



## PORT TOWNSEND REBUILD GROUP

*Fostering economic vitality through restoration of historic properties and places*

A project of Center for Sustainable Economy  
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### OUR VISION

The Port Townsend Rebuild Group (PTRB) is a collaboration of historic preservation advocates, builders, and community leaders seeking to protect and restore Port Townsend's at-risk historic properties and places as a tool for spurring economic growth and vitality. We recognize that many of our iconic historic buildings and properties across the city are increasingly dilapidated, underutilized, and exposed to weather conditions that are becoming increasingly harsh as climate change unfolds.

Crashing waves, flooded basements, peeling paint, rotting wood and increasingly unsafe conditions plague many of these properties. If Port Townsend is going to continue to serve as a premier center for arts and culture and prosper economically, major new investments in our historic properties and places are needed along with a long-term strategic plan to make maximum use of these assets for tourism, arts, cultural and educational events, protected natural areas, regenerative agriculture, and affordable living.

### OUR STRATEGY

The PTRG is promoting this vision through three primary strategies that would be implemented by a diverse stakeholder group that represents all histories involved:

1. First, we need to complete a working inventory of historic properties and places that are at-risk from neglect, development, or natural hazards and conduct a preliminary assessment of restoration costs sufficient to market these properties for the highest and best use.
2. Secondly, we need to recruit elected officials at the Port, City of Port Townsend, Jefferson County, our state legislature and Governor Ferguson's office to help secure one or more of the many economic incentive packages offered by federal, state, and local agencies to help communities like Port Townsend rebuild main streets, decaying infrastructure and historic assets. Overall investment needs probably top \$100 million for all the eligible properties in Port Townsend, but attracting this level of investment is made infinitely more possible with

unified community support for various tax incentives, matching funds, cost share arrangements, preferable loan rates and other incentives provided by these programs.

3. Lastly, the stakeholder group will collaborate with present and future owners of these historic properties and places to showcase Port Townsend's unique history, ecology, and culture through music, film, art shows and educational events.

## PROJECTS IN PLAY

### Jefferson County Fairgrounds



The land where the Jefferson County Fairgrounds is located sits within the traditional and sovereign territory of the S'Klallam and Chemakum people. It provided a gathering place that linked waters of the strait with the Kai Tai lagoon and Port Townsend Bay. Currently, frequent mud-bog races have destroyed the ecological integrity of the site, and its many lower-quality buildings are in disrepair. With new investment and a long-term management plan, PTRG hopes to transform this historic property into a multi-cultural public space used for a wide variety of historical and cultural events and for demonstration of regenerative agriculture techniques needed to help our region's farmers adapt to climate change.

### Hastings Building



Constructed in 1890, the Hastings Building was "conceded by all to be the most elegant building in the city" according to news reports from that time. This once proud marker of our historical heritage now has the aura of a prison due to the chain link fences and keep out signs that dominate it's exterior. It also suffers from direct hits from a rising tide and abandoned spaces that are in rapidly deteriorating condition. Renovation plans were put on hold with the demise of the Hastings Landing Project. PTRG hopes to revive those plans and make structural modifications that will lessen the impact of waves and flooding.

### Hastings Landing



Immediately adjacent to the Hastings Building is a dilapidated dock that was once included in plans to construct a pier-supported building housing a hotel, restaurant, event spaces and small vessel passenger ferry terminal. The project was abandoned and the dock is now an eyesore in a high-traffic tourist area. It is falling apart and jeopardizing the safety of pedestrians and watercraft using Union Wharf – our only cruise ship dock. PTRG believes that the property should be condemned, acquired by the City or Port and either restored for a public space (such as a small park or food truck court) or removed to allow the eelgrass beds and marine life below to recover and help buffer the Hastings Building from the rising tides and waves.

## Uptown Theater



Located in Port Townsend's most prosperous neighborhood, the Uptown Theater has potential to serve as a hub for performance arts, film festivals, lectures and community gatherings. Historic theaters like this are indispensable assets in developing cultural tourism—the fastest-growing segment of the tourism market. Sadly, it has fallen into disrepair and now is for sale. PTRG envisions giving this building a major facelift both inside and out and transforming it into a community-managed facility

that provides a high-capacity space for showcasing the work of our talented pool of artists and social activists. In the short term, we hope to work with new owners of the theater to secure funds from Washington's Historic Theater Capital Grants program to breathe new life into this largely idle historic building.

## James and Hastings Building



Right in the center of Downtown, it is the most featured building in travelogues and articles about Port Townsend and for tourism groups that seek interesting places to visit, e.g., American Cruise Lines, a cruise ship company that brings groups of tourists to town on a weekly basis throughout the prime tourist season. The James & Hastings Building needs repair and upkeep that challenges even the most robust budget of any building owner. The building is a high-profile component of the

Downtown Historical Registry which should help secure investment. As an added attraction from a cultural perspective, we hope to revive the world class jazz club Cellar Door that had to close its basement location due to flooding and leaky pipes.

## Customs House



Directly across Water Street from the James and Hastings to the south, and right on the edge of Port Townsend Bay, the Customs House is a thriving business hub with a popular coffee shop, a quaint and nautical-themed cafe, a very popular pizza parlor and an upstairs walk-up apartment. The biggest challenge to the old building is the battering of waves from the weather systems from the bay coming from the south, sometimes quite powerfully. The foundation needs current tech sealing

even though the stone bulkhead has been a positive, strong diffusing buffer to the bay. The pressures of tidal actions leave the basement with standing water often and the need to remediate that is much the same as with the Hastings Building.

## Mount Baker Block Building



Built at the high point of Port Townsend's real estate speculation boom, Charles Eisenbeis saved the best for the Mount Baker Block Building. The Mount Baker Block Building has been an integral part of the downtown for over 110 years, with thriving first floor retail space, and second story office and artist studio space. The third floor remained unfinished until 1990. It has been completely renovated and serves as office space for

software designers, photographers and artists. The fourth-floor renovation began in 1998 and was completed the following year. Key renovation needs include replacing an aging electrical system and repair or replacement of dozens of large, custom designed windows, many of which have spectacular view of Mt. Baker, the building's namesake.

## NEXT STEPS

The PTRG is in an early organizing stage. We have four important tasks in the short term and welcome new participants to take us to the next level. Our short-term priorities include:

- Creating and formalizing a Steering Committee made up key stakeholders. These may include representatives from tribal and non-profit organizations, business leaders, historic preservation advocates, event organizers and builders with experience in renovating historic structures. Attendees at the first meeting of potential SC members are listed below.
- Identification of all potential sources of federal and state funding for historic building and property acquisition and renovation as well as related arts and culture programming at these sites.
- Meeting with our elected officials at the Port, City of Port Townsend, and Jefferson County to seek their support in securing these funds during upcoming grant cycles in 2026.
- Meeting with existing and prospective owners of at-risk historic properties and places to develop a full inventory of what these properties and places need to be restored and protected from the elements.

## INVITED STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- H. Steve Hanners, James and Hastings Building management and maintenance
- John Talberth, Ph.D., President and Senior Economist for the Center for Sustainable Economy
- Devon Kohn, owner and manager of the Customs House
- Gina Johnston, Windermere Real Estate
- Daphne Wyham, CEO of Methane Action, President of This Land
- Sebastian Eggert, CEO Rain Shadow Woodworks
- Richard Lukens, United Earth Networks
- Jamie Elsbury, Port Townend community activist
- Thomas Buell, journalist and community activist
- Rob Gruye, structural restoration consultant

VERSION 2: 12-30-25