

Maintaining and Improving Public Infrastructure

Message from Public Works Director, Steve King, May 2026

Public infrastructure is a core purpose of City government, and it is an honor to share a Public Works Director's perspective on daily challenges and successes our team experiences supporting the community in maintaining our streets, public buildings, parks, and water, sewer, and stormwater utilities.

Let's start with trivia. Has anyone pondered how much money it would take to build Port Townsend as we know it today? A few years back, I put together a rough estimate of the investment required to build all the water lines, streets, sewer pipe, wastewater treatment plant, City buildings, Olympic Gravity Water System, parks, and stormwater systems in today's dollars. The number is a bit beyond comprehension for a city of 10,000 people coming in at nearly \$1 billion. Bringing this into context, that is about \$100,000 per person.

As we know, Port Townsend has infrastructure still in use today dating back over 100 years. We also know how good vs. poor economic times impacted the quality of infrastructure built. The most visible example is [our streets](#) which started as dirt or gravel and often were later oiled without the proper gravel base. Today, we fight a seemingly never – ending battle of potholes as a result of lack of investment in the initial building of the street and maintenance. Thanks to the voter approved sales tax in 2023 to form a [Transportation Benefit District](#), we are clawing our way back with substantial work in the last couple of years leveraging grants and investing in maintenance.

Given we have such a high per capita responsibility for infrastructure maintenance and repair, I would be remiss if we didn't touch on the subject of grant and low interest loan funding from State and Federal sources. As a small rural community with low housing density, the tax and utility rate burden is high and thus we rely on programs such as the State Transportation Improvement Board funding for streets, State Public Works Board funding for utilities, State Department of Ecology Funding for sewer and stormwater, and Federal Funding from US Department of Transportation, US Department of Agriculture, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Often times, we are able to get grants and loans to cover 50% or higher of the costs to upgrade infrastructure. For example, the State Public Works board funded the recent Water Street sewer pipe replacement project with a 50% forgivable loan and 50% low interest loan. Given this critical sewer trunkline was collapsing, we were fortunate to have such funding resources. We are thankful for these resources which greatly reduce the burden on Port Townsend tax and rate payers to help us maintain and improve failing infrastructure in Port Townsend with a 100-year forward-thinking perspective. With the community's support, your Public Works team is dedicated to efficiently working with the resources available to sustain our community for generations to come.