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Port of Newport tables decision on building permit

At their regular meeting on Tuesday, commissioners from the Port of Newport voted to table a decision regarding the future of a building permit that dates back to 2015 on a project that never came to fruition.

In December of 2015, the Port obtained a permit from the City of Newport for the development of a log yard on the land adjacent to the International Terminal. In a letter from August of this year, City Building Official Joseph Lease urged the Port to define its plans related to that permit.

The building official outlined the relevant section of Oregon law and then stated “I am requesting that the Port of Newport review the current viability of this project and determine if it is their intent to proceed with this development and, if so, provide a proposed timeline for construction and a request for permit extension.”

General Manager Paula Miranda outlined the efforts made and costs incurred in recent years to keep the permit open, but also said the pathway to turning it into a viable project was a narrow one.

In a report to commissioners, the manager noted that “if we keep the permit open, the only project the permit will cover is another log yard and nothing else.”

Community Development Director Derrick Tokos addressed the body and explained that the building permit was for a specific project and the scope of improvements that would accompany that specific project.

“The issue we have is that, under the state’s structural codes, once we issue a building permit, the entity that pulled that permit is obligated to make progress or the permit will expire,” he noted.

Regardless of whether the permit is extended or allowed to expire, Miranda emphasized that she has actively been seeking new opportunities for the International Terminal and the Port of Newport is open for business.

“We have been working and trying to figure out ways to use that site... to find some sort of partnership to utilize all that property around the terminal for the benefit of everyone,” she explained.

Keeping the permit open is an expense for the Port, using dollars that Miranda said could be utilized more effectively for the project.

“Instead of spending money with a permit to build a specific type of business that isn’t coming to fruition anytime soon, we could spend the money getting that site ready for something,” the general manager said.

Since pulling the permit, the Port has been required to pay system development charges (SDCs) to the city. Those fees will be refunded if the permitted project does not move forward. The Port



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has invested roughly \$172,000 to-date on this project, of which \$76,000 was spent on SDCs and permit charges.

Commission President Sara Skamser remarked on the expanding wetlands on the acreage and agreed that the money might be better spent improving the site.

“I think we would gain a lot from using the money we will get back to put into that property and make it more shovel ready or at least start to contain wetlands that will just get bigger,” she said.

Ultimately, the commissioners decided to table the decision for one month.

After the meeting, Miranda summarized why the decision is a difficult one.

“It is not an easy choice because we could terminate the permit and then find the opportunity for that same use and have to go through the same process all over again or we could continue spending the money on this permit and be presented with a totally different use that would require us to go through the same process again,” she explained.

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