

# 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:** In 2001, the Port Commission voted to make port districts identical to Whatcom County Council districts. At the November 2015 general election, voters increased the number of Whatcom County Council districts from three to five. The Port Commission and County Council districts are now different.

**Are you in favor of increasing the Port Commission from three to five members so Port Commission and County Council districts are uniform?**

**Background:** When the Port of Bellingham acquired the former Georgia-Pacific West property, they proposed turning the former treatment lagoon into a marina. In 2004, a study showed the need for an additional 600 slips by 2015 and 1,700 by 2025. A Seattle consulting firm was hired to find the best location for a new marina; the treatment lagoon was the top choice. There has been very little discussion recently about the proposed marina.

**What is your position on turning the former treatment lagoon into a marina?**

**Background:** The Port of Bellingham Commission acquired the Georgia-Pacific West property in exchange for the port's agreement to perform specific environmental remediation on the property. The entire area is former tidelands.

**What do you propose to protect the port's investment in that development against the predicted sea level rise that could inundate that area?**

## Port of Bellingham Commission — District 1



**Dan Robbins**

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I am not opposed to either three or five commissioners. I believe there are advantages and disadvantages to each. A five-member commission would provide more representation and perspective for the Port. A three-member commission is less expensive (the yearly expense of commissioners and the cost of elections) than a five-member commission. Two commissioners in a three-member commission cannot discuss Port matters or meet except in an open public meeting. With a five-member commission two commissioners can meet and discuss Port matters outside of an open public meeting. Some might look at this as meeting behind closed doors.

The economics of a marina have changed significantly since the decision by the Port Commission to create a marina in 2004. I am not opposed to a marina now, but 13 years later, the Port needs to do a thorough review of the treatment lagoon. First, the demand for moorage has generally declined nationwide and in Washington State. I recognize the need to support marine trades. Over the next year, the Port Commission, with the involvement of Port staff, the marine trades groups, the City and the public, will need to take a hard look at the potential future uses.

I am happy to report that when the Port completed the environmental review documents and the Subarea Plan, the effects of climate change and sea level rise were taken into consideration. The Port's environmental staff and City staff gave this issue complete attention along with other similar issues. For example, since this is former tidelands special attention was paid to potential effects from a seismic event. New and rehabilitated structures and infrastructure are and will be designed to take sea level change into account.



**Michael Alvarez Shepard**

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Different Ports have different methods of electing Port Commissioners. For example, the ports of Seattle and Tacoma elect five commissioners county-wide while the Port of Everett elects three commissioners by districts. In 2012 voters narrowly voted against moving to a five-commissioner model. Because of the three Commissioner structure, two Port Commissioners cannot meet privately without calling a public meeting. This limits ability to plan and innovate. Now that County Council elections are on a five-district model, it is complicated to have Port on a different system. I support moving to five Commissioners in alignment with the other countywide elections.

The ASB lagoon is a unique and contaminated structure. Construction of a tidelands bulkhead of this nature would be nearly impossible to build again, given environmental and treaty rights concerns. Regardless of use decision for the ASB, cleanup should be our first priority. Given sufficient cleanup, I would like to investigate opportunities for armored shoreline mediation, habitat restoration and salmon rearing in the lagoon. Once we are able to achieve substantial progress on the main Waterfront District development, I would be interested in determining if a marina, upland boat storage or residential is the best option for this property.

Climate change is real and it's happening. Numerous indicators prove that the environment is dramatically out of balance with free market capitalism. When we make development decisions, we must account for the effects of a rising sea level so we don't have to come back and spend more money to fix it later. I'll defer to the experts for their opinion on what engineering measures we should take, but from a policy standpoint, we need to account for realistic sea level rise expectations. The Waterfront District is a low elevation location and requires adequate planning.

## Port of Bellingham Commission — District 2

**Ken Bell**

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Ken Bell acknowledged receipt of the questions. When his answers were not received by deadline a follow-up message was left on his answering machine.



**Barry Wenger**

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Yes. The current situation is very confusing to voters and also creates difficulty for community events where more than one commissioner may need to be in attendance. It also sometimes prevents commissioners from performing site visits and gain valuable insight into on the ground operations that yield better, more informed decisions. I would support a five district plan that allows for in-district primaries and county-wide elections in November, as is required by state law.

The current marina proposal is a poor approach to cleanup that isn't right for our community. Instead, I support alternative mixed-use options that include a large park featuring Coast Salish story poles marking the entrance to Whatcom Waterway, a downtown-oriented vessel moorage (with a market where fishing families can sell directly to the public), a smaller marina on the inner edge of the ASB serving a drystack boat facility in the tissue warehouse, with marine trades fully integrated, and an innovative stormwater treatment lagoon providing salt marsh habitat at the water's edge of C street.

The Port should prepare for the worst case scenario of sea level rise and increasing severe storm threats by elevating the perimeter of the site using innovative public access improvements that will protect the shoreline with attractive park space. Utilities should be planned to withstand inundation and provide backup power generation capabilities. Stormwater management is a serious challenge. The site needs to be planned to provide adequate water storage during extreme events, and safe, clean drainage afterwards. Cleanup standards should be evaluated for their performance in the long-term, and all climate change mitigation options should be meaningfully considered and implemented.