

# **2025 Port Renovation Project Completion Report & Final Comments from Port of Illahee Commissioner J Aho**

## **2025 Renovation Project**

### **1. Background**

The beginning of the Port of Illahee's Renovation Project likely dates back to 2001, when it became clear that the Port had ongoing stormwater issues following the 1999 Illahee Creek culvert installation. The concern was the excessive sedimentation from Illahee Creek, which, during storms, caused murky, brown-colored stormwater to extend out in the bay for miles. The sediment was also accumulating under the dock and floats in concerning amounts, raising the possibility that dredging would soon be necessary for the Port to remain viable. With the Port's limited annual tax income there was no room in the budget for large-scale dredging projects and outside funding help would likely be needed someday.

Kitsap County's Department of Community Development (DCD) was consulted about the ongoing sediment issue, especially with new developments planned along Illahee Creek that would likely exacerbate the problem. The DCD representative noted development was required in the urban growth areas (UGAs), which prompted the Port and community members to meet with Kitsap County Public Works who were dealing with stormwater's impact on the new Illahee Road culvert, which was becoming a problem. The recommendation by the County was to undertake a watershed analysis to understand the extent of the problem.

This resulted in the Port hiring Kathleen Barrantes of Grant Solutions to search for possible grants and in 2003 applied for a \$268,000 Centennial Clean Water grant from the Department of Ecology for the watershed study, which was awarded in 2006. The grant uncovered a number of critical issues within the watershed and a \$20M cost estimate to resolve the issues. The report enabled the Port to engage more deeply in land-use issues which included a later challenge to developers' plans to increase the size of the stormwater outfall at the base of the Illahee Dock.

Meanwhile, the Port Commissioners worked on acquiring properties near the Illahee Dock, including an Ocean View property, the Dietch property, and the vacant Illahee Store, which was purchased at a sheriff's sale. A statewide grant with the Pollution Liability Insurance Agency (PLIA) was obtained to clean up leaking underground storage tanks (USTs) where the Port scored #16 statewide. Though the grant was approved, it took years before funding became available for grantee #16. In 2024, funding was finally allocated, and in 2025 a contractor was selected, with the work to remove the tanks and the pump island planned to complete in early 2026. Incidental to the removal of the tanks will be the installation of a holding tank to meet the requirement for a reserve drain field, which is required for future store renovations and opening.

## **2. Deteriorating Dock and Floats**

As the above efforts were underway, it became increasingly clear that the Illahee Community Dock and floats, inherited by the Port at its founding, were deteriorating. Additionally, the Dietch house was in disrepair. To address these needs, the Port reached out to other Port Districts and, after discussions among other Commissioners, who had completed similar projects, decided to contract with Soundwest Engineering, a local marine engineering firm with a successful track record in Kitsap County. Soundwest's experience with successful grant applications and construction projects made them the ideal choice for the Port's renovation project.

## **3. Grants Submitted, Approved, and Stalled**

The Port applied for 2020 grants with the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), which were approved, but the regulatory approval process stalled. Approval from the Army Corps of Engineers was required, which in turn needed consent from the Suquamish Tribe, particularly the Tribe's Fish Committee. Since the Committee only met periodically, the process was delayed for several years. Eventually, the necessary agreements were reached, and a contract was signed, allowing the Corps to approve the permit.

In the meantime, a second inspection of the dock pilings revealed that 20 pilings were failing. This led to an emergency 2022 grant request to replace the pilings, which was approved and funded. Without this replacement, the dock would likely have been condemned and demolished due to structural instability.

## **4. County Permits and Project Delays**

In 2024, after five years of planning and submissions, the project was ready for final drawings, construction documents, and permits. The project went out to bid, and three contractors submitted proposals. Construction was slated to begin in early 2025, but the upland work was delayed for four months when the tenant in the house set to be demolished refused to vacate. The house was finally vacated in April 2025.

## **5. Project Progress**

The waterfront and upland work officially commenced, continuing through the summer and fall with minimal disruptions, aside from two change orders. One change order addressed a failing seawall, which required an emergency repair before the dock pilings could be driven. The second change order involved the removal of a power pole requested by a neighboring property owner. Puget Sound Energy (PSE) will remove the pole on an as-available schedule, which means power will remain unavailable on the dock until the pole work is complete.

Despite the project late start and challenges with the asphalt work scheduled at the end of construction season, favorable weather allowed the roadway down the hill to the shoreline to be completed.

Substantial and final completion status requires all required documentation items to be completed, signed off, and submitted, which as of 12/29/25 is in the process of completing. Additionally, the contractor, Quigg Bros, has vacated the vacant Illahee Store they were using for their onsite office. In the meantime, the dock will remain closed until the Port's Dock Manager has approved its opening (see next item).

