

CAPITAL BUDGET STANDOFF EXPLAINED - WHAT HAPPENED?

Where is the CERB program? Where are the cleanup grants? Where did the money for my little project go? Those questions, and many more, are being asked all over the state these days. The answer, as you have probably heard, is that for the first time in modern history the state legislature did not pass a Capital Budget. This is the budget that uses bond proceeds and some other funding sources to fund capital projects such as schools and colleges.

How can this be? Most press coverage referenced "gridlock" and made passing mention of a water problem called the "Hirst decision." Here is a brief explanation of what is going on.



Last year the Supreme Court issued a decision in *Hirst v Whatcom County* that effectively ended small-scale well drilling in our state. Until that decision, state law allowed a landowner to drill a well that pumped less than 5,000 gallons a day without getting a water right. These so-called "exempt wells" allowed mostly residential uses of land that was not served by an existing water supply system. The Hirst case ended that practice, instead ruling that a landowner has to prove that a proposed well will not impact any other water rights in the basin – which is slow, expensive and in some cases not even feasible.

The Senate Republicans, who control the chamber by one vote, passed a bill that clarified the legality of these small wells. The Democrats, under tremendous pressure from Tribes, refused to pass a permanent fix – instead offering a temporary fix to allow currently-planned actions to proceed. This was not acceptable to the Senate, who said that they would not pass a Capital Budget until their solution was passed.

That standoff was never resolved, and today we have no law allowing small wells, and also no Capital Budget. Since selling bonds to finance that budget requires a 60% majority, any solution will require support from both parties. The two sides are both very deeply dug in to their position, and until that is resolved, we are not going to see a Capital Budget. ■

PORT SPOTLIGHT

CRUISING BUSINESS GROWING AT PORT OF CLARKSTON

The Port of Clarkston, at the Southeast corner of our state, is becoming an important embarkation point for cruise boat passengers. The cruise boat industry has been quietly growing in Clarkston for several years, and has now reached an all-time high.



Four cruise lines now call on the Port, which has seen its business model evolve from being a turnaround point twenty years ago to an origin and destination point for cruises both upriver and also downriver from Clarkston. These tours average two and a half days each direction, and have been growing in popularity.

The result is that the Port of Clarkston has become a full-service embarkation and exit point for thousands of passengers each year. There were over 18,000 passengers in 2016, which brought over two million dollars per year in estimated economic impact to the region. At least one cruise line plans to increase its offerings in 2018.

This welcome increase in business has also brought challenges to

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FROM ERIC JOHNSON

FAST BALLS, CURVE BALLS & CHANGE UPS



You have heard me mention before that one of the most significant changes in what WPPA does has been the evolution of our seminars and conferences. They have become more numerous, and more sophisticated. This is due entirely to the demand for them, which continues to increase.

But there has been another change in the past two years. I am not sure if it is a temporary thing, or more permanent. I am talking about our involvement in legal cases. WPPA used to get involved in a court case about as often as the Mariner's made the playoffs (which is three times in forty years – not that anyone is counting ...).

But lately, entirely as a result of the "carbon wars," that has changed in a big way. The groups that are hell-bent to stop the movement of any carbon product through our state have declared a de-facto war on the statutes and practices that ports use in our everyday lives – regardless of whether you are involved in carbon or not. Because of this, WPPA has ended up reluctantly engaging in four cases over the past two years. All we have been trying to do is maintain the traditional implementation of laws like SEPA, the Open Public Meetings Act, and the Shoreline Management Act.

After fouling off these pitches for two years, I have decided that I could use some organized help. Until now, it has been my responsibility, along with WPPA staff, our attorney and the attorney for whatever port was getting sued to make recommendations to our Executive Committee about whether to get involved in a case. That system has worked, but it is a bit ad-hoc. It also can get stressful when we have to make decisions about how to structure arguments, etc. After thinking about it a couple of weekends ago while mowing my lawn I decided it would be a good idea to have a more structured system to think these matters through.

I have recommended to the Executive Committee that they create a WPPA Legal Review Committee, which would consist of four or five attorneys who 'volunteer' to be a sounding board and discussion panel for making recommendations to the Executive Committee in a more structured way. The Executive Committee would retain the authority to make all final decisions. I am pleased to report that the Committee agreed that this would be a good idea, in light of the increased frequency of legal issues that we seem to be getting involved in.

I hope it results in an improvement in our decision-making process. As for the Mariners – I wish it were so simple. ■

UPCOMING EVENTS

Environmental Seminar
September 21-22, 2017
Heathman Lodge, Vancouver

Annual Meeting
November 15-17, 2017
Motif Hotel, Seattle

Small Ports Seminar
October 26-27, 2017
Enzian Inn, Leavenworth

PORT SPOTLIGHT

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the port. The port has had to greatly increase the sophistication of its services, from over-water fueling to ground transportation to garbage pickup. "We have had to up our game" said port manager Wanda Keefer, "We welcome the business though, and it is great to see visitors enjoy our part of the state and see the importance of the Snake River."

These passenger operations have highlighted the importance of maintaining channel depths and berthing areas that support cruise operations on the Columbia/Snake system. With many of these passengers in their 70's or 80's – or even 90's, safe navigation depths are more important than ever.

The four cruise lines that currently call the Port of Clarkston are American Cruise Lines, American Queen Steamboat Line, UnCruise Adventures and Lindblad Expeditions. ■

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Accounts Receivable Manager
Port of Seattle

Facilities Management Specialist
Port of Tacoma

Accounting & Financial Reporting Business Technology Analyst
Port of Seattle

HR Manager, Labor & Employee Relations
Port of Tacoma

Finance Operations Specialist
Port of Everett

Project Manager II, Engineering
Port of Tacoma

Executive Director
Humboldt Bay Harbor, California

Director, Port Operations
Northwest Seaport Alliance

Airport Operations Specialist III
Port of Bellingham

Director of Marine Terminals
Port of Longview

Payroll/Lease Specialist
Port of Camas-Washougal

Project Engineer
Port of Longview

Payroll Technician II
Port of Tacoma

Director of Economic Development
Port of Bellingham

Chief Commercial Officer
Port of Vancouver

If you would like information on any of these positions, visit washingtontports.org/washington-ports/employment-opportunities