

Port of South Whidbey

Comprehensive Scheme 2023



Since its inception, the Port of South Whidbey (Port) has helped increase public access along South Whidbey’s shoreline, while working to enhance the Island’s economic well-being.

Today, the Port is focused on cultivating a vibrant, year-round activity center at the Fairgrounds and Events Center, providing a dock for future passenger-only ferry service, and protecting water and shoreline access at Clinton Beach, South Whidbey Harbor, Possession Beach, and Bush Point.

This Comprehensive Scheme is intended to help the South Whidbey community better understand their Port, its near-term projects, and its longer-term goals, per Chapter 53.20 of the Revised Code of Washington State.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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All photos within this document have been provided by MAKERS unless otherwise noted.

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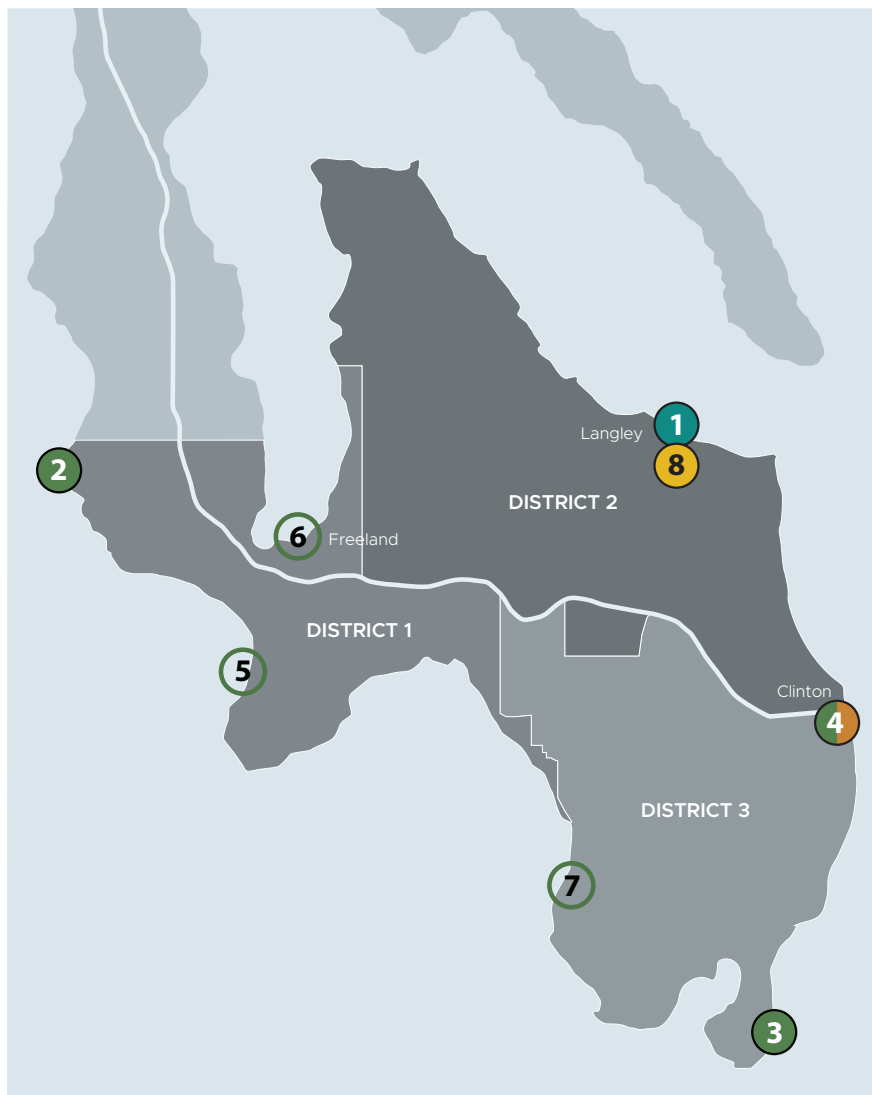
Introduction



GET TO KNOW YOUR PORT

The Port district covers around 41,000 acres (64 square miles) of the southern one-third of Whidbey Island (South Whidbey) in Island County, Washington. It is divided into three voting districts that center around the communities of Freeland, Clinton, and Langley.

The Port owns a variety of properties throughout South Whidbey. These include the South Whidbey Harbor at Langley (South Whidbey Harbor); parks and boat ramps at Possession Beach, Bush Point, and Clinton Beach Park; transportation assets at Clinton Pier and the Humphrey Road Parking Lot; and the Whidbey Island Fairgrounds and Events Center (Fairgrounds). In addition, the Port is a 25% owner of three Island County boat ramps, which are the County's responsibility to operate and maintain.



Port of South Whidbey districts and properties.

PORT MISSION

Enhance the economic wellbeing of the community and improve public access to marine areas while respecting the unique rural character and environment of South Whidbey Island.

South Whidbey Harbor

1. South Whidbey Harbor at Langley

Parks and Boat Ramps

2. Bush Point
3. Possession Beach
4. Clinton Beach Park
5. Mutiny Bay*
6. Freeland Park and Homes Boat Ramp*
7. Dave Mackey Park and Boat Ramp*

Transportation Assets

4. Clinton Pier/Dock
4. Humphrey Road Parking Lot

Fairgrounds and Events Center

8. Fairgrounds and Events Center

* Boat Ramps 75% owned and operated and maintained by Island County; 25% owned by the Port

COMPREHENSIVE SCHEME GOALS

South Whidbey is facing complex challenges related to its changing demographics, cost of housing, limited transportation choices, and seasonal tourist-based economy. Within the Port's mission, statutory powers, and financial framework, this comprehensive scheme focuses on actions that will help support a thriving and diverse island economy and increase resources to better serve the South Whidbey community.



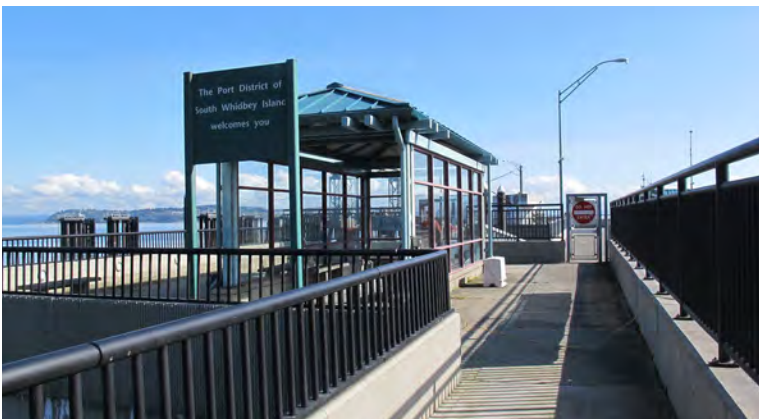
SUPPORT A THRIVING AND DIVERSE ISLAND ECONOMY

As described in community context, South Whidbey's population is aging and there are increasingly limited housing and transportation options to attract and retain the workforce necessary for a thriving, diverse economy. The Port will leverage its properties and focus investments to support and diversify local businesses and foster South Whidbey Island's entrepreneurial spirit. The Port will also support efforts to add workforce housing and expand transportation options in the district.



INCREASE RESOURCES TO BETTER SERVE THE COMMUNITY

Given the Port's financial framework, this comprehensive scheme also prioritizes efforts that generate new revenues, bring in grant funds, reduce operating costs, and protect existing assets.



Source: Langley Chamber of Commerce

The Port of South Whidbey includes four lines of business: Parks and Boat Ramps, Transportation Assets, South Whidbey Harbor, and the Whidbey Island Fairgrounds and Events Center.

PLANNING FRAMEWORK

SOURCE

PORT OF SOUTH WHIDBEY STRATEGIC PLAN, FINAL ECONOMIC EVALUATION, BST ASSOCIATES, JULY 25, 2023.

