

Port Commission Candidates

Candidate responses were not edited by Whatcom Watch.

Candidates were asked to keep their answers to 100 words or less.

Candidates reviewed their answers in the layout before the paper was sent to the printer.

Background: Jet traffic at the Bellingham airport has increased dramatically. The number of annual enplanements (passengers getting on a plane at the airport) increased from 90,000 enplanements in 2000 to more than 570,000 in 2012. The Airport Master Plan Update which is now in process is projecting 800,000 to 1.45 million enplanements in 2031. This translates to a jet taking off or landing about every 28 minutes. More and more people will be impacted by airport noise with each passing year.

How should the Port of Bellingham work with Whatcom County residents to assure their safety and comfort and to maintain the quality of life of our community?

Background: The former Georgia Pacific wastewater treatment lagoon on Bellingham's waterfront is scheduled to be converted into a marina. The public has been provided little or no input about the project. Other alternatives could be considered for the use of this area.

Would you support legal, environmental, and economic analyses of conversion of the former Georgia Pacific treatment lagoon?

Background: The complex cleanup plan of the Cornwall Landfill site proposed by the Port of Bellingham and the Washington Department of Ecology states that a layer of clay will cover the garbage and dioxin contaminated sediment, providing one barrier to water infiltration. A layer of thick plastic will top the clay to provide a second line of defense against seeping water. A layer of sand will cover the plastic, to provide a pathway for rainwater to move horizontally into the bay before it touches any buried contaminants, and atop the sand will be a layer of topsoil for grass and trees.

Do you believe the proposed cleanup plan for the Cornwall Landfill is adequate for the nature of the contamination in the dredged material there?

Port of Bellingham Commission — District 1



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Our airport is a vital economic driver, and its growth has been phenomenal, giving us opportunities to help businesses reach markets more quickly and economically. However, as elected officials Port Commissioners also have an obligation to the taxpayers and community. There is also significant concern over increased jet traffic with some citizens rightly unhappy with the impact of the airport on their residential property values and day-to-day living. It is possible to have a vital, bustling airport without damaging the community around it - it is a matter of cooperation, listening, and understanding. This is my top airport-related priority.

Full analysis of the costs and benefits – legal, environmental, and economic – of conversion to a marina must be undertaken before the Port takes any action to convert the former wastewater treatment lagoon to a marina. Every project involving our taxpayers' investment, especially of this magnitude, requires that we evaluate all potential uses of this public asset and choose wisely the one with the broadest benefit and the least cost.

Whatever standards we employ must have future generations in mind. We must get it right today to avoid spending even more public resources to fix it later. Therefore, we should be looking at the highest levels of cleanup that have been proven to work well in the short and long term. What concerns me about "cap and cover" is that it remains a technology that has not been adequately tested. Additionally, we live in an area with high potential for seismic activity, and I have concerns about the impact seismic activity would have on an area of capped toxins.



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We are not the first airport that has had to deal with noise abatement. Many airports all over the country have mitigated this issue through FAA regulations. We need to continue to study how other airports have dealt with this situation. The FAA has guidelines that are well established and are used by Ports to buy or insulate homes based on stringent FAA guidelines rather than on an emotional basis.

The Port of Bellingham should be a good neighbor and listen to citizens in the open sessions prior to most port meetings, and through the citizens' airport advisory committee.

The Treatment Lagoon has been earmarked to be a marina for many years. The reason it's been on the Port's plan is because we have had a waiting list for moorage slips. There have been many discussions as to alternatives it could be used for, but has always come back to be used as a marina.

Until we start the process of converting it to a marina, I would look at all alternatives that make sense from a citizen and community standpoint.

We must also keep in mind that marinas create recreational and business opportunities and revenue for the community.

The regulatory agencies are the environmental clean-up experts. When all the agencies agree to a plan, it would be hard for me to find fault with their findings. The Port of Bellingham's environmental staff has done an excellent job working with the Department of Ecology in a parallel fashion thus not wasting taxpayer money. Because of taking recommendations from Ecology, the process has been thorough and fruitful.

If someone were to approach me as a Port commissioner with scientific evidence based on fact rather than emotion that says otherwise, I would certainly consider the facts.

Port of Bellingham Commission — District 2



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The Port by its very nature is designed to promote travel and transportation in our region. The Bellingham airport has been the beneficiary of our proximity to Vancouver, B.C. The economics of that situation could and probably will change over time. I believe we need to diversify our carriers and create demand from other regions of the country. This community benefits greatly from access to cities with major universities and access to resources that we do not have here in Bellingham. The FAA has guidelines for mitigating impacts of noise and nuisances. We should follow those guidelines.

The Wastewater treatment lagoon is an asset that should not be dismissed. A complete review should occur before it is designated for any use. The lagoon could not be replicated under today's regulatory constraints so it is imperative that we look hard at all potential uses. There are numerous options to utilize this structure for what it was originally intended, waste water treatment. An economic, legal and environmental analysis should occur. Storm water collected from around Lake Whatcom could potentially be delivered through the existing pipeline to the lagoon for treatment.

Any cap of contamination should be the last resort. A true economic analysis of capping contamination will show that the only use of a capped landfill land is for parks. If we can clean the contamination and restore the property to beneficial use, we create revenues to pay for the increased clean up. The use of a cap is appropriate if we are risking more environmental damage by releasing contaminants into the environment through the digging process. It would be my sincere desire to remove this time bomb so that future generations would be free from potential exposure.



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The current commission will not support more mitigation than the FAA will pay for. With a new commission, my proposal for an off airport advisory committee will convene to discover the best options for airport mitigations. In my very first budget meeting 3 years ago I asked for 25 cents from each passenger to go into a mitigation fund, it was not supported. Since then it's been even more difficult to direct attention to off airport noise mitigation, I am looking forward to working with a new commission and a new advisory committee to seek the best solutions.

I've asked the last 2 port directors for alternatives for ASB use, alternatives are not supported by the commission. The city does not want the ASB for stormwater and no industry has approached the port for its use. The remaining alternatives I support are using it as a fill location for other dredge operations, possibly cleanups as well, or a commercial only marina. There is an expectation of tax money being available for cleanup of the ASB, I could not support asking for tax money to clean up the ASB for a pleasure boat oriented marina.

Scientists and engineers agree that the cleanup will protect the public. Dioxin is one of the most toxic substances known to man, but the landfill material will be protected. Also, the amount of dioxin in the soils to be buried is nearly the same as dioxin levels found on typical streets here in Puget Sound, in fact, many Seattle streets have higher levels than the landfill dredge cap. The number one source of dioxin production is trash burning in backyard burn barrels, until we stop that, then no amount of cleanup anywhere will ever meet the Stockholm goals.