

# Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting #1

Port of Coupeville Comprehensive Scheme and Strategy



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## Meeting Summary

June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017  
3:00pm – 5:00pm

*Overview:* Community Attributes, Inc., and the Port of Coupeville convened a Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) on June 28<sup>th</sup>. The CAC is tasked with supporting development of the Port's updated Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvements and Strategic Plan. The first meeting of the CAC focused on providing an opportunity for each Committee member to be heard and to generate a common understanding of the role of the Port and the facilities it operates.

### *Participants:*

Molly Hughes	Mayor, City of Coupeville
John Mishasek	Commissioner, Port of Coupeville
Jason Joiner	Windermere Real Estate Whidbey Island
Judy Feldman (not in attendance)	Local Resident
Bruce Bottolsfons	Local Resident
Ron Nelson	Whidbey Island Economic Development Council
Pat Robinson	Friends of Greenbank Farm
Pat Powell (not in attendance)	WCLT
Lynda Eccles	Coupeville Chamber of Commerce
Michelle (not in attendance)	Cove Café
Kristen Griffin (not in attendance)	Ebey's Landing Preserve
Sarah Steen	Ebey's Landing Preserve
Vickie Chambers (not in attendance)	Coupeville Waterfront Association
Chris Burns	Whidbey Telecom

## **Introductions and Background**

The Meeting began with introductions and presentation on the project scope and role of Ports in Washington. This included an assessment of each Port facility and the key attributes and issues associated with each.

- *Provided an opportunity for the Port of Coupeville, the consultant and participating stakeholders to introduce themselves.*
- *Provided background on the purpose of the project and the role of ports in Washington as well as a review of the overall project scope and role of the CAC*
- *Discussion of the Port's facilities and operations*

## **Project Priorities Discussion – Summary Notes**

Each stakeholder was given the opportunity to discuss their priorities and describe key opportunities and initiatives that the project team should be aware of. The CAC was then split into two groups with conversations centered around the following questions.

- What does a successful Port look like in 5-10 years?
- What does a successful Port look like in 20 years?
- How does the Port fit within the long term vision of the Coupeville area?

*NOTE: The following notes represent the varying ideas and opinions of the CAC members, organized by each group conversation. They do not represent consensus ideas or findings, rather, they represent the wide variety of interests, expertise and goals of each individual CAC member.*

### **Group One**

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#### **Current Issue and Changes in the Future**

- Tourism in Coupeville
  - The area is a tourist based economy
  - massive increase in visits
  - Wharf will be a destination
  - More tourists
- Parking in Coupeville is getting harder
- The resident population won't change much
- Land is available but not selling
- What's the impact of the navy and their facilities/personnel now and in the future?
- There is a desire for high speed internet in central Whidbey
- There is a need to harness regional IT growth
  - Improve infrastructure to work from home
- The region should prepare for an influx of retirees
- There is a political divide on the island that we should be aware of
  - Three "tribes": south, central, north
    - Full spectrum of politics represented
  - Small ecosystem to be so divided
  - Need to work together and form partnerships
- Housing/hiring workforce will be a major challenge and factor in the local economy
  - Much of it will have to come from Oak Harbor (housing and labor)
- In 10 years the region will be more congested How can the Port help ease congestion?
  - In 10 years – Will the base still be here?

- Operations of the base and military overall are evolving
- Growth pressure on Ebey's Landing Reserve
  - How do you accommodate/incorporate growth and change while balancing needs of preservation
- Seasonality in the local economy- there is a need to support the shoulder season

## Discussion of Greenbank Farm

- What does the community want for the farm? This is what we've heard so far:
  - Agriculture
  - Music/events
  - Opportunities for interaction with the property and facilities
  - Nature
- Be aware of conflicts and impacts on surrounding neighborhood
- The Farm should be part of the Port's sustainability
  - Make it financially profitable
- What can generate revenue at the farm? – this should be a focus
- The Farm can help diversify the model for the port in terms of revenues and operations
- Opportunity for a new facility/building at the farm?
  - One idea discussed in detail - business incubator
    - What would the model be?
      - (1) Support system for new businesses
      - (2) Business suite with associated services
  - Need any new facility to align with market demand
  - It should *not* directly compete with the private sector or fill a need being met by the private sector
  - Office vacancy is higher than originally thought – 10%-12% range
  - There's a real funding challenge for new facility to be developed
- With bond payments for the farm ending there is a real opportunity to leverage that money
- Key question: Should the Port pursue an additional public approved levy?

