

Port of Vancouver Strategic Planning Process

Findings: External Research Interviews

As the Port of Vancouver initiated the update of its Strategic Plan, staff from Maul Foster & Alongi, Inc. (MFA) conducted a series of interviews with local and regional leaders to provide an outside perspective. The interviews were conducted in January 2018. MFA staff asked a series of open ended questions related to:

- The Port's role in the local and regional economy
- Emerging economic opportunities in the region and opportunities for the Port to support those opportunities
- Strengths and areas in which the Port could improve

A list of the organizations represented by the interviewees is provided below. These individuals were selected to provide a cross section of opinions and perspectives on the Port and the greater Vancouver region. It is recognized that there are more stakeholders and parties interested in the Port than could practicably be included in these personal interviews. To provide broader context, it is relevant to review the findings of research interviews conducted as part of the Columbia River Economic Development Council (CREDC) Strategic Plan in 2017 and interviews conducted as part of the Port's Chief Executive Officer recruitment process in 2016. The findings of these research interviews are broadly consistent with these previous efforts.

Key Themes

Opportunity to Set a New Course

- Many interviewees stated that the Port has been a well-respected institution in the past. There is a foundation of trust and credibility that can be rebuilt.
- The Port has lost trust with some of the community because of the controversy over the proposed oil terminal.
- With the recent changes in leadership, it is anticipated that there will be a greater emphasis on alignment between the Port's initiatives and community aspirations.
- There is an opportunity to strengthen community partnerships to support the Port's mission.
- This window of opportunity will not last forever, so capitalize on it.
- There is supportive anticipation of what's next from the Port's leadership (perhaps an expansion beyond traditional marine cargo emphasis).
- Take license to be more non- traditional in the Port's future plans and priorities. Act boldly and with pride, the Port is a valued community institution.

There was interest by several interviewees in ways the Port could develop its new course. Tactics suggested by interviewees included:

- Involving community stakeholders in the planning process.
- Demonstrate alignment with the goals and strategies of regional economic development organizations and the City of Vancouver.

Increase Public Engagement and Recast Communications

- There is a sense that in the past, the Port was more engaged and highly visible in the community. The Port needs to re-assert itself as a member of the community.

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- The work of the Port is not well known or recognized in the community. (A significant percentage of the community only know the Port through the lens of the oil terminal debate).
- The Port needs to explain the reason WHY it is making its investments and decisions over WHAT it is pursuing and in doing so, clearly articulate the public benefit.
- The Port has an important story to tell about promoting family wage jobs, connecting the community to the global economy, and being responsible environmental stewards.
- The Port should re-focus communications with tenants and labor unions.
- Increase the Port's outreach capacity by utilizing more members of its qualified staff, the Commission, and Port partners.

There was interest by several interviewees in ways the Port could improve communications and better "tell their story". Tactics suggested by interviewees included:

- Re-instate the Port breakfast.
- Tell the story of economic development and job creation through personal stories of the people who work at the Port, not just statistics.
- Get out and personally meet with neighborhood and business associations on a regular basis.
- Brand; celebrate Port projects like Terminal 1, Warehouse 23, and public access.
- Engage your stakeholders, partners, and supporters as ambassadors to reach more people.
- Bring more students to the Port as an educational experience and opportunity to see pathways to employment. Consider Port internships.
- Recognize that with recent population growth and in-migration, there is a significant portion of the community whose only experience and knowledge of the Port is the oil terminal controversy.

The Port Plays a Key Role in Promoting Family Wage and Industrial Jobs

- Most interviewees stated that the Port plays a unique and important role in the local and regional economy by providing well-paying jobs for people without advanced degrees. These jobs are key to maintaining a healthy economy and providing social equity.
- Several interviewees stated the importance of the Port as a connection for the local community to the global economy through cargo shipping.
- Some interviewees also stated that the Port is a leader in delivery of public infrastructure to promote economic development.
- Several interviewees stated that with the recent trends in population growth and shifting types of jobs available in the region, there is a need for the Port to play a significant role as promoter of family wage and industrial/manufacturing jobs.

The Port Is Widely Recognized as an Effective, Well-Run Organization

- Many interviewees stated that the Port staff are very knowledgeable, capable, and committed to their work.
- The Port has unique and valuable ability as a local government to partner with private industry. While some interviewees were skeptical about the Port entering into long-term lease agreements with private parties, most saw public—private partnerships as an effective tool for economic development.

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- Several interviewees expressed appreciation for the Port's environmental programs, including contaminated site cleanup, habitat conservation, and water quality efforts.
- Some interviewees mentioned the concern that as the Port focuses time and resources on recruiting new businesses, the existing Port businesses could be neglected.
- Some interviewees stated that the Port needs to improve its delivery of construction projects and maintenance operations through better coordination internally and with its business partners.

Support the Core Business of Marine Cargo and Industrial Jobs

- The Port is recognized as a regional leader in marine cargo shipping. The facilities are highly functional, the labor force is efficient and highly capable, and the marketing and sales team is highly effective (partnerships in marketing were particularly identified as effective).
- The marine terminal is recognized as the largest revenue generator and job source at the Port.
- Much energy and time has been spent on redevelopment of Terminal 5. The Port needs to reconsider its approach and activate that asset.
- Need for maintenance and investment in existing marine terminal facilities cannot be neglected as the Port invests in new development.

Embrace the Columbia River and Waterfront as an essential element of the culture, economy, and identify of the region

- The Port is a steward of public lands on the waterfront. There are high expectations for the Ports management of those lands.
- Recognize the river as an economic development asset beyond shipping.
- Avoid projects and cargoes that have a high risk of negatively impacting the community and the environment.
- Terminal 1 waterfront redevelopment is generally seen as a strong positive for the community. It has the opportunity to be an icon for Vancouver, support downtown development, and provide much needed public access to the river.
- Some interviewees cautioned that the Terminal 1 waterfront redevelopment needs to have a strong economic strategy to ensure that it is financially viable.
- The Port should provide greater public access and interpretation opportunities to the waterfront and adjacent natural areas.

Leverage Port Resources and Patient Capital to Position Challenging Properties for Redevelopment

- The Port has sophisticated staff and patient capital for real estate investment.
- The Port can play an important role in providing inventory of large industrial parcels and positioning them for development. Specific mentions of the property along the short-line rail and of incubator and maker space in collaboration with education sector (co-lab).
- There is interest among some interviewees in the Port making investments more broadly across the Port district, beyond their waterfront properties.

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Support Programmatic Economic Development

- The Port should continue to be a key supporter of economic development organizations in the region. The Port's economic development agenda should mirror that of the region.
- Continue and increase financial and personal support of the many tiers of economic development efforts within the region and city.
- Continue to partner with the Ports of Camas-Washougal and Ridgefield in economic development efforts.
- Continue and increase support for education and technical training to support workforce development.
- Promote a solution to the I-5 Columbia River bridge challenge.
- Promote improvements for regional freight mobility including the heavy freight corridor concept.

Organizations Represented by Interviewees

- City of Vancouver
- Clark College
- Clark County
- Columbia Land Trust
- Columbia River Economic Development Council
- Cowlitz Tribe
- Fruit Valley Foundation
- Greater Portland, Inc.
- High Tech Council
- Identity Clark County
- International Longshore & Warehouse Workers' Union Local 4
- Senator Patty Murray's Office
- Southwest Washington Contractors Association
- Taxpayers for a Responsible Public Port
- United Grain Corporation
- Vancouver Chamber of Commerce
- Vancouver Downtown Association
- Vancouver School District
- Washington State University – Vancouver
- Workforce Southwest Washington
- Yakama Tribe