be ready to listen and to work on meeting needs.

Be Open to Many Alternative Solutions

- Brainstorm solutions for solving the problem together.
- After reviewing possible solutions, try to choose one together. If one does not work, try another and another until everyone is satisfied. You don't have to love the solution; if everyone can live with it, you've been successful.

Assure Success

- Work out together how you will put the solution into practice; then do it.
- Give the other person a chance to rectify the problem. Setting specific goals will help everyone know that the problem is solved.
- Ask yourselves, "What can we learn from this experience?"

Media and Communication Tips

Print Interviews

- Never say anything in an interview that you will not want to hear or read again.
- Know in advance the key points you want to make, and look for opportunities during the interview to state them.
- Be aware of what you say and how you say it. Stay focused. Be succinct. Take time to weigh your answers. Avoid jargon.
- Beware casual asides - they could become the main point of the story.
- Stress benefits rather than features, and offer examples.
- Have a handout available containing background materials (key messages, specific details, photocopies of related articles, photos, names and telephone numbers of other key people to interview).

Television Interviews

- Know in advance the key points that you want to make, then practice, practice, practice! During the actual interview, look for opportunities to state your key messages concisely.
- When dressing for television, keep clothes plain in color; wear medium to dark shades. Avoid necklaces, tie tacks/bars, stickpins and other shiny baubles that reflect camera lights.
- Arrive at least 45 minutes early.
- If makeup is offered, accept.
- Introduce yourself to the floor manager.
- If given a choice, opt to stand instead of sit.
- Keep your hands down at your sides.
- Try to sit on the viewer's left.
- If a clip-on microphone is used, be sure that its head isn't touching any part of your clothing.
- Ask for a glass of water.
- Speak to the reporter/photographer/show

host; while thousands may be listening or viewing, you're actually addressing them one at a time; think of it as a one-on-one conversation.

- Look at the reporter, not the camera; let the television crew worry about getting the angle they want.
- Speak to the reporter, not the microphone; the media technicians will worry about getting a good volume level.
- Rephrase the question in your answer so editing cannot change the meaning.
- Stay loose, be yourself, allow appropriate feelings to show, and avoid memorizing statements; the camera can spot a phony.
- Take advantage of the usual pre-taping conversation to give the reporter enough background information so the interview questions will generally go your way.
- Avoid using numbers; if you have to, put it in perspective so the listener/viewer can grasp the concept ("Trade accounts for one in four jobs in Washington.")
- Avoid references to specific dates or time like "today" or "tomorrow" since stories may air later.
- In taped interviews, if you make a mistake or start rambling, ask to start over or simply pause and restate your point succinctly; if it's used at all, your best version, not the flubbed one, will be aired.
- On camera, when you need to look away for a second to think, look down. If you look to either side, (back and forth), you'll come off shifty-eyed. If you look up, you could appear to be searching for answers. Looking down will appear as if you're referring to notes.
- If you've determined a live show is worth a shot to advance your message, spend plenty of time preparing. Let someone in your office - preferably a communications person - play "devil's advocate" with you, even if it hurts. Within your company you're among friends who want you to win; once you're on the air, you might not be.

The Commissioner and WPPA

In 1911, the Washington State Legislature authorized communities to create port districts to bring shipping, industrial, aviation and other economic development activities to their communities.

Soon after, ports began pooling their resources and working cooperatively. This "friendly competition," coupled with cooperation, was the genesis of the Washington Public Ports Association (WPPA).

With the passage of Chapter 31, Laws of 1961, the Washington State Legislature authorized port district commissions to designate the WPPA as a coordinating agency to:

- Initiate and conduct necessary studies, investigations and surveys to properly develop and improve commerce and business common to all port districts, to cooperate with the state of Washington and port districts within and outside the state, and to promote and advertise port properties, utilities and facilities;
- Exchange information about port construction, maintenance, operation, administration and management;

- Promote and encourage port development along sound economic lines;
- Promote and encourage the development of transportation, commerce and industry;
- Operate as a clearinghouse for information and public relations, serve as a channel for cooperation between the various port districts, and present ports' needs to the Legislature and the public.

Governance

A [Board of Trustees](#) governs WPPA. The Board is made up of one member from each port chosen by a majority vote of the port commission. Each trustee has a single vote.

WPPA holds annual meetings in both the fall and the spring. A Board of Trustees meeting is held in conjunction with each meeting. At that time, the Board reviews policies and programs of the Association.

Throughout the year the [Executive Committee](#), elected by the Board of Trustees,

meets quarterly to guide the business of the Association.

Member Involvement

The strength of the Association is measured by the activity of its members. Twelve committees meet from time to time to carry out Association functions.

The [12 committees](#) include: Aviation, Budget, Environmental, Finance and Administration, Legal, Legislative, Long-Range Planning, Marina, Nominating, Public Relations, Trade and Economic Development and Transportation and Infrastructure.

The Association and its members have a proud history of accomplishments in legislative affairs, regional studies, and in promoting overall cooperation among ports in Washington state.

Activities

WPPA provides a variety of services to its members and to the public, including legislative advocacy, research, technical assistance, [education and training](#).

The Association also serves as a [clearinghouse of port information](#) including: technical

assistance and research, statistical data related to port economic impacts, environmental studies, cargo forecasts and transportation needs, and public relations assistance.

In addition to these general programs and services, WPPA participates in a wide range of public policy issues and processes, including:

- **Government Relations** - legislative advocacy for port districts.
- **Economic Development Policy** - involvement in state discussions about business climate, trade promotion, urban and rural job-creation policies.
- **Environmental Policy** - development of policies to streamline cleanups of contaminated industrial land and harbors, prevent oil spills, improve salmon habitat, and water quality.
- **Aviation Policy** - promotion of policies to improve airport operations, facilities and planning.
- **Transportation** - promote funding of rail and highway infrastructure, freight mobility and efficient transportation systems.
- **Marinas** - promote marina, harbor and shoreline policies that foster waterfront access and vibrant community-based boating facilities.

Publications

WPPA publishes educational, informational and promotional materials, including: [Port Directory](#) (ports and associate members); [Members Letter](#) (a monthly newsletter); and [Legislative Report](#) (a weekly publication provided to members during session).

Legislative Agenda

Port districts are formed by local voters under authority granted by the Legislature. The Legislature is the source of all powers exercised by a port district. The Washington Public Ports Association represents the interests of port districts to the Legislature. The purpose of the Association's legislative program is to preserve ports' current powers, expand port powers when necessary and encourage public policies that support port development.

One way to keep up with the legislative action is to read the Legislative Report. The report, published during the

legislative session, provides weekly updates on legislation that could affect ports.

Staff

The WPPA staff is well-versed in port district law, operations, public relations and industry trends. Please feel free to contact the Association anytime at (360) 943-0760 or online at www.washingtonports.org.

Resources

- [Personal Services Contracting Manual](#)
 - [Local Shoreline Master Program Updates Manual](#)
 - [Environmental and Land Use Handbook](#)
 - [Environmental and Land Use Handbook Flowchart](#)
 - [Port Management Agreement \(PMA\) Handbook](#)
 - [Comprehensive Plan Guidebook](#) - updated July 2009
 - [Knowing The Waters](#) - updated April 2009
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Port commissioners are encouraged to become involved in WPPA activities and governance. Contact the Washington Public Ports Association at 360-943-0760 or go online at www.washingtonports.org.