## 6. Deck Cleaning Work Remains

Deck cleaning, and possibly railing work, remain following the 2025 Renovation Project. While completing this work would have resulted in the dock being open sooner, it was not authorized as part of the project for a variety of reasons (see next item). The deck cleaning now needs to be completed, along with having power to restored the lights, for dock access to be fully opened to the public.

## 7. Proposed Phase 2 Dock Decking Renovation Grant (2026)

A 2026 grant submission for Phase 2 of the Dock Renovation Project is strongly recommended, specifically to replace the old, but still structurally adequate, deteriorating decking and upgrade the dock's handrails. The original grants did not cover the decking work due to funding limitations of the secured grants. The new RCO 2026 grants have recently opened, and a grant writer should be secured soon and submit an application. A successful Phase 2 project to replace the decking and associated railings should complete the Dock Renovation Project.

## 8. Items Yet to Complete for the 2025 Renovation Project

There are still several contractual and recommended items to be completed as part of the 2025 Dock Renovation Project:

1. **Tribal Signage:** As per the contract with the Suquamish Tribe dated 7/16/24.
2. **Benches:** Three benches are suggested for the overview site between the stairs and one near the loading ramp. The recommended source for these benches is the BI Artisan Resource Network (BARN), which will construct benches for the cost of materials. The contact for this group is Betsy Hagestedt ([bhagestedt@gmail.com](mailto:bhagestedt@gmail.com)).
3. **Plaques:** RCO grant plaques & Assist Fund plaque at the base of the flagpole.
4. **Historical and Educational Signage:** Four obsolete raingarden sign frames from the Illahee Preserve have been removed for reuse by the Port for the following suggested new signs:
  - o Dock history, including the WWII detachment stationed at the end of the dock.
  - o Stormwater filtration issues, highlighting the renovation's filtered stormwater and the unfiltered stormwater runoff from the surrounding Illahee hillside.
  - o Information about the Illahee Film, funded by the Port's Centennial Clean Water Grant and the Illahee Community.
  - o Details about the PLIA cleanup project.
5. **Help with Signage:** Illahee resident and artist Vic Keranan, who helped design signs for the Port in 2012 and worked with the Suquamish Tribe on the Clear Creek Trail signs, has expressed interest in assisting with the new signs. I, Jim Aho, would also like to volunteer to help with the proposed signage.

## 9. Project Walkthrough

A walkthrough of the completing 2025 project is recommended for the new Commission, either as a group or individually, at your convenience.

## 10. Questions?

If you have any questions about the details in this report, feel free to contact me.

## **Final Comments as a Port of Illahee Commissioner**

### **1. Elimination of Port Districts**

My first goal as a commissioner was to eliminate Commissioner Voting Districts which required finding candidates in 3 equal population areas within the Port's boundary (in this case a north, middle, and south district). This requirement made finding candidates extremely difficult, especially for those who wanted to serve in a popular Commissioner district and had to wait until the end of their 6-year term before they could even run against them. The change was made and it is now easier to find commissioners who would like to serve.

### **2. Adherence to State Statutes**

Another observation, especially for new commissioners, is the Port needs to follow the same rules that a county or a city is required to adhere to. For a small port with no office or employees and a yearly tax revenue of \$100,000 this is not easy. There are fixed expenses, like insurance on a \$2M dock, elections, and even Secretary of State audits that must be paid for by the Port, not to mention Maintenance and Operations costs. The Port of Illahee was most efficient when it hired a contract Administrator familiar with the required RCWs, WACs, and MRSC regulations to manage daily operations. An earlier agreement with the Port of Silverdale for administrative services worked out well, until it was terminated by Silverdale. The Port of Illahee then contracted with the former Silverdale Administrator until she left for another job, which left one of the Illahee Commissioners taking on the job in the interim. In other words, there are significant administrative challenges for Port Commissioners to handle, in addition to managing the Port.

### **3. Stipends**

Commissioners receive stipends for attending meetings, and a second stipend was approved for extra duties like being the Dock Manager, Property Manager, and Website Manager. That arrangement has worked out well for the Port in addition to dividing up responsibilities. It has been noted by past commissioners that while stipends help compensate for the extra time and effort involved, they are not to be considered as adequate financial compensation for the time commissioners must spend in executing their Port duties.

### **4. Finally, thanks for past 25 Years of Attending Port Meetings, Including 2 Terms (12 Years) as a Port of Illahee Commissioner and 5 Years as Project Manager for the Port's Department of Ecology Centennial Clean Water Grant (2006 to 2011)**

It has been a pleasure to work with past and present Port Commissioners. Major accomplishments have been made with more being planned. They say it takes a community to make good things happen, and the Illahee Community has always been supportive in many different ways. I look forward to seeing future endeavors by the Port of Illahee, including a Phase 2 Dock Decking Renovation Project and an Illahee Store Renovation Project.

Commissioner Jim Aho  
Cell 360 649-1049

