



NEWS RELEASE

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Subject: Port of Chelan County supports business projects

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The Port of Chelan County's investment in and support of several business-related programs in North Central Washington is valuable in attracting new and cultivating existing businesses, according to reports delivered to Port commissioners on Wednesday, February 14th.

Martin Straub, president of the Greater Wenatchee Area Technology Alliance (GWATA), related the results of a Port-funded feasibility study for building a web-based technology resource directory. He reported the directory would be used to facilitate networking among North Central Washington businesses and technology organizations, those considering opportunities in the region, entrepreneurial start-ups, and related support agencies. The web site would act as a hub, connecting users with a searchable directory of private and public technology organizations and services.

Straub said the study found approximately 740 businesses in Chelan, Douglas, and Okanogan counties would be initial target users of a web-based directory. Benefits would include promoting the local technology cluster, helping potential new businesses connect with established local resources, increasing NCW's competitiveness in the global marketplace, and encouraging collaboration. Straub said GWATA, anticipates the initial startup cost of developing the technology and launching the web site would be about \$20,000. He said this would not include the cost of populating, marketing, or maintaining the database,

"The Port receives a lot of questions about the local availability of technological expertise," Port economic development director Ron Johnston-Rodriguez observed. "This resource would be very helpful to the Port and to the business community." Commissioners agreed the study had proven the need and benefits of a resource directory and encouraged Straub to work with other GWATA members to formulate a marketing and funding plan.

Commissioners also heard an update from Wenatchee Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau Director Roger Clute on several Port-supported projects including the Bureau's annual calendar of events, the visitor-oriented web site www.visitchelancounty.com, development of four informational kiosks, brochure publication, and a Wenatchee Valley video. The Port also has

contracted with the Visitors Bureau to help market meeting facilities at the Port-owned Confluence Technology Center, complementing the range of services offered by hotels and other private enterprises.

“I really believe the CVB and the Port relationship is essential to fostering additional tourism in the valley,” Clute stated during the commission session. “We’re much stronger working as a partnership than working alone. Not only is the Port’s financial support important to our visitor outreach, but it also provides us the opportunity to market the CTC facility, which gives more impact to our efforts in marketing to meeting planners. We have a super relationship.”

In another presentation, three representatives of Wenatchee Valley College Continuing Education described progress that department has made in enrollment and business planning. Business Development Specialist Jim Fletcher reported to Port commissioners that fall registration figures were double those from a year ago, and winter registration almost doubled. According to Fletcher, the program continues to expand its strengths, with popular courses such as ‘Workplace Spanish’ and computer training.” He commented that the message of WVC Continuing Education, that it can customize training programs to meet the needs of employers in North Central Washington, seems to be getting out there.

Port Executive Director Mark Urdahl noted that the continuing education program leases space in the Confluence Technology Center from the Port at less than market value because it provides the community with important business training services. “The Port can incubate a training facility in the same way we incubate a business, by arranging good rental rates to help them get on their feet,” he said.

In other business, Pangborn Memorial Airport Manager Pat Moore reported she would be on hand to answer questions at the February 21st public hearing before the Douglas County and City of East Wenatchee Planning Commissions. The commissions will consider and take public comment on proposed amendments to a comprehensive plan and airport overlay district.

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