



The Port of Port Townsend commissioners named planning director and in-house counsel Eric Toews, right, as interim executive director. Toews is shown talking with Greg Englin, director of operations and port development. (Jeannie McMacken/Peninsula Daily News)

Port of Port Townsend director resigns; acting director named

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By Jeannie McMacken

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PORT TOWNSEND — Port of Port Townsend commissioners unanimously accepted the resignation of Executive Director Sam Gibboney effective immediately, and named Eric Toews, current planning director and in-house counsel, acting executive director.

Gibboney's letter of resignation was discussed during a 90-minute executive session Wednesday afternoon with port legal counsel Frank Chmelik present.

Commission President Steve Tucker and Commissioners Bill Putney and Pete Hanke voted unanimously in public session to accept her resignation. They also approved the release of a letter of recommendation for her use in getting another job.

No public comment was taken.

Gibboney was executive director of the Port of Port Townsend from June 7, 2016, to Wednesday.

The commissioners voted unanimously to name Toews acting

executive director.

Toews has been with the port, first as a contract employee and then as a full-time senior staff member, since 2011.

“Executive Director Gibboney did an exceptional job for the port and we’re appreciative,” Toews said.

“We’re going to carry forward, business as usual, until such time the commission makes a decision regarding an interim director.

“Attorney Chmelik outlined that someone has to be responsible for the day-to-day operations in case of an emergency. It’s a fulfillment of a legal responsibility.

“Port staff is exceptionally skilled and we’re a team.”

In her resignation letter, Gibboney said that she “took the job of executive director at a time of tremendous change and significant and operational challenges.

“I acted as a change agent to confront these challenges and I’m proud of what the port commissioners and our excellent port staff and I were able to accomplish working as a team,” she continued.

“Nevertheless, as we discussed, the tenure of a change agent can be limited. It is now time for a new executive director to work with the port commission and port staff to continue to drive progress on these challenges.”

She concluded, “I thank you for the opportunity to work with each of you and the port staff.”

Tucker said, in addition to accepting Gibboney’s letter of resignation, the commissioners approved a separation agreement as well as the letter of recommendation.

The letter outlined her accomplishments and provided a recommendation for her future employment.

“You took the job as executive director of the port at a time of tremendous change and significant financial infrastructure and operational challenges,” the recommendation letter says.

“You immediately confronted these challenges with energy and enthusiasm.



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“You and the port commission, however, have determined there was a need for a change in the port’s senior management to allow the port to move forward on initiatives.

“To be clear, the port commission recognizes the tenure of a change agent for an organization can be limited. You have served as that change agent and we are in a significantly better position.”

Pam Petranek, Port Townsend Marine Trades Association spokesperson, said the organization is looking forward to helping the port over the months ahead.

“The Port Townsend Marine Trades Association and the port are on the same team,” Petranek said. “We will work together through this transition. PTMTA is focused on the practical work of supporting our port commissioners in working on the critical issues and sustainability of the port.

“We recognize that the port has been wonderfully successful in the last 40 years at generating economic growth and encouraging job creation. The entire community benefits from the quality, talent and strengths of what we share together here.”

Chris Sanok, chair of the Port Townsend Marine Trades Association, is looking forward to a new chapter in the port’s history.

“The port has been wonderfully successful in the last 40 years at generating economic growth and encouraging job creation,” Sanok said.

“These are difficult times for the Port of Port Townsend, and our three commissioners have shown tremendous dedication to the port and to the community.

The port has struggled with finding funds to replace the two failing Point Hudson jetties, as well as other infrastructure in need of repair or replacement, and has faced issues with leases and financial problems.

“Commission Chair Steve Tucker has reached out with some ideas on how the marine trades and the port can leverage their cooperation and the recent economic impact study to address the capital funding needs of the port.

“We look forward to working more with him and the new interim executive director to collaborate and find creative solutions to the serious challenges ahead.

“The entire community benefits from the quality, talent and strengths that we share together here.”

Jake Beattie, Northwest Maritime Center executive director, said: “We regret that this ended up not being a good fit for Sam, but we have a long standing, productive relationship with Mr. Toews and are encouraged by the commission choosing him as acting director.”

According to a prepared statement released after the meeting, the port commission “thanks Sam for her service and wishes her success in her future endeavors.”

The port will be “moving forward with discussions regarding the next steps, and identification of an interim executive director.”

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