

**Chapter 53.04 RCW
FORMATION**

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RCW 53.04.010 Port districts authorized—Purposes—Powers—Public hearing. (1) Port districts are hereby authorized to be established in the various counties of the state for the purposes of acquisition, construction, maintenance, operation, development and regulation within the district of harbor improvements, rail or motor vehicle transfer and terminal facilities, water transfer and terminal facilities, air transfer and terminal facilities, or any combination of such transfer and terminal facilities, and other commercial transportation, transfer, handling, storage and terminal facilities, and industrial improvements.

(2) Powers of a port district that is located in a county that has a contiguous border with another state, and a population between fifty and seventy thousand, shall be exercised within the district, except as otherwise provided by statute or pursuant to an interlocal cooperation agreement with another public agency as defined in chapter 39.34 RCW. In addition to other requirements of chapter 39.34 RCW, such an interlocal cooperation agreement may involve the exercise of a port district's powers for a port district that is located in a county that has contiguous borders with another state, and a population between fifty and seventy thousand, outside the boundaries of the

state of Washington in whole or in part only if found, by resolution of the port district commission exercising such authority, to be reasonably necessary for the effective exercise of the port district's statutory powers and for the benefit of the inhabitants of the district and the state of Washington. The resolution may be adopted only after a public hearing of which notice has been published in a newspaper of general circulation within the district at least ten days in advance. [1999 c 306 § 2; 1963 c 147 § 1; 1911 c 92 § 1; RRS § 9688.]

Purpose—1999 c 306: "Article VIII, section 8 of the Washington state Constitution authorizes the use of public funds by port districts in such manner as the legislature may prescribe for industrial development or trade promotion. The legislature recognizes a growing need for a Washington port district that is located in a county that has a contiguous border with another state, and a population between fifty and seventy thousand, to participate with other public agencies of this state and an adjoining state to attract, encourage, and develop industry and promote trade on both sides of their borders, for the economic benefit to the state of Washington. RCW 53.08.240 authorizes agreements between two or more port districts for the exercise of powers both within and outside their districts, and further authorizes contracts by port districts with other governmental entities. The interlocal cooperation act, chapter 39.34 RCW, also authorizes joint agreements and contracts between port districts and other state and local public agencies including political subdivisions of other states. However, there is uncertainty as to whether or not a port district that is located in a county that has a contiguous border with another state, and a population between fifty and seventy thousand, may exercise industrial development or trade promotion powers outside the district or state boundaries except jointly with another Washington port district.

The purpose of this act is to define and clarify the authority of a Washington port district that is located in a county that has a contiguous border with another state, and a population between fifty and seventy thousand, to exercise those powers jointly or in cooperation with other public agencies when found to be necessary and beneficial to the people of this state." [1999 c 306 § 1.]

Construction—1911 c 92: "This act shall not be construed to repeal, amend or modify any law heretofore enacted providing a method of harbor improvement, regulation or control in this state, but shall be held to be an additional and concurrent method providing for such purpose." [1911 c 92 § 14.]

*Establishment of harbor lines: State Constitution Art. 15 § 1
(Amendment 15).*

RCW 53.04.015 Port districts in areas lacking appropriate bodies of water—Authorized—Purposes. In areas which lack appropriate bodies of water so that harbor improvements cannot be established, port districts are hereby authorized to be established under the laws of the state, for the purposes for which port districts may be established under RCW 53.04.010, and such port districts shall have all of the powers, privileges and immunities conferred upon all other

port districts under the laws of this state, including the same powers and rights relating to municipal airports that other port districts now have or hereafter may be granted. [1963 c 147 § 2; 1959 c 94 § 1.]

RCW 53.04.016 Port districts in areas lacking appropriate bodies of water—Authority an additional and concurrent method. RCW

53.04.015 shall not be construed to repeal, amend or modify any law heretofore enacted providing a method of harbor improvement, regulation or control; acquisition, maintenance and operation of municipal airports; or industrial development; but shall be held to be an additional and concurrent method providing such purposes. [1959 c 94 § 2.]

RCW 53.04.017 Port districts in areas lacking appropriate bodies of water—Elections.

All elections with respect to any such port districts authorized by RCW 53.04.015 and 53.04.016 shall be held, conducted and the results canvassed in the same manner and at the same time as now or hereafter provided by law for other port districts. [1959 c 94 § 3.]

RCW 53.04.020 Formation of countywide district.

At any general election or at any special election which may be called for that purpose, the county legislative authority of any county in this state may, or on petition of ten percent of the registered voters of such county based on the total vote cast in the last general county election, shall, by resolution submit to the voters of such county the proposition of creating a port district coextensive with the limits of such county. Such petition shall be filed with the county auditor, who shall within fifteen days examine the signatures thereof and certify to the sufficiency or insufficiency thereof, and for such purpose the county auditor shall have access to all registration books in the possession of the officers of any incorporated city or town in such proposed port district. If such petition be found to be insufficient, it shall be returned to the persons filing the same, who may amend or add names thereto for ten days, when the same shall be returned to the county auditor, who shall have an additional fifteen days to examine the same and attach his or her certificate thereto. No person having signed such petition shall be allowed to withdraw his or her name therefrom after the filing of the same with the county auditor. Whenever such petition shall be certified to as sufficient, the county auditor shall forthwith transmit the same, together with his or her certificate of sufficiency attached thereto, to the legislative authority of the county, who shall submit such proposition at the next general election or, if such petition so requests, the county legislative authority shall, at their first meeting after the date of such certificate, by resolution, call a special election to be held in accordance with RCW 29A.04.321 and 29A.04.330. The notice of election shall state the boundaries of the proposed port district and the object of such election. In submitting the question to the voters for their approval or rejection, the proposition shall be expressed on the ballot substantially in the following terms:

"Port of, Yes." (giving the name of the principal seaport city within such proposed port district, or if there be more than one city of the same class within such district, such name as may be determined by the legislative authority of the county).

