

Port Townsend School District, Fort Worden ink pact for outdoor learning

By Jeannie McMacken

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PORT TOWNSEND — Port Townsend students will again have access to a living outdoor classroom, the result of a memo of understanding between the Port Townsend School District and the Fort Worden Public Development Authority.

Unanimously approved by the development authority's board Wednesday, the agreement provides the school district with a nine-month window to use the campus as an adjunct to curriculum. Students use both the outdoors at Fort Worden and an indoor classroom for which the district is charged no rent.

This is the third year of the relationship.

“This is a case of two public entities involved in education working together,” said David Robison, executive director of the Fort Worden Public Development Authority (PDA).

“The teachers love it. They use the outdoors as a classroom. Our tenant partners have the opportunity to be involved with students as well.”

The PDA has offered the district a dedicated classroom in the old Schoolhouse Building, Room D. In the event of the need for a larger indoor space, rooms in Building 204 could be used depending on availability.

Robison told the board that in the first year, Room 225 on the bluff was made available as a classroom for Port Townsend school teachers to use.

“They took advantage of the Fort as a living classroom,” he said. “We found out after the first year there were some use conflicts in 225, so last year we allowed them to use a classroom in the old Schoolhouse Building D and that worked out quite well.”

School district officials were very interested in continuing this opportunity this year, Robison said.

“Because we are both public entities, we entered into this nine-month agreement with the school and we don’t charge them the basic rent,” Robison said.

A few changes were made to this year’s agreement.

To increase the utilization of School Room D, the space will be shared with another educational agency, Western Washington University. From September through May, 29 days will not be available for local learning.

The PDA will charge the school district a custodial fee at its cost. In addition, the school is required to monitor heating of the classroom and turn it down when leaving at the end of the day.

Because the space will be co-managed with Western Washington University, there is a lock box that contains the key to the room. The district also will have use of a storage room for classroom supplies.

If there is a need for a larger classroom, the PDA will charge for the use of these rooms; the cost will include set-up, cleaning and a utility surcharge.

Equipment rental including audiovisual elements, chairs and tables will be provided at the standard rate. Thirty chairs and 10 tables are available in School Room D. Additional requests for room set-up, movable classroom fixtures and furniture, and/or custodial services will be charged at the standard rate.

Fort Worden benefits through access and use of Blue Heron Middle School parking areas for special events or meetings and communication about arts, culture and educational events will be distributed through the schools.

The PDA has developed a classification system that takes into account its mission, vision and strategic objectives, as well as past practices, relationships and the local market to determine the applicable use or rental fee.

Board member Herb Cook said that in terms of public entity-to-public entity, the preference is for “as net neutral of a relationship as possible.”

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