PORT PLANS

Support development of higher wage jobs, workforce housing, and transportation choices to attract younger individuals and families to work and live in the district.

See page 20, page 27, and page 30.

PORT PLANS

Explore assisting in development of sewer infrastructure on appropriately zoned properties needed to support higher-wage job growth.

See page 30.

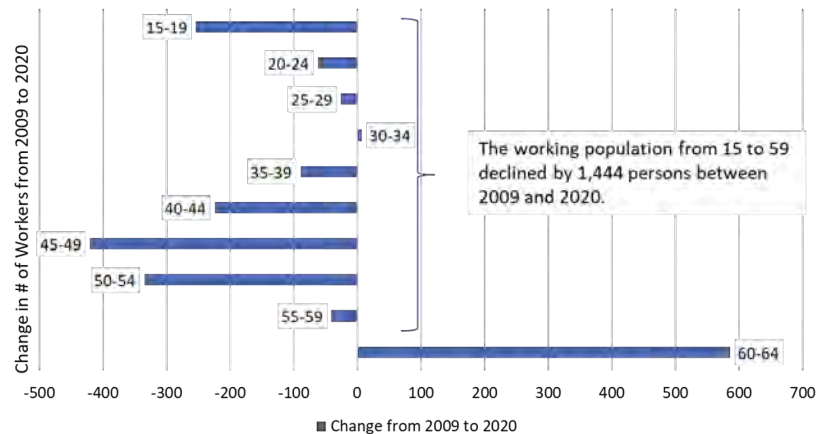
BST Associates summarized key demographic and economic trends that provide the context for this comprehensive scheme. They also reviewed the Port's financial framework and the performance of each line of business. Key findings are summarized in the following sections.

KEY FINDINGS - COMMUNITY CONTEXT

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

One of the key demographic trends impacting south Whidbey is age. The South Whidbey population is growing older while younger, working age residents are leaving. Median age in the district was 58.2 in 2021, up from 43.2 in 2013.

Population growth was fastest in residents over 65 years of age, while the working age population (between 15 and 59) has declined. This is partially due to the rising cost of living, lack of housing options, and limited job opportunities.



South Whidbey working age population trends (change 2009 to 2020.) Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management

EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES

Retail, health care and social assistance, and accommodation and food services are three of five economic sectors that make up 60% of employment in South Whidbey. These sectors have lower wages than manufacturing and construction, the two other most prominent sectors. Island County has an average annual income of \$49,530, which translates to \$23.81 per hour.

The Port is evaluating its potential role in assisting other entities in developing commercial and/or industrial properties to create family wage jobs. Appropriately zoned properties are primarily located in Freeland and the Whidbey Airpark near Langley.

PORT PLANS:

Support development of workforce housing to help attract and retain employees to support economic vitality and diversity on South Whidbey.

See page 27 and page 30.

PORT PLANS

Seek opportunities to improve transportation choices for employees working in South Whidbey as well as those that commute on and off island for employment.

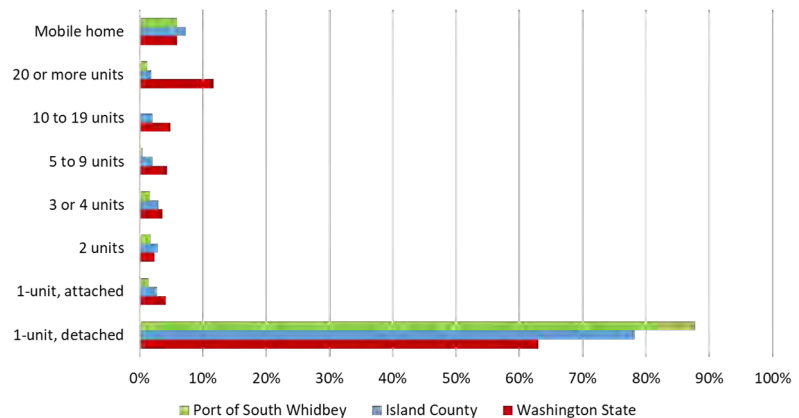
See page 22 and page 30.

TOURISM

Tourism is one of the key drivers of the Island County economy, and destination spending supports a wider variety of businesses, adds revenues, and increases livability in South Whidbey. Recent estimates indicate tourist spending generated 990 jobs, \$30.2 million in wages, and \$10.4 million in state and local taxes in 2021. That said, tourism-related businesses are having a difficult time finding and retaining employees in South Whidbey. The lack of affordable, long-term rental housing is one reason for this, combined with relatively low wages in tourism-related businesses.

HOUSING

One of the largest challenges facing South Whidbey Island is the shortage of workforce housing. Multi-family and mobile homes account for 11% of housing on South Whidbey, while they account for 27% in Washington State and 12% in Island County. A much higher share of housing in South Whidbey is owner-occupied (81%), as compared with Washington State (64% owner-occupied) and Island County (73% owner-occupied). It should also be noted that seasonal occupants represent a large portion of the population and housing in South Whidbey. A portion of this seasonal housing may be for rent during part of the year.



Housing by type. (Source: American Community Survey 2021.)

TRANSPORTATION

Limited transportation options also impact the ability to attract and retain the workforce. The Mukilteo-Clinton ferry route is one of the two main ways to get on and off Whidbey Island. Ridership is on the decline, which is partially related to negative perceptions of ferry service. A recent survey showed that 74% of riders on the Mukilteo/Clinton route have a high level of dissatisfaction, which is higher than on other routes. Of the top 10 service complaints about the Mukilteo/Clinton route, two relate to issues that could be actionable for the Port of South Whidbey: Inadequate parking at the ferry terminals, and schedules not being coordinated between the ferry and local transit service.

KEY FINDINGS - FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

PORT-WIDE

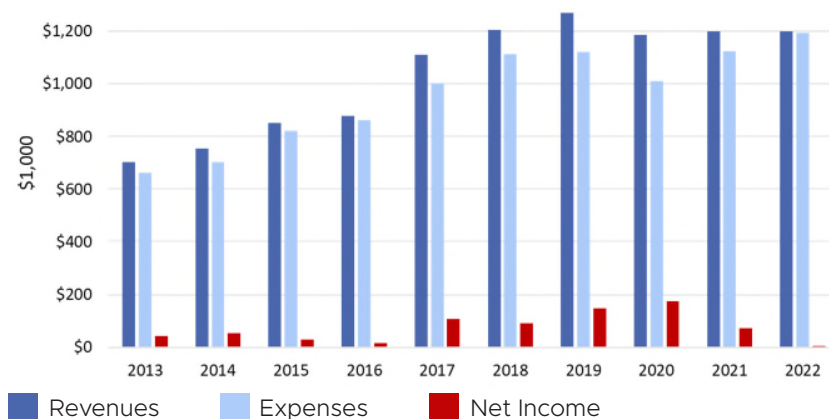
PORT PLANS

Quantify deferred maintenance and consider ways to increase net revenues to better steward assets, augment reserves, and pursue projects that increase economic diversity and vitality.

Approaches to be considered include resetting the tax levy, establishing an industrial development district (IDD), and/or issuing Unlimited Tax General Obligation bonds.

See page 27 and page 30.

The Port essentially operates as a break-even business with net income averaging \$74,000 per year over the last decade. This limits the Port's ability to maintain assets, increase reserves to respond to economic downturns or unexpected costs, and take on new projects. At the same time, the Port has a significant and growing deferred maintenance backlog.



Port of South Whidbey Financial Trends.

SOUTH WHIDBEY HARBOR

PORT PLANS

Assess the rate structure and facility condition, develop a sustainable financial plan, and identify an economically viable approach to maintaining and expanding South Whidbey Harbor.