## Priorities for the Port

- The Port needs a strategy for a new levy to fund needed/required improvements
- Planning for and paying for maintenance of existing facilities
- Infrastructure for the public
- Leverage taxing authority to support economic development opportunities
  - Partnerships with schools, vocational facilities, training
- Explore build to suite opportunities for potential users (public and private)
- Focus on the sustainability of the properties it owns and operates
- Pursue grant funding and do more of it!

## Role and Vision for the Port

- Support or implement infrastructure projects that address deficiencies on Island County
- Support or implement infrastructure to diversify:
  - The economy
  - Tax Base
  - Overall economic resiliency
- Coupeville Wharf focus should be:
  - Upgrade the pier and ensure its presence in the future
  - Consider building a marina to drive more business at the pier
  - Utilize waterfront access and location
  - Provide water activities and services
  - Add more tourist facilities
  - Be practical
  - Address the pilings replacement
  - Rehabilitate the facility
  - Need strategies to support this now – consider a levy to support this particular project
- Greenbank focus should be:
  - Industry and trade opportunities
  - Consider addition of a trade school (either at the farm or some other property)
    - Consider building a school facility for another organization to operate
    - Opportunity for a farm focused school?
  - Help address the lack of core services (trades people) and skilled labor
  - Serve as a community gathering space
- See Port Townsend and its model for a school, marina, commercial space and other facilities – this is a good model to emulate.

## **Group Two**

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### **How do you see the area changing?**

- General attitude: managing, not preventing change. Maintaining unique character while adapting to new realities
- The Reserve will continue to be a major component of the district/central Whidbey Island – while the conserved areas will not change, the areas intended to be developed will change
  - UGA laws do not apply to Coupeville because of the reserve – still large lot zoning, rural densities. Growth has been slow up until this point
  - Development is now trending up in Coupeville, but the long term significance of this is unclear
- Reestablishing agriculture at Greenbank is a high priority

### **What are some current trends impacting change?**

- The residential housing market is very tight, with few rentals
  - Airbnb is a significant factor in the local housing stock
  - Housing affordability is a major concern moving forward – recruiting business is difficult without workforce housing, and growth in service industries related to tourism means still more affordable housing is needed
- Losing prime agriculture, many farmers struggling (though not all) – challenge to connect new potential farmers to land, opportunities for modern value-added products
- Growing local share of retirees

### **Other considerations and opportunities:**

- “This is a place-based economy” – how do you demonstrate the importance of place in typical measures?
- There is a desire to become more diverse – in terms of people, products produced, more...
- Can SPU Camp Casey presence grow?
- Build on agritourism, trails and recreation tourism –
  - Connect required housing to new jobs in those areas, as many are lower-paid
  - Don't become totally dependent on tourism/rec, don't push up the cost of living, don't let the island die in the off-season - “We're not Martha's Vineyard”
- Farming on the reserve comes with specific limitations – in addition, soil conditions vary widely around Central Whidbey

## Specific 10-year goals and measures of success:

- Pursue more partners for preservation to maintain assets and keep them sustained
- Make a strong statement that the wharf and farm are equally valued assets
- Multiple uses at the farm – ex brew pub, apprenticeships, WSU tie-ins, etc...
- Partner with a new visitor's center reflecting place-based values
- Define success by the number of living-wage jobs and recognize those that aren't always acknowledged (ex. there are good jobs in conservation)
- The Port will demonstrate stability when it is respected by citizens – passing a levy, for example
- How do you measure the reinvestment that results from conservation? (Ex. conservation easement cases)
  - Should the Port track this?
- The local economy needs to be more than just the Navy and tourism
- The Reserve isn't intended to be completely static – Coupeville is a living town
- Look for new farm support services, find incentives to keep farmers going
- Develop a "21st century vision of farming" as it relates to Greenbank and Central Whidbey

## Any priorities outside of the properties?

- Really focus on maximizing usage of the two properties first – this is another way for the Port to grow trust in the community
- Explore the implementation of business/industry Incubator space
- Farmworker housing (Combine this and other ag-related efforts with more conservation?)
- Development of a new multi-use facility
- Lots of local starts and stops – the Port could be the agent to bring things over the hump to fruition that have existing support