

# La Conner Weekly News - Your independent hometown award-winning newspaper

## Port open house lays out Marina options

By [Bill Reynolds](#)

Those attending the Port of Skagit's open house Thursday at La Conner Marina lost their marbles.

That was the plan, it turns out.

Port consultants handed people Zip-Lock bags containing seven marbles each as they entered the Swinomish Yacht Club for the two-hour event, which offered an opportunity to share ideas and learn more about Marina redevelopment plans.

Attendees were asked to indicate preferences by placing marbles in jars matching the respective Port proposals presented on illustrated placards. They ranged from pedestrian and roadway bridge construction to an emphasis on commercial space and marine recreation areas to installation of an iconic sculpture and flexible use pavilion.

The casual format allowed area residents, business owners and Town staff to chat with executive director Sara Young and Port officials about the future of the 13-acre commercially zoned parcel located at the heart of the marina complex.

"I thought it went well," Town Administrator Scott Thomas told the Weekly News afterward. "It was nice to have illustrations of different proposals. This format is one we are considering for the Town's Comp Plan update, so I was pleased to see it working for the Port."

Residents were also invited to offer specific feedback for marina redevelopment on post-it notes. That input advocated for environmental and green energy issues –solar generation – along with tiny homes and low-income housing and honoring La Conner's maritime history and the previous occupants of the land.

Some skepticism was heard. One person in a small group discussion said, with a not-so-subtle hint of sarcasm, that "this is your tax dollars at work."

However, Port leadership contends maintaining the status quo is not fiscally sustainable.

"The marina property is owned by the public and it's underutilized," Port of Skagit Commission President Dr. Kevin Ware said prior to the open house. "The Port needs to produce a better public benefit from that property, and we hope to do so by improving marine trades opportunities, contributing to the year-round economy of La Conner and incorporating more public access and trails near the waterfront."

The Port first shared a “visioning presentation” of marina redevelopment plan at a public meeting with Town Council and Planning Commission members at Maple Hall in May.

“Since May,” said Communications Director Linda Tyler, “the Port has been gathering input from the community and identifying priorities for the underutilized property.

“Early priorities,” she emphasized, as did Ware, “include marine trades, improved access to the waterfront, community open space and improved traffic and pedestrian circulation.”

[The Port of Skagit](#) was created in 1964 to generate jobs in the maritime, agriculture, wood products, fisheries and minerals industries.

One of the Port’s earliest projects was construction of the La Conner Marina for vessels using the Swinomish Channel. Its south basin opened in the spring of 1970. Eight years later the north basin, home to several boat building and maintenance ventures, opened.

With the marina now in its second half-century, Port officials are looking to craft a plan that meets the needs of a much different local economy.

The goal, they say, is to reach consensus on a plan that assures retention and support of marine-related uses, complements – but doesn’t compete with – the downtown business district, enhances public safety and efficient traffic flow and secures the highest and best use of the property.

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