See page 15.

The number of boats and use of hand-powered crafts is growing in South Whidbey, but the area has limited moorage slips and facilities catering to hand-powered craft. In addition, South Whidbey Harbor, like many marinas in the region, is plagued by significant deferred maintenance. It is currently a break-even venture and does not generate the funds needed to maintain this deteriorating asset.

RECENT PROGRESS

- Extended the breakwater to add moorage,
- Purchased a small parcel near the South Whidbey Harbor to increase parking and hold for future use,
- Hosted the San Juan Clipper at the South Whidbey Harbor during gray whale watching season (March through May, the Harbor's shoulder season) to boost Langley's economy,
- Received grant funding to retrofit the South Whidbey Harbor expanded docks with outside mooring points, which can accommodate temporary mooring for large vessels, including passenger only ferries and tour boats,
- Revised the marina expansion project plan to be more practical and affordable, and
- Addressed critical maintenance issues as budget allowed.

PARKS AND BOAT RAMPS

PORT PLANS

Apply for grant funding to repair the boarding floats at its Bush Point and Possession Beach boat ramps.

In the longer term consider charging a fee for boat ramp parking, partnering on a regional strategy to quantify demand and provide fiscally sustainable boat ramps, and evaluating opportunities to increase revenues by leveraging caretaker properties at Bush Point and Possession Beach.

See page 16.

The Port's parks and boat ramps at Possession Beach, Bush Point, and Clinton Beach are important to residents and visitors and the Fire District depends on these launches to respond to over water incidents. That said, maintenance issues impact boat ramp usability and there is limited revenue to address these ongoing issues as they occur. Over the past 10 years, the combined net loss for Possession Beach, Bush Point, and Clinton Beach has averaged \$40,000 per year. Funding to maintain these facilities must be generated from other sources.

RECENT PROGRESS

- Rebuilt the Possession Beach Waterfront Park boat launch,
- Completed ongoing maintenance at the Bush Point boat ramp, and
- Added accessible entry to the shoreline at Clinton Beach Park.

TRANSPORTATION ASSETS

PORT PLANS

Continue to pursue grant funds to rebuild the dock at Clinton to support future passenger ferry service. Longer term, the Port will replace the manual parking payment system and add security cameras at the Humphrey Lot when revenues allow.

See page 21.

Walk-on ferry traffic is important for the South Whidbey economy and quality of life but has declined in recent years due to inadequate parking, transportation gaps, and unreliable ferry schedules. The Port has two assets that support walk-on ferry traffic: the Clinton pier/dock and the Humphrey Road parking lot.

- The Clinton dock was damaged in 2020 and had to be demolished. The Port has applied for grant funds to rebuild this dock to support future passenger ferry service.
- The Humphrey Road parking lot supports walk-on traffic from Clinton to Mukilteo. This lot has generated positive net income over the past decade; however, the Covid 19 pandemic caused a recent sharp drop in income. Net income is expected to increase as the economy recovers and when passenger service is introduced.

RECENT PROGRESS

- Acquired a grant to perform an economic analysis of Clinton.
- Removed the Clinton dock after it incurred significant weather damage, and
- Collaborated with the IRTPO to think creatively about transportation and received initial funding for a passenger-only ferry dock.

FAIRGROUNDS

PORT PLANS

Collaborate with tenants and users to develop a sustainable financial plan for the Fairgrounds. This plan will consider changing the way expenses are allocated for events, developing lease policies that minimize tenant dislocation during fair week, and seeking new opportunities for revenue (including business incubators and other potential opportunities).

The Port is also working to upgrade the campground to enhance the visitor experience and increase Port revenues.

See page 27.

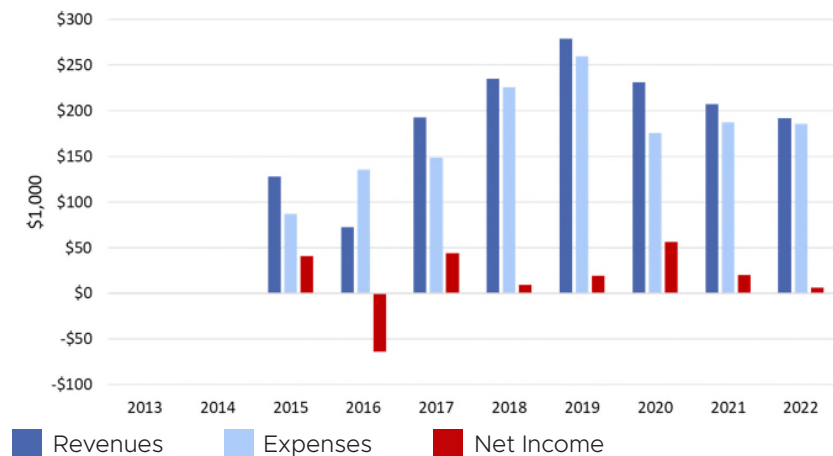
PORT PLANS

Continue to study how a portion of the Fairgrounds property might be used to develop workforce housing.

Leverage its Fairgrounds property to attract year-round business tenants that serve visitors and residents.

See page 27.

The Port acquired the Fairgrounds in 2017, which is primarily supported by property taxes (42% of total revenue from 2013-2022). Remaining revenue comes from tenant leases (26%), camping fees (12%), fairground events (12%), and other sources (9%). Deferred maintenance at the Fairgrounds is substantial and the buildings and grounds will need significant investments in the coming years.



Fairground Financial Trends.

RECENT PROGRESS

- Took over the formerly Island County Fairgrounds on an interim basis to help maintain the historic location for the beloved annual Whidbey Island Fair and 4-H events,
- Succeeded with a ballot measure to permanently obtain the Fairgrounds and provide some funding to support the community, economic development, 4-H, and the Fair,
- Upgraded the property to maximize use of the commercial kitchens and increase the use of the campground, and
- Supported numerous local businesses and a growing value-added agriculture center.

The Port has completed the following specific upgrades:

- Upgraded the 4H bathroom and added shower stalls.
- Addressed drainage issues on the property's east side and updated water backflow prevention throughout.
- Replaced power poles, addressed low-hanging power lines, upgraded power in the Burrier, Coffman, and Pole Buildings, and installed LED lights throughout.
- Added an exit to the Blackbox Theater.
- Removed a rotted, dangerous totem pole and trees hanging over buildings along the west border.
- Re-worked the arena footing, re-leveled the base, and purchased a groomer.
- Installed larger ventilation units in Malone.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This comprehensive scheme is organized into the following chapters:

1. **Introduction** includes a summary of the Port's goals, current community and financial context, planning process, and community engagement themes that influenced this comprehensive scheme.
2. **Lines of Business** describes issues, opportunities, and recommendations at the Port's four lines of business:
 - » South Whidbey Harbor at Langley
 - » Parks and Boat Ramps at Bush Point, Possession Beach, and Clinton Beach
 - » Transportation Assets including the Clinton pier/dock and the Humphrey Road Parking Lot
 - » Whidbey Island Fairgrounds and Events Center
3. **Recommendations** summarizes the Port's near-term actions and longer-term strategies.

