



# PORT OF WHITMAN COUNTY STRATEGIC PLAN

*2021-2025*

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## YOUR PORT

The Port of Whitman County is a port authority located in the Palouse region of southeastern Washington. Driven by the development of the Columbia-Snake River System, the Port was formed in 1958 to provide access to slack water navigation, promote industrial development and create recreational opportunities on the Snake River. Today, the Port of Whitman County strives to make the Palouse a great place to live and a better place to work.

The Port of Whitman County operates three lines of business: 1) industrial real estate; 2) telecommunications infrastructure development; and 3) recreation.

The Port operates three properties on the Snake River: Port of Wilma, near the Idaho state line; Port of Central Ferry, midway between Walla Walla and Colfax; and Port of Almota, four miles downriver of Lower Granite Lock and Dam in Colfax. The Port's more recently acquired, off-water properties include Pullman Industrial Park, which borders Washington State University, and Port of Whitman Business Air Center, which occupies the former site of the Colfax airport and also features an industrial park.

The Port also builds telecommunications infrastructure across the state, supports tourism and transportation needs county-wide and manages Boyer Park & Marina in Colfax to enhance recreational opportunities on the Snake River.

In all, port activities support more than 5,369 jobs for the surrounding community. For more information, please visit the Port's website: [www.portwhitman.com](http://www.portwhitman.com).

## YOUR COMMISSION

The Port of Whitman County is governed by a three-person elected Board of Commissioners that sets policy, approves all expenditures and appoints the Executive Director and Port Attorney. Commissioners serve six-year terms and while they are elected countywide, each must live in a specific district within Whitman County. The current Commissioners are Karl Webber (District 1), Kristine Meyer (District 2) and Tom Kammerzell (District 3).



**Karl Webber**



**Kristine Meyer**



**Tom Kammerzell**

## YOUR COUNTY

The Port District of Whitman County encompasses the entire county.



# OUR VISION, OUR MISSION, OUR CORE VALUES

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## VISION

We are valued for our ability to operate sustainably; move strategically, decisively and effectively; and make the Palouse a great place to live and a better place to work.

## MISSION

The Port of Whitman County is dedicated to improving the quality of life for all citizens of Whitman County through industrial real estate development, preservation of multi-modal transportation, facilitation of economic development and provision of on-water recreational opportunities.

## CORE VALUES

- » **Integrity**—We deliver on our commitments and inspire public trust.
- » **Sustainability**—We make business decisions that ensure long-term financial sustainability.
- » **Stewardship**—We are responsible stewards of community resources and the environment.
- » **Collaboration**—We seek partnerships that drive economic development.
- » **Leadership**—We are a model of leading decisively in the public interest.



# CREATING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

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A 2020 study quantified the Port of Whitman County's impact on the regional economy, finding that Port activity had a significant positive effect. Author Steve Peterson, a research economist and clinical assistant professor with the University of Idaho, wrote, "The Port of Whitman County is arguably the most impactful economic development agency in the region."

## DID YOU KNOW?

### – \$1=\$6.18 RETURN ON INVESTMENT

*Every dollar of tax payer investment creates \$6.18 in local tax revenue. Tax dollars are invested back into economic development efforts across Whitman County.*

### – PORT OPERATIONS SUPPORT 20% OF COUNTY JOBS.

*In Whitman County, the Port's economic contributions account for 20% of all jobs, 31% of output, 25% of total compensation and 23% of gross regional product.*

### – IN TOTAL, THAT'S MORE THAN 5,369 LIVING WAGE JOBS.

*Business associated with the Port support more than 5,369 living wage jobs – paying on average \$68,627 in annual salaries and benefits.*

### – DIRECT JOBS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PORT GREW 334% IN TWO DECADES.

*Between 1996 and 2019, direct jobs associated with the Port increased 334% cumulatively.*



# OUR LINES OF BUSINESS

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## INDUSTRIAL REAL ESTATE

The Port currently operates three on-water port/industrial sites and two off-water properties as part of its mission to develop industrial real estate.

