



BY FRANK SPENCE

Greetings from the President



As I finish the first year of my service as an elected Port Commissioner, and, reflecting on the past year of activities, I want to let you know how optimistic I am about the future of the Port of Astoria.

Internally, I am joined by two other first year commissioners, Dirk Rohne and Robert Stevens (US Coast Guard Captain, Ret.), as well as returning long time Commissioner Jim Campbell, who bring with them a wealth of experience and knowledge. Our meetings are kept professional and civil, and not the chaos and dysfunction of the past. We have a professional, first-class staff, led by our Executive Director Jim Knight. I can't say enough good things about Jim and what an excellent job he is doing. He's the complete communicator, negotiator and lobbyist, continuously on the go, running from one meeting to another, be it in town or in Portland or Salem, always working for the good of the Port. There is no substitute for face-to-face lobbying!

Externally, the bad news is that the Port is struggling to play catch-up on replacing and repairing docks and infrastructure that have been neglected and deteriorated for years. Our "Want and Need" list is daunting:

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over \$60 million in deferred maintenance, Port-wide. Although we get grants occasionally, they require a match. For example, the FAA might give us another grant for \$4 million for upgrading our runways, but they require a 25% match. That's \$1 million cash that we would have to find. The good news is that our two main economic drivers, the exporting of timber, and the increase in the number of cruise ships coming to our Port, not only benefit the Port by their fees, but generate millions of dollars of benefit to the whole county through the ripple affect.

I could go on and on, because so many good things are happening, and are about to happen. Elsewhere in this Newsletter will be articles about additional activities and projects that are taking place around the Port.

Thank you to all, for your continued support of our Port, Frank

PORT OF ASTORIA

INTERVIEW : WILL ISOM PORT OF ASTORIA FINANCE DIRECTOR



The Port has a small, dedicated staff to support the work of the Port Commission. The newsletter team plans to interview key staff members to share their experience at the Port and offer a behind the scenes look at the inner workings of the Port of Astoria.

Will Isom is the Port of Astoria's Finance Director which oversees the Port's administrative team, including accounting and administrative services. The Finance Director along with the Operations Director (Matt McGrath) manage two large teams and report directly to Jim Knight who is the Executive Director. The finance team is a full-service operation that does a variety of tasks all in house, including payroll, accounts receivable and payable, budget control, and asset management. Will started with the Port in 2015 and came from the private sector with positions at Columbia Memorial Hospital and Georgia Pacific Wauna Mill. Will recently received his CPA license and is the former head basketball coach for Knappa High School, where Will lives with his family.



What's it like to work at the Port of Astoria? What's a typical day look like for you?

We have quite a few routines around here on a monthly, quarterly, and annual basis. On a monthly basis we have two Commission meetings. One is regular meeting and the other is a workshop. My job is to make sure our Commission has updated financial info and provide support to other Port management staff to make presentations and have good information for decision making. The other important piece on a monthly basis is that since we're a government entity, we're constantly working on a budget, making sure managers are maintaining their budget, and providing good tools to managers for accurate financials for budget control. We also interact quite a bit with Commissioners, tenants, vendors, and constituents who are requesting transparency in everything we do. President Frank Spence has made transparency a centerpiece of his leadership. We're updating and implementing better policies and procedures like our finance, procurement, and personnel policy. All of these provide a set of guidelines and standards for day to day operations.

What are some of challenges you face?

The biggest challenge is our aging infrastructure and deferred maintenance. The Port has improved its cash position the last few years, but were not swimming in money and by no means can we spend more than we take in. We're not in a position to go hire a lot of contractors to go fix these things, but we're being smarter in what projects to take on and leverage our existing resources. So, the biggest challenge is to prioritize the important projects since we can't take on everything at once. We have to ask the question: How are we going to set the plan moving forward?

What's the toughest part of the job and how do you handle it?

The toughest aspect of this job is not having all of the resources that you want. We're a small staff and we do a great job, but we're limited in what we can do. We don't have a great inventory system of our physical assets like utilities and buildings so we decided to hire a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) consultant to help us develop a GIS system that will map out all of our infrastructure so we have a baseline of information to plan for new infrastructure. This is a tool that most cities and counties have, so we're playing catch up on some basic best practices.

What are your top two goals for this fiscal year and what are some of the best practices you employ to achieve the Port Commission's goals?

One of our goals is to address any past audit findings and one of those is an inventory of our assets. Another goal from a finance perspective is to be aware of our cash position to ensure we can pay our bills and have operating capital to run the various aspects of the Port.

What's your role in the new Strategic Plan? Why is it important?

The Strategic Plan plays a very important role from a Commission perspective. It's a guiding document as new Commissioners and staff come on board and have a plan in place, as things change over time. It shows to our partners like the State of Oregon some reassurance about where the Port is headed and if the Port needs financial assistance on a project, then we can point to the Strategic Plan. My role is to provide a financial overview to the Port Commission and set a context for the big picture and point to potential issues. The hard part is deciding what issues are the most important to address right away. Also, what projects are going to leverage our funds, produce the most revenue, and provide the best return on our investment.

Lightning Round: We asked Will some light-hearted questions to get to know Will as a person.

1. What book is on your nightstand? The Tools of Titans by Timothy Ferriss
2. What Netflix series are you watching? The Grinch (Will has four kids!)
3. What is your favorite place to spend outside? Any golf course!
4. What sort of travel plans are on the horizon? Sporting events seems to drive our travel schedule. We recently attended the State Basketball Tournament in Pendleton.
5. What legacy do you want to leave? Legacy is not important to me. Hard work and being a good Dad is what I want people to remember.