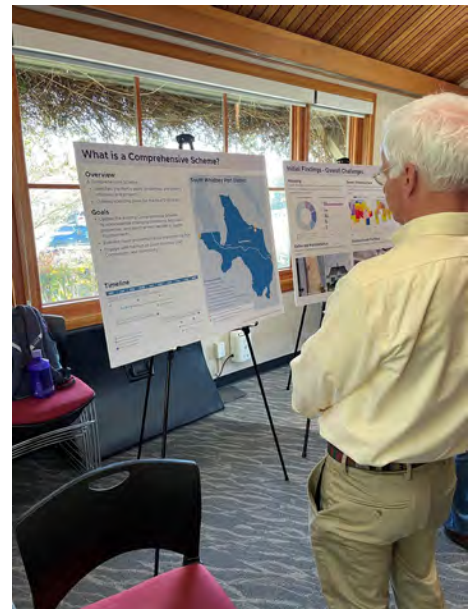
PLANNING PROCESS

The Port's comprehensive scheme update began in December 2022 and included:

- Interviews with Port Commissioners, staff, and community stakeholders
- Port facility tours
- Commission and staff work sessions
- Community open houses and surveys
- A series of commission and staff discussions and reviews

Comprehensive scheme recommendations are based on key findings of an economic evaluation prepared by BST Associates, community engagement themes, and Port staff and commission priorities. There will be additional opportunities for community feedback as recommendations are implemented and move through design and environmental review.

This document replaces the previous Comprehensive Scheme 2013-2019 and is intended to guide the next six years of Port activities. It will be amended as the need arises, with appropriate public notice and opportunities for community feedback.



Community member reviews project information at an open house at the Freeland Public Library.

ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES

Port commissioners, staff, stakeholders, and community members identified Port strengths, areas needing improvement, property-specific ideas, and Port-wide goals. Deferred maintenance and lack of revenue generators at Port properties and shortage of workforce housing and lack of sewer infrastructure throughout South Whidbey were key issues identified by a variety of stakeholders.

When asked where the Port should focus this comprehensive scheme, the Fairgrounds was the highest priority for survey respondents.

At the Fairgrounds, respondents would like to see:

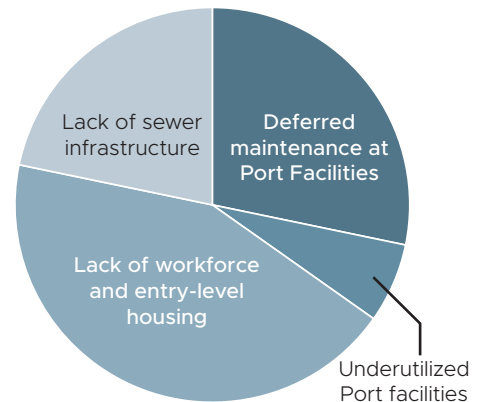
- Workforce housing
- Business incubation
- Educational opportunities
- Attracting more visitors and tourists

Survey respondents and open house attendees are also interested in the Port:

- Supporting passenger ferry service
- Maintaining boat ramps and supporting community boating programs
- Adding moorage to South Whidbey Harbor

A majority of survey respondents agreed with Port priorities and strategies identified in this comprehensive scheme:

- 84-89% agreed with priorities and strategies at South Whidbey Harbor and the Transportation Assets
- 64-73% agreed with priorities and strategies at the Parks and Boat Ramps and Fairgrounds and Events Center



46% of survey respondents said that the lack of workforce housing is the most important challenge facing South Whidbey at present.

This issue is a result of many factors, but some stakeholders pointed to the lack of sewer infrastructure on the island as a major contributor.



Community members attend an open house at the Freeland Public Library to discuss initial findings of the Comprehensive Scheme and provide feedback.

WHO WE HEARD FROM:

Port Staff and Commission

General Public, including:

- 93 Survey Respondents
- 45+ Open House Attendees

Stakeholders and Community Groups

Government Partners

Economic Development Councils

Chambers of Commerce

Local Business Owners and Developers

Fairgrounds Director

Lines of Business





SOUTH WHIDBEY HARBOR AT LANGLEY



FAST FACTS

GREAT LOCATION TO BOAT IN OR LAUNCH

PRIMARILY VISITOR MOORAGE

285 PEOPLE ON THE WAIT LIST FOR PERMANENT MOORAGE

FEATURES

- VESSEL MOORAGE
- ACCESSIBLE RESTROOM
- SHOWERS
- ACCESSIBLE PARKING
- BOAT RAMP
- BEACH ACCESS
- ACCESSIBLE FISHING

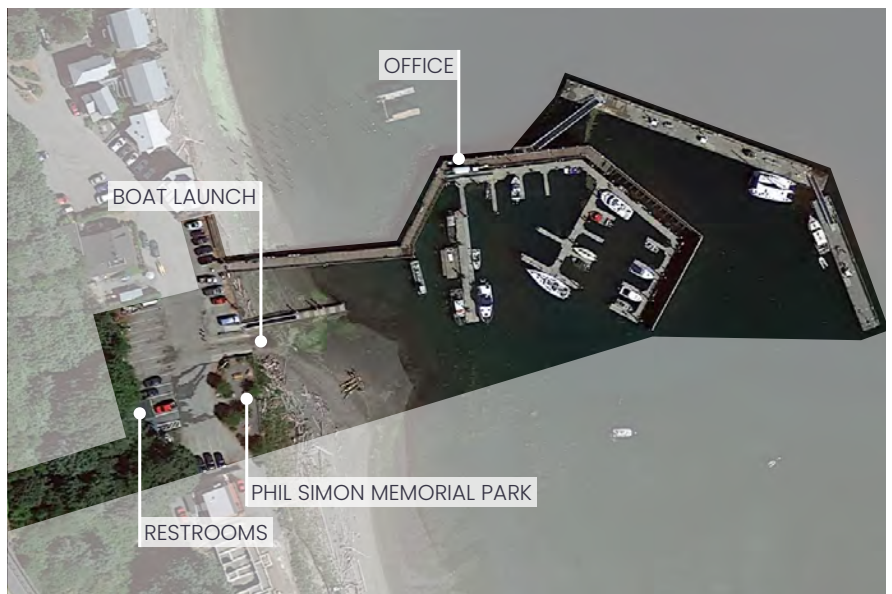
OVERVIEW

South Whidbey Harbor at Langley (South Whidbey Harbor) includes a series of properties along Saratoga Passage accessed by Wharf Street near downtown Langley. The property includes a launch ramp for trailered boats and hand-powered craft, about 1,500 linear feet of moorage which includes 31 slips and about 415 linear feet of side-tie moorage, and a pump-out station. The upland area consists of parking, Phil Simon Park, and a small public restroom.

The Port is currently working with the Tulalip Tribes and permitting agencies to renew an in-water permit to expand the marina.

HISTORY OF PORT OWNERSHIP

In 2004, the Port and City of Langley (City) sponsored the Langley Boat Harbor and Environs Master Plan to examine opportunities to expand the marina and enhance the adjacent waterfront. In response, ownership of adjacent properties and facilities were transferred from the City to the Port as part of an interlocal agreement. Since then, the Port hired a full-time Harbormaster and Assistant Harbormaster; refurbished electrical systems; installed new floats, pilings, and a grated gangway; and added amenities to Phil Simon Memorial Park.





Picnic area at South Whidbey Harbor.



Boat launch at South Whidbey Harbor.



Wintertime view of South Whidbey Harbor.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Great location.** The South Whidbey Harbor is the only public moorage location in South Whidbey Island and is in close proximity to downtown Langley.
- **High demand.** The number of boats and use of hand-powered crafts is growing in South Whidbey, but the area has limited moorage slips and facilities catering to hand powered craft. The Port currently has 285 people on its wait list for permanent moorage.
- **Community interest.** The South Whidbey Yacht Club expressed their support for increasing slips and adding mooring buoys to the harbor at the spring 2023 open house. Other boating interests suggested the Port consider supporting creation of a “Community Boating Center” as part of the South Whidbey Harbor expansion. This center would provide easy access and launching for non-motorized craft to support the non-profit mission of the Youth Sailing Association.



Moorage slips at the harbor used by various boat types and sizes.



Winter storm caused damage to finger piers; siding is separating from float.



South Whidbey Harbor. Source: Port of South Whidbey.



Floating dock at South Whidbey Harbor.