### **Port of Wilma**

The Port of Wilma (pictured top left) is the largest and busiest of the on-water port sites and is noted for its diverse tenant base and heavy industrial character. It is located near the terminus of the Columbia-Snake River inland waterway.

### **Port of Almota**

The Port of Almota (pictured bottom left) serves as a major grain-shipping terminal for the Palouse region and is the former site of the now submerged historic town of Almota, where Lewis and Clark stopped on their historic voyage through the Pacific Northwest.

### **Port of Central Ferry**

Centrally located on State Route 127 between Walla Walla and Colfax, Central Ferry (pictured bottom right) is the most rural of all the port sites and allows access to a wide geographic area.



### Port of Whitman Business Air Center

The Port of Whitman Business Air Center is a small general aviation airport and industrial park. It is located on Airport Road approximately one mile from State Route 26, directly adjacent to the Colfax Airport.

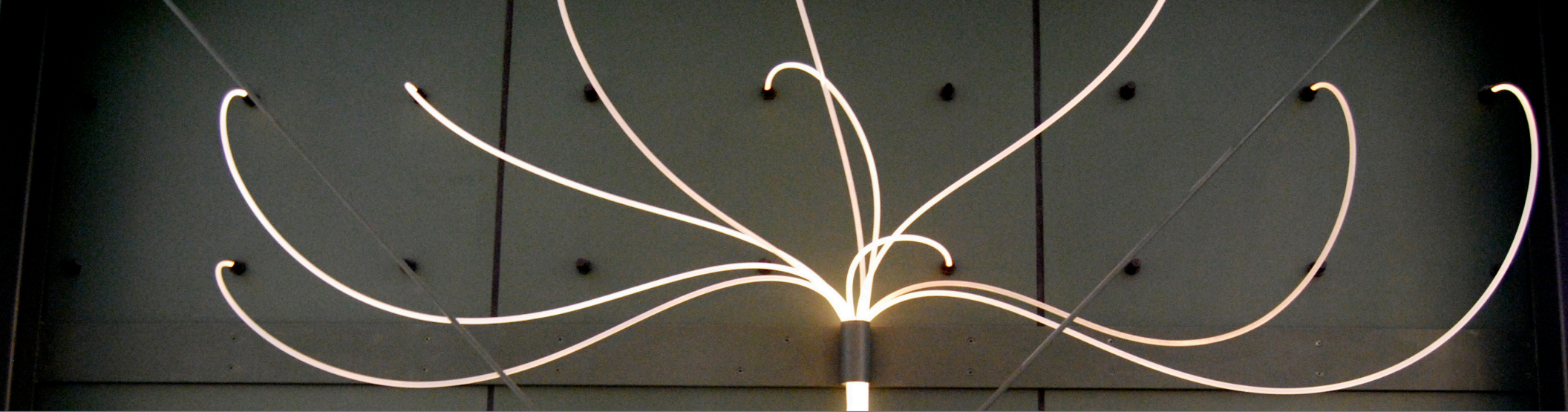
### Pullman Industrial Park

Located on the north end of Pullman, Pullman Industrial Park (pictured top right) is home to several technology and manufacturing firms. It is located adjacent to Washington State University and within an easy drive of the University of Idaho. The western portion of Pullman Industrial Park includes 8.36 acres of undeveloped land, which is zoned light industrial.

### Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvements

*Information on planned improvements for the Port properties can be found in the Port's 2021 Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvements.*





## TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Telecommunications work has played an increasing role in the Port's business operations since the 1990s. About 25 years ago, the Port Commission dreamt of bringing high bandwidth internet access to the rural communities of Whitman County. Legislative changes and strategic thinking on the part of the Port Commissioners has allowed the Port to build out over 300 miles of dark fiber in a network ranging from the City of Spokane in the north to the City of Clarkston in the south. This commitment to expanding internet to all reaches of Whitman County continues today.

Most recently, the Port and a private internet company partnered to bring fiber-to-the-home to underserved communities across Whitman County, including Rosalia, Tekoa, Oakesdale Garfield and Palouse. Construction began in fall of 2020.

In addition, the Port has sought out partnerships with other ports that share an interest in bringing broadband infrastructure to previously unserved or underserved communities across Washington State.

