

## **Fort Worden Task Force Preliminary Governance Recommendations**

In 2007, the State Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) adopted a vision for Fort Worden as a center for life long learning. As envisioned, the Fort will become a full-service, year-round destination providing a diverse array of meaningful experiences for people of all ages, backgrounds, skills, and interests through its programs, events, services, and facilities. A multitude of resident partners will create a shared economy that supports state of the art programming in the arts and culture, health and wellness, natural science, outdoor recreation, and historic preservation. With a variety of conference facilities and accommodations ranging from camping to residences and single guest rooms, the new Fort Worden will allow visitors to design their stay around their needs and preferences.

As a first step toward this vision, the Commission has chartered a task force to evaluate existing and alternative governance structures for management of the Fort. From its analysis, the Fort Worden Task Force recommends that a non-profit corporation is the best suited manager of core park facilities. This management structure combines the fund raising capability and flexibility of non-profits with investment from private enterprise, and the financial capacity, stability and public accountability of state government. Lead management by a non-profit also breaks down isolation among the Fort's resident partners and creates an incentive for them to work together and share in the long-term care of the park and its facilities.

While the Task Force recommends that a non-profit is best suited to manage, it is important to assure the public that Fort Worden will always remain a state park and operate according to the vision, mission, values, and principles the Commission has adopted for the Fort.

Should State Parks' staff and the Commission concur with the Task Force's recommendation, management responsibility will transition over a period of time, as the new manager builds experience, capacity, and capability. A formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Commission and the prospective non-profit would guide this transition, which may take several years to accomplish.

During the transition, the Commission will ask the non-profit to demonstrate that it is capable of assuming management responsibility. Likewise, the Commission must demonstrate to the prospective non-profit that it is willing to transition significant management authority and has put in place financial commitments and administrative provisions toward that end and ultimately the realization of the Commission's vision for Fort Worden.

A MOU negotiated between the Commission and prospective non-profit will guide the management transition. As a preparatory step, State Parks staff should ask the Commission to approve a series of milestones to guide MOU negotiations. Staff should then ask the Commission to authorize execution of a final MOU with specific, measurable commitments that it and the prospective non-profit must satisfy in order for a management transfer to occur. Similarly, the non-profit board of directors should also be asked to authorize execution of the MOU, thereby committing itself to the transition.

Both parties should agree that if respective milestones and commitments are met, transfer of management authority and responsibility will follow. Ultimate transfer of management will likely take the form of a long-term master lease.

Commission staff and the non-profit should negotiate and draft a transition MOU. The Task Force recommends that the MOU include provisions in the following areas: Leadership; Business Development; Program and Partner Development; Operating Funding; Capital Funding; Community/Constituent Relations; and Employee Relations.