ISSUES

- **Financially unsustainable.** The South Whidbey Harbor is currently a break-even venture and does not generate the funds needed to maintain this deteriorating asset. Moorage rates were increased modestly one time between 2013 and 2022 for transient but not monthly or annual moorage. The Port should review rates annually to assure that revenues are sufficient to cover O&M costs as well as some capital costs.
- **Seasonal occupancy.** Occupancy of transient slips is highest in the summer but decreases in the shoulder season (June and October) and low season (November to May). Increasing occupancy would increase revenues and the economic benefits of the site without requiring significant additional capital investment.
- **Steep slope and lack of connection to downtown Langley.** The steep slope between the marina and downtown Langley limits the visual connection and acts as a barrier. Further, the slope is susceptible to erosion: a spring mud slide in 2013 temporarily closed the Wharf Street access. The Port does own a 6-person gas powered golf cart to provide access to downtown Langley.
- **Limited parking.** On-site parking is limited; off-site parking is needed for more than eight boat trailers. The one parking lot available for this purpose is not available on Sundays. Island Transit does not provide service to the harbor. Limited parking inhibits the ability of commercial users, like whale watching businesses and charter boats, to embark from the South Whidbey Harbor, especially on Sundays. Better striping for on-site parking would be helpful.
- **Small, aging facilities.** The restroom on site is older and undersized; the Port also lacks an adequate marina office and storage areas.
- **Deferred maintenance.** Marinas are expensive facilities to operate and maintain over time. Best practices dictate maximizing occupancy and adopting a rate structure that generates funds that can be used for major maintenance projects. The core infrastructure of the marina is a 40-year-old creosote pile stockade, and there is a limited life span remaining for this structure and the interior docks.
- **Out of date plan.** The last plan for the South Whidbey Harbor was completed in 2004 and is no longer relevant to current conditions.



View across the floating dock to the harbor.



Marina at South Whidbey Harbor.



View from South Whidbey Harbor.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Assess the rate structure and facility condition, develop a sustainable financial plan, and identify an economically viable approach to maintaining and expanding South Whidbey Harbor.

NEAR-TERM ACTIONS

- Adjust moorage rates annually to cover expenses, build up reserves, and address critical deferred and on-going maintenance.
- Assess facility condition and budget to address critical issues as soon as is feasible including repairing dock damage and adding reasonably sized insulated space for on-site staff.
- Continue to work with Tribal governments and agencies to renew the in-water work permit.

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

Apply for grants to complete a South Whidbey Harbor Master Plan, potentially in collaboration with the City, that:

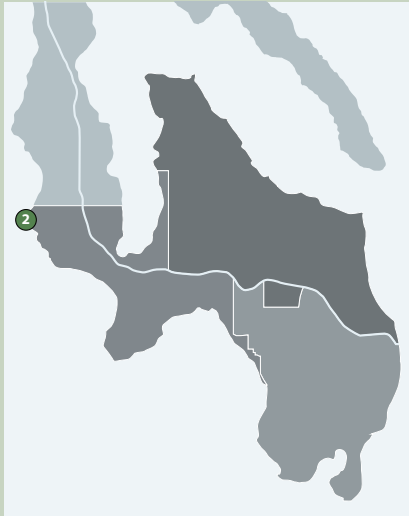
- Engages the community,
- Analyzes the rate structure and funding required to address deferred and ongoing maintenance, without expanding the harbor,
- Explores a variety of expansion and slip mix options, to include buoys as a lower cost approach to offering additional moorage and increasing revenue,
- Improves the drop off area, parking, and connections to downtown Langley,
- Supports growing interest in non-motorized craft,
- Quantifies the potential economic benefits of plan implementation, and
- Includes a viable approach to funding capital investments as well as ongoing maintenance and operations.



Phil Simon Memorial Park beside the boat ramp at South Whidbey Harbor.



PARKS AND BOAT RAMPS



FAST FACTS

1.6 ACRES

12 PARKING SPACES

12 TRAILER PARKING SPACES

FEATURES

- BEACH ACCESS
- BOAT RAMP
- PARKING
- RESTROOMS
- FISHING

OVERVIEW

The Port of South Whidbey provides shoreline and beach access at Bush Point, Possession Beach, and Clinton Beach Park. Bush Point and Possession Beach also contain boat ramps, as does South Whidbey Harbor (see page 12).

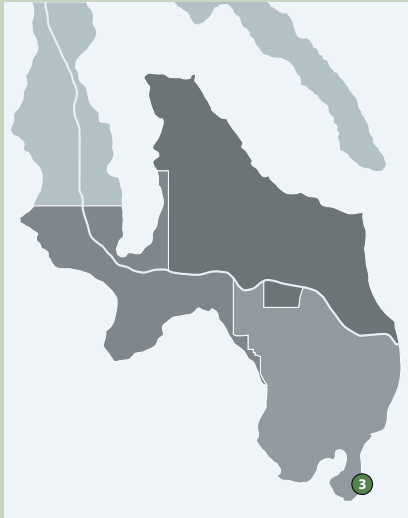
The Port is also the 25% owner of the Holmes Harbor, Dave Mackie Park, and Mutiny Bay boat ramps, but the County is the 75% owner and responsible for operations and maintenance of these facilities.

BUSH POINT

Bush Point is located on the end of a land mass projecting into Admiralty Inlet, near a traditional island fishing community. The Port partnered with Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB) to construct the boat ramp in 2006. The site also provides beach access in a popular fishing area, small turn-around parking area, and restroom. Across the road from the ramp is a parking lot used for trailers and the former on-site manager's house. The house is in poor condition and currently used for storage.



Former on-site manager's house now used for storage.



POSSESSION BEACH

OVERVIEW

Possession Beach is located on the southwest side of Possession Sound. The site consists of a boat ramp, shoreline access, steep woodland hill, and hiking trail. The waterfront portion contains picnic areas, interpretive stations, visitor parking, and a residence occupied by the site manager. There is a wetland between the sandy shoreline and hillside. The uplands is wooded and contains the Dorothy Cleveland Trail, which starts near the boat ramp, crosses Franklin Road, and connects uphill to a trailhead at the south end of Lupine Lane. Permits are available for overnight parking.

FAST FACTS

35+ ACRES

14 PARKING SPACES

20 TRAILER PARKING SPACES

FEATURES

- PICNIC TABLES
- BEACH ACCESS
- BOAT RAMPS
- PARKING
- RESTROOMS
- FISHING
- TRAILS



On-site manager's house overlooking Possession Beach.



Floating docks along the boat launch are prepared for installation in April after being removed for the winter.



FAST FACTS

0.55 ACRES

6 PARKING SPACES

**2 ADA VAN ACCESSIBLE
PARKING SPACES**

FEATURES

- RESTROOMS
- PICNIC TABLES & SHELTER
- BEACH ACCESS
- TEMPORARY MOORING DOCK
- FISHING PIER
- PARKING



Children's play space at Clinton Beach Park.

CLINTON BEACH PARK

OVERVIEW

Clinton Beach Park was developed in 1999, when the Port acquired the commercial property at the west end of the Clinton Ferry terminal and developed public beach access facilities. The park consists of an open sandy beach, play area, picnic shelter, small lawn, dog walk, restrooms, interpretive signage, parking area, and public art. Recently, the Port installed an ADA-compliant walkway from the restroom area to the beach in collaboration with Island Beach Access, an organized community volunteer group.



View to Washington State ferry dock from Clinton Beach Park.



Boat ramp at Bush Point looking east.



Possession Beach.