In January 2020, the Port founded and began managing Petrichor Broadband LLC, a limited liability company that seeks to meet the broadband needs of Washington State. Other initial members include Port of Bellingham, Port of Kalama, Port of Pasco, Port of Ridgefield and Port of Skagit County.

These members selected the Port to manage the cooperative for a minimum of three years, due to the Port's proven ability to develop infrastructure, partner with local and regional carriers and provide affordable, state-of-the-art telecommunications opportunities. The Port will be compensated for managing the cooperative and obtained independent financial analysis which showed that the Port will realize a cumulative net positive cash flow of \$679,045 in the first three years.

The mission of the LLC is to provide wholesale telecommunications facilities with the collective goals of: enabling communication services to unserved or underserved areas within member communities; and creating economic opportunities, including sustainable community wage jobs; and consolidating administrative and operating functions for efficiency.

## RECREATION

As part of its ability to own and operate on-water recreation facilities, the Port manages Boyer Park & Marina in Colfax.

Boyer Park & Marina is a 56-acre full-service marina and campground located near the base of Lower Granite Lock and Dam. The Port funds, operates and maintains the park and marina as a public service to the citizens of Whitman County, as it is the only port facility that is appropriate for use by everyone in the county.

The Port also organizes the annual Snake River Family Festival at Boyer Park & Marina in the early summertime. The event draws about 500 people to the Park each year to celebrate the Columbia-Snake River System.

Past festivals have featured live entertainment, a hot, catered lunch, local ice cream, educational vendors and activities for kids of all ages: scavenger hunts, bouncy houses, a fun spin-off of a sand box including wheat and an interactive, fiberglass sculpture of a Pacific Northwest salmon named “Fin.”

The Port will continue to offer this family-friendly, free festival to its community as part of its commitment to encourage recreational opportunity on the Snake and advocate for the continued on-water transport provided by our working rivers.



# SUMMARY OF GOALS

- GOAL 1** Diversify Our Economy
- GOAL 2** Encourage Balanced & Economical Multimodal Transportation System
- GOAL 3** Collaborate to Drive Economic Growth
- GOAL 4** Acquire, Develop & Maintain Properties
- GOAL 5** Improve Our Financial Position
- GOAL 6** Expand Broadband Access
- GOAL 7** Enhance Community Outreach and Engagement



# 1 DIVERSIFY OUR ECONOMY

## Strategic Assessment

Whitman County's major economic base is agriculture, an industry that fluctuates widely in response to interest rates, world markets, weather conditions, government policy and inflation/recession cycles. We are also living in the age of robotics, computers and high technology, and it takes fewer and fewer people to perform the work tasks, including farming. In order to offset these agricultural economic fluctuations and the displacement of farm workers, other types of industries should be developed in the county. The official population of Whitman County is directly related to enrollment at Washington State University (WSU). Without WSU, the county's population would be spiraling downward like that of the small towns in the area. To state it simply, we need more jobs in Whitman County, such as those created by high-technology companies in Pullman Industrial Park, to decrease out-migration of population. It is the Port's opinion that economic base diversification, state-of-the-art telecommunications and economic development outreach in the rural communities are some suitable paths to this goal.

## Strategic Action Items

- » Identify and assist in the development of alternative products, markets and industries relying on the human, organizational, agricultural and natural resources of the region.
- » Support the storage, handling, processing and promoting of value-added agricultural commodities.
- » Undertake active recruitment of new economic activities and accelerate the Port's involvement in economic development activities in Whitman County's small, rural communities.
- » Promote tourism as a viable industry by advertising, publicizing or distributing information designed to attract visitors as outlined by RCW 53.08.255.
- » Initiate dialogue with other public agencies and the private sector to obtain and support industrial feasibility studies of potential regional significance.
- » Partner with local, regional and state economic development organizations in order to recruit, retain, enhance and foster business and industry.
- » Utilize powers to build telecommunications infrastructure throughout Whitman County.



