WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
ITEM SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: President Sabah Randhawa on behalf of Donna Gibbs, V.P. University Relations and Marketing

DATE: February 14, 2020

SUBJECT: Waterfront Update

PURPOSE: Discussion Item

Purpose of Submittal:

Donna Gibbs and Brad Johnson will give an update on the Waterfront Project.

Background:

The College of Science & Engineering has been in dialogue with several potential tenants for the Western Crossing Innovation Park concept, including federal and state agencies who have ongoing research projects and talent pipelines established with Western. We will discuss the nature of climate change and hazard mitigation research – both currently underway and potential future projects – and potential tenant partners, including the U.S. Geological Survey, the Cascades Volcano Observatory, the Pacific Northwest Seismic Network and the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, among others.

Strategic Questions:

1. How will Western students and faculty, especially those in non-STEM fields, benefit from research partners at the Waterfront?

2. How would this project support the Port of Bellingham’s economic development goals?

3. What types of additional multinational companies, start-ups, scientists and entrepreneurs would be attracted to this development?
POTENTIAL TENANTS FOR THE WESTERN CROSSING INNOVATION PARK

Update to the Board of Trustees

Following the proposal approved by the Port of Bellingham Commission and the WWU Board of Trustees in December 2019 establishing a working model for a joint waterfront development roadmap, the working group is proposing next steps in accordance with the overall guiding principles and vision established in the proposal. In particular, the model is focused on creating and nurturing a public-private partnership; the purpose of this document is to outline proposed specific commitments from WWU to catalyze the next operational phase of the model.

In order to reach the eventual goal of significant investment from private developers in a vibrant waterfront facility, a first step involves leveraging current federal and state government agency partnerships with WWU. These partnerships could provide initial tenants for the project, and spaces for growing the established research projects, including work with both graduate and undergraduate students, faculty, and programmatic development components from WWU as well as staff and other professionals and administrative support from the agencies involved. Once established, the facility and its working tenancy will serve as a strategic foothold for attracting further tenants from the private sector (facilitated, in part, by current working partnerships with WWU). Specific examples include:

- **The United States Geological Survey (USGS).** The USGS and WWU have had a significant partnership for more than a decade, including USGS staff working as research associates with WWU faculty, mentoring student research (both graduate and undergraduate), and joint long-term project ventures. The joint projects have centered on assessment, modeling, and mitigation of coastal hazards in the Bellingham region, including Bellingham Bay and the local watershed. In northwestern Washington, the USGS maintains 58 stream gauges and conducts research to monitor and characterize stream flows and quality, sediment loads and chemistry, groundwater quantity and quality and their effects on people, infrastructure, and wildlife, including endangered and/or threatened species of salmon. In concert with the experimental monitoring, a large-scale joint modeling effort has been established to predict and address impending landscape-scale climate change impacts across the Nooksack, Skagit, Stillaguamish and Snohomish watersheds. This work includes refining models that project how the area’s glaciers, snowpack, rainfall patterns, stream runoff, sediment loads, and coastal processes are likely to change, and communicating potential effects to communities and decision makers. With appropriate infrastructure, the USGS intends to increase its presence and working relationships in the North Cascades region.

- **The Cascades Volcano Observatory (CVO).** WWU also has a long-established working partnership with the CVO, as part of its mission to monitor and assess volcanic and seismic hazards to our region. The CVO has current plans to increase its instrumentation on, and monitoring of, Glacier Peak and Mount Baker, and given the opportunity, to increase staffing in Bellingham as a part of these expanded efforts. A partner organization to CVO, the Pacific Northwest Seismic Network (PNSN), is also involved in the proposed expansion of monitoring and hazard assessment.
Staff are currently housed at the University of Washington, and there is significant interest in expanding the partnership to the northern sector of the network. Faculty and leadership of the College of Science & Engineering will be meeting with leadership of the CVO and PNSN this month to discuss project, talent and facility needs in more detail.

- **Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL).** Another established relationship is with Pacific Northwest National Laboratory’s (PNNL) Division of Ocean Science Partnerships, Marine Energy sector. In particular, partner staff who are studying wave and tidal power, offshore wind, and other power generation technologies are potential tenants. Work in this area focuses on the mechanics of power generation via turbines, and as well, an extensive modeling effort is underway to assess and predict potential impacts on the marine environment of the acoustic noise produced by the technology. For this project, PNNL partnerships with the National Renewable Energy Labs (NREL) might also be expanded given the availability of new facilities proposed here.

- **Consolidation of State Agency Staff.** For some time, there has been discussion of consolidation of staff from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) given the growth in project scope and activity associated with these operations. There are currently staff associated with both DNR and DFW projects focused on the Northwest region housed in different locations, both within Whatcom County and other locations in the state, that could benefit from consolidation in a facility central to the area where projects are assigned. The Northwest Region of DNR, for instance, oversees 387,000 acres stretching from Snohomish County to the Canadian border, with responsibilities including oversight of wildlife habitat, natural resources, and recreation areas.