

Port of Astoria Moves Funds to Compass Community Bank

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The Port of Astoria Commission passed over two banking giants Tuesday and agreed to move \$1 million in checking accounts from the Bank of Astoria to the locally owned Compass Community Bank.

One-year-old Compass flexed its muscles to earn the Port's business, offering better interest rates and lower fees than Wells Fargo and U.S. Bank.

Port leaders said they liked the idea of supporting the local bank, where they can expect quick decision making and, according to Port Executive Director Jack Crider, make \$9,000 a year in interest.

"They're all three great banks," Crider said, "but going through the process I was extremely impressed with Compass Bank."

A clash over the ground lease under the Taggart Building on Pier 1 has put the Port at odds with its current bank, the Bank of Astoria, and its parent company, Columbia Bank of Tacoma, Wash.

The agency has to pay off the bank's \$50,000 loan by May 15 and move its accounts elsewhere.

On Tuesday, after comparing the virtues of three banks with local branches, the Port Commission voted 4-0, with Commissioner Bill Hunsinger abstaining, to move three checking accounts worth between \$1 million and \$1.5 million to Compass Community Bank. Commissioners Larry Pfund, Kathy Sanders, Floyd Holcom and Dan Hess voted for the move.

Hunsinger said he was abstaining because he hadn't had enough time to consider the decision.

Columbia Bank assumed control over the Taggart Building and the Port's underlying ground lease on Pier 1 after Astoria Bay LLC and C.A. Taggart Construction, owned by former Port commissioner Glenn Taggart and his father, Charles Taggart, defaulted on nearly \$2 million in loans.

The default came after Port politics foiled the Taggarts' attempt to sell the controversial building in 2007. The Port, which pays more to rent space inside the building for its marina office than it makes from the underlying ground lease, wants to buy the building or renegotiate the land lease to correct the money-losing arrangement.

When the bank moved to auction the property late last year, Astoria Bay filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and the Port declared the bank in default of its land lease.

The sale was canceled, and Crider said the Port has been trying unsuccessfully ever since to get the bank to negotiate a purchase or a new land lease.