Picnic table and viewing area at Clinton Beach Park.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **High demand.** The Port's parks and boat ramps at Possession Beach, Bush Point, and Clinton Beach are important to residents and visitors and the Fire District depends on these launches to respond to over water incidents.
- **Grant funding.** Grant funds may be available to address maintenance issues or fund new boat ramps or public access, though grants often require matching funds from the port.
- **Development potential.** There is some potential for limited upland development to generate revenue at Bush Point and/or Possession Beach. Ideas include refurbishing the caretaker houses for seasonal rentals, developing a small campground for tents, yurts, or RVs at Possession Beach, etc., subject to existing agreements and permits.

ISSUES

- **Ongoing maintenance.** The floats at Bush Point and Possession Beach are in poor condition and need to be replaced. During winter storms sand is deposited on the ramps, making them difficult to use. Weather has impacted the recently installed ADA-compliant path at Clinton Park Beach.
- **Limited funds.** There is limited revenue to address ongoing maintenance at all three properties. Ramps are unmanned and free for users (donation boxes are located at South Whidbey Harbor and Possession). There is no fee to use Clinton Beach Park. Over the past 10 years, the combined net loss for Possession Beach, Bush Point, and Clinton Beach has averaged \$40,000 per year. Funding to maintain these facilities must be generated from other sources.
- **Regional need.** South Whidbey lacks reliable deep-water boat launches and there is confusion around responsibility for maintaining the County-owned launches. A comprehensive assessment of maintenance needs has not been completed, but Island County recently evaluated its boat ramps and identified the Maxwellton boat ramp in Dave Mackie Park and the Mutiny Bay Boat Ramp on Robinson Beach as no longer in use.¹

¹ Source: Island County Boat Ramp Evaluation – Final, Coastal Geological Services, Inc. December 2022



Beach at Bush Point.



Boat ramp at Possession Beach.



Picnic tables at Clinton Beach Park.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Maintain ramps as funding allows and develop a sustainable long-term strategy for these assets.

NEAR-TERM ACTIONS

- Apply for grant funding to replace boarding floats at its Bush Point and Possession Beach.
- Consider charging for boat ramp parking to generate revenues to better maintain these community assets.
- Continue to maintain parks and ramps as funding allows.
- Support the County in making improvements to jointly-owned boat ramps.

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

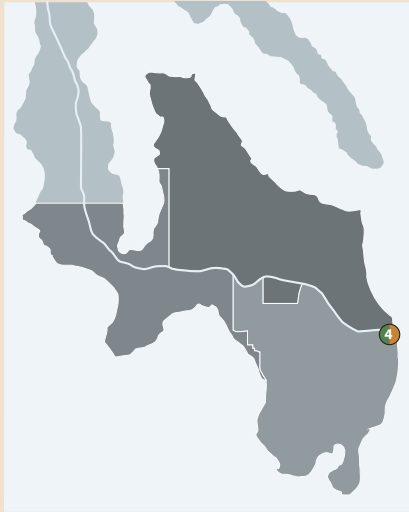
- Evaluate opportunities to leverage caretaker properties and uplands at Bush Point and Possession Beach, subject to existing agreements and permits.
- Explore partnering with the County on a regional strategy to provide reliable launching in South Whidbey.
 - » Consider use patterns, climate change, maintenance needs, and community desires.
 - » Evaluate a variety of options including surplussing lower priority facilities, building a new ramp, etc.
 - » Recommend a financially sustainable strategy to provide reliable launching where most needed and provide a reliable revenue stream to maintain facilities. Consider asking the community to support a tax increase to address deferred and ongoing maintenance at Port-owned ramps.



Upland area of Possession Beach property has picnic tables and grills; foot bridge crosses over wetlands connecting to the beach.



TRANSPORTATION ASSETS



FAST FACTS

WALKWAY AND FISHING PIER

LOCATION OF FORMER GANGWAY AND FLOATING DOCK

2.72 ACRE PARKING LOT

109 PERMIT PARKING SPACES

100 COMMUTER PARKING SPACES

FEATURES

- PEDESTRIAN PATH
- FISHING PIER
- FUTURE PASSENGER FERRY DOCK LOCATION
- PARKING

OVERVIEW

Walk-on ferry traffic is important for the South Whidbey economy and quality of life but has declined in recent years due to inadequate parking, transportation gaps, and unreliable ferry schedules. The Port has two assets that support walk-on ferry traffic: the Clinton pier/dock and the Humphrey Road parking lot.

CLINTON PIER/DOCK

Clinton pier/dock is located at Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) ferry terminal at Clinton. In the 1980s, the Port entered into the first of a series of long-term agreements with WSDOT to provide a fishing pier and walkway along the north side of the terminal and install a floating dock over DNR-leased tidelands. The floating dock was a popular landing spot for boaters but eventually fell into disrepair and was removed.

HUMPHREY ROAD PARKING LOT

Humphrey Road parking lot is located about a five-minute walk from the Clinton ferry terminal and supports walk-on traffic from Clinton to Mukilteo. This surface parking lot provides daily and quarterly fee-based parking spaces for commuters. It was acquired partially through private property purchase and partially via a no-cost transfer from WSDOT, under the condition that the lot would be maintained for transportation purposes.





North side pedestrian walkway.



Walkway to Clinton floating pier, prior to removal.



Floating pier at Clinton Dock, prior to removal.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Passenger ferry service.** The Puget Sound Regional Council studied potential passenger ferry routes in the region, including a route from Clinton to Everett. The first step to implementation is to identify a lead agency to plan, fund, implement, and manage this service. The Port can support this by pursuing grant funds to replace the berthing dock at the Clinton Ferry terminal.
- **Income generator.** The Humphrey Road parking lot has generated positive net income over the past decade; however, the Covid 19 pandemic caused a sharp recent drop in income. Net income is expected to increase as the economy recovers and when passenger service is introduced.
- **Transportation choices.** The Port may have a role to play in supporting Island Transit and nearby mainland transit agencies in adding transportation choices and assisting the workforce in getting on, off, and around the island.

ISSUES

- **Float damage.** The floating dock was removed after storm damage rendered it unsafe in 2020.
- **Challenging access.** Connection between the Humphrey Road parking lot and ferry terminal is steep and via a staircase. That said, there is consistent Island Transit bus service between the lot and the ferry, routes 60 and 1, and the Clinton Commuter.
- **Outdated payment system.** The parking lot's payment system is outdated and expensive to modernize. The current system requires port staff time to monitor and is challenging to enforce. There is currently no monitoring or security cameras on the site.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Pursue grant funds to rebuild the Clinton dock to support future passenger ferry service and replace the manual parking payment system at the Humphrey Lot when revenues allow.

NEAR-TERM ACTIONS

- Acquire grants to replace the Clinton dock to support passenger ferry service.
- Add security cameras at the Humphrey Road parking lot.

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

- When funding allows, modernize Humphrey Road parking lot payment system.
- Support Island Transit and nearby mainland transportation agencies in pursuing initiatives that expand transportation choices and assist the workforce in getting on, off, and around the island.