# 2 ENCOURAGE BALANCED & ECONOMICAL MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

## Strategic Assessment

Provision of water-transport access by the Port has enhanced the competitive advantage of agricultural producers and industries in the region by reducing reliance on overburdened rail car inventories and truck transport. However, the cumulative impacts of major rail line abandonments could result in an over-reliance on barge and truck transport. With the continuing debate over salmon recovery and possible dam removal, these issues become even more important to the continuing prosperity of our region. The success of water-transport has also placed considerable stress on the capacity of state and county roads in the District due to the volume of both locally originating and interstate truck traffic to Whitman port sites. This impacts the condition of roads for all users, as well as increasing the public costs of roadway maintenance. Therefore, the Port District ultimately benefits from the maintenance of adequate rail, road and air transportation in the District and can play a major role in identifying local needs and supporting adequate overall transportation planning in the region at local, state and federal levels.



## Strategic Action Items

- » Formally participate in the State Transportation and Rail Plans on a regular basis and partner with local railroads to preserve and enhance rail service in Whitman County.
- » Seek establishment and recognition in the State Transportation Plan of the major north south and east-west traffic (rail, barge & truck) corridors in the District and seek prioritization of the truck routes within the county road plan.
- » Strive to maintain existing rail access at all port sites operated by the District.
- » In conjunction with affected industries, review and participate in the acquisition and operation of short line rail facilities.
- » Support completion of the proposed Wawawai to Lower Granite Dam road in partnership with the US Army Corps of Engineers and other pertinent parties.
- » Continue to participate in the operation and maintenance of Pullman-Moscow Regional Airport and related public facilities.
- » Maintain and improve the Port of Whitman Business Air Center.
- » Explore further partnerships to enhance and promote other rural Whitman County airports as needed.
- » Support continued economical and ecologically friendly navigation of the Columbia/Snake River system.
- » Support State and Federal policies that recognize the increasing transportation demands created by the local agriculture sector.
- » Participate in the PCC Rail Authority through board membership.

# 3 COLLABORATE TO DRIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH

## Strategic Assessment

The Port holds the following capabilities as a general-purpose economic development agency and an off-water industrial property developer. The Port acts as a liaison between private businesses and local, state and federal business assistance programs. It is a conduit to state and federal lobbyists. Therefore, the Port needs to communicate with, and educate, the public about these capabilities. The Port must continue to increase the coordinated, cooperative promotion of the area to prospective industrial investors and firms. Most of the smaller communities in the District have experienced population decline and the actual disappearance of essential goods and services. Much of this problem is due to a lack of local jobs. However, some of the problem is due to a need for greater organizational strength. Now, as the Port's on-water sites have become successful, the Port is able to turn more of its attention to further off-water development. However, both because of the Port's limited resources and because it increases a project's chances of success, it is essential that the affected communities become involved as partners with the Port in developing off-water projects as per Port Resolution # 190. Communities need to organize investment/development groups that are dedicated to the economic wellbeing of their communities and can work with the Port toward the same goal.



## Strategic Action Items

- » Acquire feasible sites in Whitman County for cooperative development with interested communities and firms. Initiate dialogue and work in partnership with other public agencies and the private sector for economic development purposes.
- » With community support, acquire and lease feasible single or multiple-use facilities in Whitman County communities.
- » Seek partnership with entities such as the Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB), Washington State University (WSU) and the State Legislature to fund economic development facilities and services.
- » Provide input on District and County needs to the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association (PNWA) and the Washington Public Ports Association (WPPA).
- » Monitor changes in water rights policies and laws as they may potentially impact business and agricultural interests.
- » Contact State legislators to provide input on policy work.
- » Assist or refer private business needs to agencies providing assistance.
- » Distribute promotional materials for the District and County with a particular focus on developing materials for Port facilities.

# 4 ACQUIRE, DEVELOP & MAINTAIN PROPERTIES

## Strategic Assessment

In order for the Port to continue its success, it must continue acquisition, development and management of all Port properties and facilities. Therefore, the Port must continue to nurture its existing on-water and off-water sites and diversify its interests by exploring alternative locations and approaches, such as micro-enterprise development in rural communities. With the increasing challenges facing waterfront development as a result of the ESA listings of salmon and steelhead and updated stormwater regulations, the Port must be forward thinking in its future development plans and incorporate proactive methods for industrial development in balance with watershed improvements and preservation.

