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Estuary management tops Port Commission agenda

(NEWPORT, OR) Development, resource protection and climate impacts were topics at Tuesday's meeting of the Port of Newport Commission, when proposed updates to the Yaquina Bay Estuary Management Plan were discussed.

Meg Reed, policy specialist at the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD), shared recommendations to revise the plan, which is now more than 40 years old. The changes were proposed by a steering committee, formed in 2020, consisting of representatives from DLCD, Lincoln County, the City of Newport, the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, the Port of Newport, and the Port of Toledo.

Estuary management plans are part of the state's planning goals. Each identify management units around the estuary that are classified under the headings of development, conservation, or natural. Based on the classification, a management unit has a list of allowable, conditional, and not allowable uses that ultimately guide a review process whenever alterations are proposed. For a more thorough understanding of Yaquina Bay's Estuary Management Plan, visit www.yaquina-emp.org.

"So why are we updating it? The plan was first developed and adopted in 1982. It has held up fairly well over time but there are certainly some things that have changed in that time period. The biggest of them being data and how it can be used," Reed said. Use of GIS mapping was an example offered, since 1982 mapping was hand-drawn.

Other updates were made to the plan, including removing outdated references, the implementation of estuary zoning districts, the changes in some boundaries, and the consideration of climate change and vulnerabilities that may occur as a result.

Port commissioners asked several questions about the newly-added climate vulnerability consideration and discussed how interpretation and confusion over definitions may ultimately create difficulty in future permitting and management.

Reed encouraged commissioners and anyone interested to review the proposed updates and offer public comment via the website. Once public comment concludes, a revised draft will be published in August and, following a formal review, adoption expected in early 2024.

In other business, commissioners completed their evaluation of Port General Manager Paula Miranda and offered high praise of the leader, who began her fifth year with the port in May. From the juggling of numerous capital projects to the effective networking with state, federal, and local stakeholders, commissioners congratulated Miranda on another successful year and voted unanimously to add an additional four percent increase to the port-wide six percent cost of living increase provided to all staff.

"It helps having a good commission and a good staff. I have an amazing team," Miranda said.

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One key staff member was also recognized at the monthly meeting. Director of Operations Aaron Bretz was congratulated on reaching the milestone of six years in port employment. Miranda called Bretz her “right hand” and was joined by commissioners in praising the director.

Tuesday’s meeting marked another milestone, when Commission President Jim Burke offered his final farewell at the end of his term. On the occasion of his last meeting, several commissioners thanked Burke for his steady leadership and his calming influence. Burke began his service to the Port of Newport in July of 2018.

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