

MINUTES  
PORT OF ASTORIA WORKSHOP  
JANUARY 31, 2007  
PORT COMMISSION CHAMBERS

Chairman Don McDaniel called the Workshop Session to order and took roll call.

Commissioners present: Don McDaniel, Larry Pfund, Jim Bergeron, Dan Hess, Bernie Bjork.

Staff present: Peter Gearin, Ron Larsen, Rita Fahrney and Port Attorney, Heather Reynolds.

Others present: See attendance sheet.

MEDIA RELATIONS.

Chairman Don McDaniel opened the meeting by explaining the purpose of the meeting is to address issues brought up by the Daily Astorian's recent series of articles about the Port of Astoria and to discuss future direction in responding to media.

Director Peter Gearin stated the Port needs to have a strategy to address future publicity.

Commissioner Bergeron acknowledged staff has prepared a point-by-point response to adverse statements made by the Daily Astorian, he believes by explaining what the Port is doing and has done in a more positive way will be a more effective method of dealing with issues. Gearin stated the Port is updating its web site and is placing information with local media to show what the Port has accomplished in the past seven years. The Port is also hosting an after-hours open house on February 15<sup>th</sup>. Gearin agrees with Bergeron's approach.

Commissioner Bjork also concurs with the strategy and suggests ignoring individual letters to the Editor addressing specific points. He supports a guest column and putting out information for the media.

Peter Gearin explained past efforts dealing with Steve Forrester from the Daily Astorian over the years and difficulty getting the reporters to correct mistakes they report. The Daily Astorian also did not publish the Port's meeting notice for this workshop. Commissioner Bjork also relayed a past problem getting corrections addressed in the paper.

Commissioner Hess voiced his concurrence with Commissioner Bergeron's approach, noting, "it is hard to argue with someone who buys ink by the barrel". He wants to move on and stated regardless what has been said, the Port is moving in the right direction and we need to keep going.

Commissioner Pfund stated the Port would be fools to fight. He spoke about potential legal proceedings by possibly the Attorney General or EPA and if Mr. Gearin directed staff to break the law. If so, he can be terminated. Pfund stated Gearin is "off track". He questioned why the Port continues to be so secretive regarding the past probation of Gearin. Attorney, Heather Reynolds, responded in public law, personnel actions are exempt from public record disclosure. Any document a public entity has is public unless it has been declared by law to be exempt. Personnel action and discipline is exempt.

Some discussion followed about Bill Cook's termination and a past letter from Gearin to commission members, which included health information. Discussion then was held about complexity and difficulty with dredge issues and how to get the information out to the public so they can understand the issues.

Chairman McDaniel stated some feel the Port has been "irresponsible" with debt, however, he said, a person who takes out a mortgage is in debt but is also acquiring an asset. Bergeron added he believes the debt the Port incurred was loaned to very responsible, respected local business owners.

Commissioner Pfund questioned the process the Port used to deal with Floyd Holcom, who is a private citizen interested in development at the Port. It was explained members of the public, in order to be on the agenda, need to submit a proposal first to give the board members time to review. This was never done. Additionally, all members of the public are welcome to attend meetings and speak about any subject during public comment.

Commissioner Pfund continued with questions about Taggart's building and the problems associated with it and the fuel system at the marina – why it isn't online, blaming it on "piss-poor management". Mr. Gearin explained the electrical work needed for the system and the cost came in over budget. He commended Marina Manager, Ken Smith, for doing a phenomenal job working to get the costs down. Commissioner Bjork commented newly-constructed buildings tend to always take time to get the bugs out.

There being no further business, the workshop session was adjourned.