## Strategic Action Items

- » Maintain a flexible leasing policy responsive to the needs of the District
- » Provide public port facilities as warranted by market demand.
- » Support public safety programs at Port facilities
- » Work toward acquisition of additional acreage wherever needed or invited for future Port expansion.
- » Consider acquisition of additional land at all Port sites as needed.
- » Encourage maximum taxable tenant improvements at all Port sites.
- » Incorporate proactive environmental planning with industrial development.
- » Maintain all Port properties and facilities.



# 5 IMPROVE OUR FINANCIAL POSITION

## Strategic Assessment

The Port must maintain its fiscal ability to provide needed resources and services to all clients while seeking to minimize reliance on tax revenue. Historically, Port policy has been to conserve the District's money and not require more taxes beyond what was originally authorized. Tax revenues support the Port activities including the continued operation and maintenance of Boyer Park & Marina as a free day-use park on the river for the citizens of Whitman County. Tax revenues aid in the continued support of the Pullman/Moscow Airport through payment on a long-term bond and the ongoing economic development activities, which entail support of legislative lobbying efforts, business recruitment efforts and business retention efforts for the District and Palouse region at large. While the Port works to become self-supporting from internal revenues, this goal should not take precedence over economic development efforts in Whitman County.

## Strategic Action Items

- » Periodically review long-term lease rates to consider the impacts of inflation, the needs of the District and the competitiveness of leases.
- » Periodically review the best use of excess or inactive properties and consider their sale to fund capital projects.
- » Strive to increase the District's eligibility to procure funds under state and federal guidelines and utilize that eligibility for desirable economic development projects.



**\$1 = \$6.18**

Every dollar of taxpayer investment creates \$6.18 in local tax revenue. Tax dollars are invested back into local communities.

# 6 EXPAND BROADBAND ACCESS

## Strategic Assessment

The Port must continue to pursue telecommunications infrastructure projects that enhance broadband services countywide. Many Whitman County citizens still lack access to reliable internet services, due to both a lack of rural broadband opportunity and competition in the market. In addition, the Port recognizes the value in aggregating statewide opportunities for federal and state broadband funding. Therefore, the Port will continue to collaborate with Ports across the state to create a consistent voice for broadband funding opportunities.

## Strategic Action Items

- » Work within the guidelines of HB 2664, a House bill passed in June 2018, extending existing telecommunications authority to all ports in Washington state in order to facilitate public-private partnerships in wholesale telecommunications services and infrastructure.
- » Work with Whitman County's independent telephone companies, when invited and where feasible, to create infrastructure that will help our local providers enhance telecommunications services offered to rural communities.
- » Work with public and private agencies building telecommunications infrastructure to provide and link networks that will reach in and out of Whitman County.
- » Build transmission and “bricks and mortar” type facilities for lease in Whitman County that will encourage telecommunications companies to provide enhanced services in rural Whitman County.
- » Build partnerships with regional and state-wide Port districts to facilitate the growth of a dark fiber telecommunications network.
- » Pursue opportunities for last mile build out of fiber to the home (FTTH) networks in communities.



# 7 ENHANCE COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

## Strategic Assessment

The Port is most effective when it enjoys strong community connections. From hosting 500 community members at the annual Snake River Family Festival to meeting with local Future Farmers of America, the Port must continue to seek out intentional opportunities to engage with the citizens of Whitman County. With the recent addition of a Communications Director position, the Port is uniquely positioned to bolster its communications and outreach efforts in the next five years. Through partnerships, sponsorships, civic presentations, community events and media, the Port connects with the community in multiple ways.

## Strategic Action Items

- » Increase the public's understanding about the Port and its work.
- » Share data demonstrating the economic value of ports to our local and state economy.
- » Educate the public about the value of our river system to jobs, trade, agriculture, hydropower and recreation.
- » Continue to organize the Snake River Family Festival as a free, family-friendly and educational event.
- » Establish and maintain relationships with key stakeholders in the region.
- » Deepen relationships with economic development agencies.





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