WHIDBEY ISLAND FAIRGROUNDS AND EVENTS CENTER

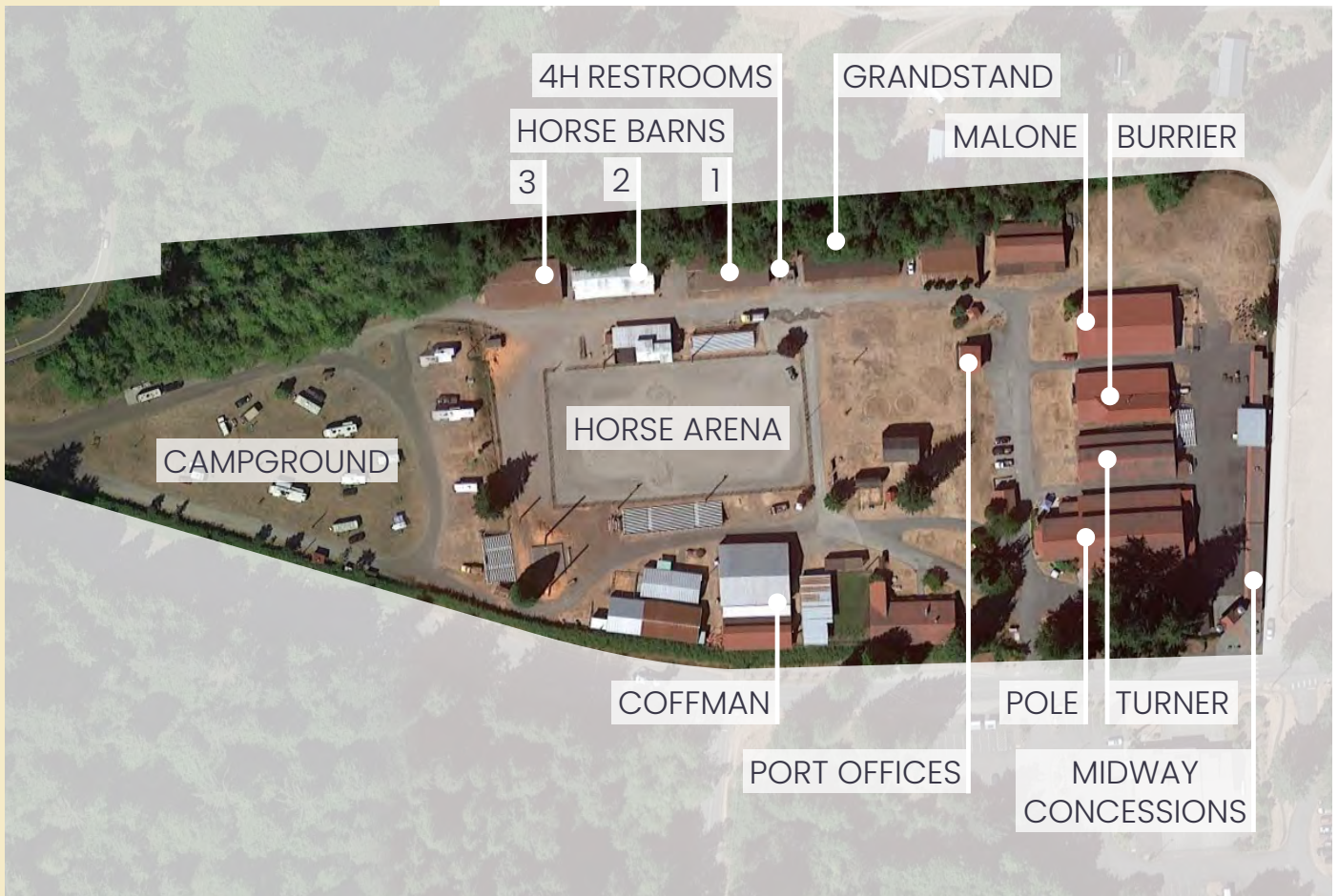


OVERVIEW

The Whidbey Island Fairgrounds and Events Center (Fairgrounds) is located just outside of the Langley business core on Camano Avenue. It sits on a 12.8-acre property composed of two parcels next to a community center owned by the Island County School District.

The Fairgrounds was acquired by the Port of South Whidbey in 2017. This property is historically significant and has hosted the annual Island County Fair, run by the Island County Fair Association (Fair Association), since 1937. The Fairgrounds also hosts equestrian and 4-H events throughout the spring and summer.

The Fairgrounds property has a variety of buildings and structures including buildings, barns, concession stands, a grandstand, and a designated RV camping area with electric hookups. Since the Port's acquisition, it has leased out several spaces, rebuilt restrooms, and upgraded the commercial kitchen.



FAST FACTS

WHIDBEY ISLAND FAIR SITE
SINCE 1937

12.8 ACRES

27 STRUCTURES

30 RV SITES

20 CAMP SITES

COMMERCIAL KITCHENS AT
CAPACITY

54 RENTERS AND SUB-RENTERS
AS OF JULY 2023

FEATURES

- 3 BUILDINGS FOR RENT: POLE, TURNER, AND COFFMAN
- OUTDOOR EVENT CAPABILITY
- 2 COMMERCIAL KITCHENS: POLE AND COFFMAN
- 2 STAGES
- EQUESTRIAN ARENA
- BARN FACILITIES
- CAMPGROUND



OPPORTUNITIES

- **Potential for increased activity.** In addition to continuing to support the annual fair and 4-H events, the Fairgrounds buildings and property could host other events, year-round activities, and small business incubation. As of July 2023, there are 54 current renters and sub renters using the site. With improvements, the Fairgrounds could accommodate more tenants and activities.
- **Value-added agriculture.** With the two commercial kitchens and variety of flexible facilities, the Fairgrounds is particularly well suited to support value-added agriculture businesses. For example, Whidbey Island Grown, a cooperative with 63 members, helps store and distribute agricultural-based products from the site.
- **Underutilized campground.** The Fairgrounds campground could be updated to attract year-round tourists and generate revenues to help maintain the site. Tourism is a key economic driver in Island County, and destination spending supports a wider variety of businesses, adds revenues, and increases livability in South Whidbey. The Port fully renovated the 4-H restroom, which will also serve campground users.
- **Workforce housing.** One of the largest challenges facing South Whidbey Island is the shortage of workforce housing. The Port is exploring the opportunity to develop a small workforce housing project at the Fairgrounds in the area currently occupied by fair concessionaires. The first floor of this development would be designed to support concession use during fair times, and other commercial uses when the fair isn't operating. Lower cost housing is important to help local businesses retain their workforce, give young residents the ability to remain in South Whidbey, and better enable seniors access to caregivers.



Conceptual drawings of potential workforce housing at the fairgrounds. Perspectives show views from the south courtyard (left) and north access road (right). Source: Ron Kasprisin



Fairgrounds restrooms.



Entrance to the fairgrounds; Source: Langley Chamber of Commerce.

ISSUES

- **Significant deferred maintenance backlog and functional improvements needed.** There is significant deferred maintenance and critical functional improvements needed at the Fairgrounds, including but not limited to:
 - » Flooding. Stormwater drainage and management is a significant issue. A patchwork of improvements has mitigated some problems, but flooding risks remain; the Fairgrounds lacks a comprehensive drainage system.
 - » Fire safety. Assessments identified the need for improved egress in buildings around the campus.
 - » Grandstand. The grandstand structure on the west side of the property is in dire need of structural repair. Support beams have rotted out and the seating area has been condemned.
 - » Horse barns. The horse barns are not sized to accommodate the number of horses during equestrian events. Horse barns 1 and 2 need repairs and horse barn 3 is at the end of its life.
 - » Pole building. The Pole building's main commercial kitchen was recently upgraded to provide one additional high-voltage power outlet for large kitchen appliances. This upgrade only partially addressed the need for additional power in the Pole building and others on the grounds. The Pole building also requires heat to make it usable year-round.
 - » Coffman building. The Coffman building kitchen has very limited commercial equipment and lacks three-phase power, limiting the equipment that can be used in the building and tenants it can support.
 - » Burrier Wing. Burrier Wing is rented by a fitness business but has only a garage-style heater for use during the winter.
 - » Midway concessions. The midway concessions buildings lack adequate hoods for deep fat frying and have considerable structural issues, which may render them unusable in the near future.
 - » Miscellaneous. Additional issues identified as part of the 2017 property transfer include a need for an electrical upgrade in the goat and cattle barns, water backflow prevention improvements (partially addressed but still present on the site), and critical tree maintenance.
- **Limited net income.** The Fairgrounds is primarily supported by property taxes, which provided 42% of total revenue from 2013-2022. Remaining revenue comes from tenant leases (26%), camping fees (12%), fairground events (12%), and other sources (9%). Though net income has been positive since 2017, it has trended downward from 2019 to 2022. Deferred maintenance at the Fairgrounds is substantial and the buildings and grounds need significant investments in the coming years.



The Pole building is a great event space, but needs additional electrical power and heat.

- **Vacation requirements.** Much of the site is underutilized for much of the year; however, the requirement to vacate the site during the annual fair severely limits the Port's ability to attract potential tenants, increase year-round use, and generate revenue to maintain the site. The Port is currently working with the Fair Association to modify this requirement in a way that continues to support the fair but also increases year-round use and revenues.
- **Limiting zoning.** Current Fairgrounds zoning does not allow for commercial or residential uses, which limits the capacity of the site to generate additional revenue and support year-round use.
- **Growing management demands.** Site management, kitchen scheduling, and tenant recruitment needs are growing. One manager/director is currently responsible for most operational duties in addition to tenant recruitment and scheduling, which leaves little time for longer term projects.



Pole Building circa 1937. Source: courtesy South Whidbey Historical Society



Local pasta made in the Pole building's commercial kitchen is sold at a farmers market and businesses around South Whidbey Island.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Upgrade the campground, address critical maintenance, and invest to improve assets as funding allows. Continue to work with the Fair Association, City, and other partners to align policies and regulations to support goals and support development of workforce housing on the site. In the longer-term, collaborate to create a community-driven vision and sustainable financial plan for this asset.

NEAR-TERM ACTIONS

- Apply for grants to redesign campground to improve aesthetics, clarify rentable space to add capacity, and add services. Market the site to attract year-round users and increase revenues.
- Continue to work with the Fair Association to update policies to meet fair needs and minimize tenant displacement.
- Continue to work with the City to update zoning to allow workforce housing, expanded retail, and other synergistic uses on the site.
- Consider ways to increase revenues including adjusting the way expenses are allocated for events.
- Complete a comprehensive facility condition assessment to identify maintenance needs in priority order and provide cost estimates for budgeting. Include essential property improvements such as stormwater upgrades in the plan. Address priorities as funding allows.
- Complete currently funded projects: upgrade electricity and heat in the Pole Building, upgrade utilities at the campground, and improve stormwater/drainage on the property.
- Find grants to improve priority assets with upside potential. For example, improve the Pole Building to accommodate year-round events, upgrade the commercial kitchen in the Coffman building, demolish the bleachers and re-orient the grandstand for use as an event and performance stage, etc.

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

- When funding is available, expand campground offerings by adding rental cabins, common amenities, etc.
- Continue to work with partners to support development of workforce housing on the site. Ensure first floor spaces support year-round active use and easy transition to fair concessions.
- Apply for grants to complete a community-supported vision, master plan, and viable investment strategy for the Fairgrounds. Include capital investments as well as ongoing operating, maintenance, and management costs. Complete robust community and stakeholder engagement and consider all potential funding sources including voter-approved revenue bonds, resetting the tax levy, and/or creative approaches to increase net revenues.
- As demand warrants and budgets allow, fund additional part-time or full-time staff to support tenants, events, marketing, etc.



Coffman building, sometimes rented by community groups.

Recommendations



NEAR-TERM PRIORITIES

Near-term recommendations are the highest priority initiatives for the Port's focus within the next six years. These projects address the most pressing issues, can be accomplished with the Port's resources, and/or are essential first steps to achieving a larger effort. Many of these initiatives are already in process.

Deferred maintenance is a widespread issue among the Port's properties and the Port lacks comprehensive information to identify and prioritize needs and estimate costs. Moving toward a financially sustainable approach to protecting existing Port assets is a high priority for the Port commission, staff, and community.

The Port's highest priority near term areas of focus are listed below.

PORT-WIDE

- Conduct a comprehensive facility condition assessment of Port assets to quantify liabilities and prioritize needs. Develop a capital improvement plan that is updated annually.
- Conduct a long-term Capital Improvement Plan.

SOUTH WHIDBEY HARBOR

- Conduct a comprehensive facility condition assessment of Port assets to quantify liabilities and prioritize needs. Address issues as funding allows.
- Adjust moorage rates annually to cover expenses, build up reserves, and address critical deferred and on-going maintenance.
- Repair dock damage and add reasonably sized insulated space for on-site staff as funding allows.
- Continue to work with Tribal governments and agencies to renew the in-water work permit.

PARKS AND BOAT RAMPS

- Apply for grants to replace boarding floats at Bush Point and Possession Beach.
- Consider charging for boat ramp parking.
- Continue to maintain parks and ramps as funding allows.

TRANSPORTATION ASSETS

- Acquire grants to replace the Clinton dock to support passenger ferry service
- Support the County in making improvements in jointly owned boat ramps.
- Add security cameras at the Humphrey Lot.

FAIRGROUNDS AND EVENTS CENTER

- Apply for grants to redesign the campground and market the site to attract year-round users and increase revenues.
- Continue to work with the Fair Association to update policies to meet fair needs and minimize tenant displacement.
- Continue to work with the City to update zoning to allow workforce housing, expanded retail, and other synergistic uses on the site.
- Consider ways to increase revenues including adjusting the way expenses are allocated for events.
- Complete funded projects at the Fairgrounds, which include upgrading the electricity and heat in the Pole Building, upgrading utilities at the campground, and improving stormwater/drainage on the property.
- Find grants to complete critical upgrades, which include upgrading the commercial kitchen in the Coffman building, improving the Pole building to accommodate year-round events, and reorienting and replacing grand stand seating to better support performances on the green.

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

Longer term priorities include finding ways to increase net revenues to better steward assets, augment reserves, and pursue projects that increase economic diversity and vitality. Approaches to be considered include resetting the tax levy, establishing an industrial development district (IDD), and/or using Unlimited Tax General Obligation Bonds.

Completing community-supported master plans and sustainable investment strategies for the Fairgrounds and South Whidbey Harbor are critical long-term areas of focus.

Other important strategies include partnering to address South Whidbey's significant challenges. These include working with partners to support development of workforce housing, partnering with the County on a regional strategy to provide reliable boat launching, and assisting other entities in improving transportation choices and developing commercial and/or industrial properties to create higher wage jobs.

PORT-WIDE

- Consider resetting the tax levy, establishing an IDD, Unlimited Tax General Obligation Bonds, and other methods to generate funds to maintain assets, augment reserves, and pursue projects that increase economic vitality.
- Explore assisting in development of sewer infrastructure on appropriately zoned properties to support higher-wage job growth.
- Collaborate with developers and regulators to support initiatives to bring more workforce housing to South Whidbey.

SOUTH WHIDBEY HARBOR

- Apply for grants to complete a South Whidbey Harbor Master Plan, potentially in collaboration with the City.
- Explore partnering with the County on a regional strategy to quantify demand and provide reliable launching.

PARKS AND BOAT RAMPS

- Evaluate opportunities to increase revenues by leveraging caretaker properties at Bush Point and Possession Beach, subject to existing agreements and permits.

TRANSPORTATION ASSETS

- Replace the manual parking payment system at the Humphrey Lot when revenues allow.
- Support Island Transit and nearby mainland transportation agencies in pursuing initiatives that expand transportation choices and assist the workforce in getting on, off, and around the island.

FAIRGROUNDS AND EVENTS CENTER

- When funding is available, expand campground offerings by adding rental cabins, common amenities, etc.
- Continue to work with partners to support development of workforce housing. Ensure first floor spaces support year-round active use and easy transition to fair concessions.
- Apply for grants to complete a community-supported vision, master plan, and viable investment strategy for the Fairgrounds.
- As demand warrants and budgets allow, fund additional part-time or full-time staff to support tenants, events, marketing, etc.



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