"Port of, No." (giving the name of the principal seaport city within such port district, or if there be more than one city of the same class within such district, such name as may be determined by the legislative authority of the county). [2015 c 53 § 77; 1992 c 147 § 1; 1990 c 259 § 15; 1986 c 262 § 1; 1971 ex.s. c 157 § 1; 1913 c 62 § 1; 1911 c 92 § 2; RRS § 9689. Formerly RCW 53.04.020 through 53.04.040.]

Severability—1992 c 147: "If any provision of this act or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the act or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected." [1992 c 147 § 4.]

Effective date—1971 ex.s. c 157: "The effective date of this act shall be May 1, 1972." [1971 ex.s. c 157 § 4.]

RCW 53.04.023 Formation of less than countywide district. A less than countywide port district with an assessed valuation of at least one hundred fifty million dollars may be created: (1) In a county that already has a less than countywide port district located within its boundaries; or (2) under the provisions of *RCW 53.04.025. Except as provided in this section, such a port district shall be created in accordance with the procedure to create a countywide port district.

The effort to create such a port district is initiated by the filing of a petition with the county auditor calling for the creation of such a port district, describing the boundaries of the proposed port district, designating either three or five commissioner positions, describing commissioner districts if the petitioners propose that the commissioners represent districts, and providing a name for the proposed port district. The petition must be signed by voters residing within the proposed port district equal in number to at least ten percent of such voters who voted at the last county general election.

A public hearing on creation of the proposed port district shall be held by the county legislative authority if the county auditor certifies that the petition contained sufficient valid signatures. Notice of the public hearing must be published in the county's official newspaper at least ten days prior to the date of the public hearing. After taking testimony, the county legislative authority may make changes in the boundaries of the proposed port district if it finds that such changes are in the public interest and shall determine if the creation of the port district is in the public interest. No area may be added to the boundaries unless a subsequent public hearing is held on the proposed port district.

The county legislative authority shall submit a ballot proposition authorizing the creation of the proposed port district to the voters of the proposed port district, at any special election date provided in RCW 29A.04.330, if it finds the creation of the port district to be in the public interest.

The port district shall be created if a majority of the voters voting on the ballot proposition favor the creation of the port district. The initial port commissioners shall be elected at the same election, from districts or at large, as provided in the petition initiating the creation of the port district. The election shall be otherwise conducted as provided in RCW 53.12.172, but the election of commissioners shall be null and void if the port district is not created. [2014 c 15 § 1; 1997 c 256 § 1; 1994 c 223 § 84; 1993 c 70 § 1; 1992 c 147 § 2.]

***Reviser's note:** RCW 53.04.025 expired December 31, 2020.

Effective date—1997 c 256: "This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect immediately [May 5, 1997]." [1997 c 256 § 2.]

Severability—1992 c 147: See note following RCW 53.04.020.

RCW 53.04.031 Initiating petition, commissioner district descriptions—Initial election of commissioners. Three commissioner districts, each with approximately the same population, shall be described in the petition proposing the creation of a port district under RCW 53.04.020, if the process to create the port district was initiated by voter petition, or shall be described by the county legislative authority, if the process to initiate the creation of the port district was by action of the county legislative authority. However, commissioner districts shall not be described if the commissioner districts of the proposed port district shall be the same as the county legislative authority districts.

The initial port commissioners shall be elected as provided in RCW 53.12.172. [1994 c 223 § 83.]

RCW 53.04.060 District declared formed. Within five days after an election held under the provisions of RCW 53.04.020, the board of county commissioners shall canvass the returns, and if at such election a majority of the voters voting upon the proposition shall vote in favor of the formation of the district, the board of county commissioners shall so declare in its canvass of the returns of such election, and the port district shall then be and become a municipal corporation of the state of Washington and the name of such port district shall be "Port of" (inserting the name appearing on the ballot). [1959 c 17 § 2. Prior: 1913 c 62 § 2, part; 1911 c 92 § 3, part; RRS § 9690, part.]

RCW 53.04.070 Expense of election. All expenses of elections for the formation of such port districts shall be paid by the county holding such election, and such expenditure is hereby declared to be for a county purpose, and the money paid out for such purpose shall be repaid to such county by the port district, if formed. [1959 c 17 § 6. Prior: 1913 c 62 § 2, part; 1911 c 92 § 3, part; RRS § 9690, part.]

RCW 53.04.080 Annexation of territory—Petition—Election. At any general election or at any special election which may be called for that purpose the county legislative authority of any county in this state in which there exists a port district which is not coextensive with the limits of the county, shall on petition of the commissioners of such port district, by resolution, submit to the voters residing within the limits of any territory which the existing port district desires to annex or include in its enlarged port district, the proposition of enlarging the limits of such existing port districts so as to include therein the whole of the territory embraced within the boundaries of such county, or such territory as may be described in the petition by legal subdivisions. Such petition shall be filed with the county auditor, who shall forthwith transmit the same to the county legislative authority, who shall submit such proposition at the next general election, or, if such petition so request, the county legislative authority, shall at their first meeting after the date of filing such petition, by resolution, call a special election to be held in accordance with RCW 29A.04.321 and 29A.04.330. The notice of election shall state the boundaries of the proposed enlarged port district and the object of the special election. In submitting the question to the voters of the territory proposed to be annexed or included for their approval or rejection, the proposition shall be expressed on the ballots substantially in the following terms:

"Enlargement of the port of, yes." (Giving the name of the port district which it is proposed to enlarge);

"Enlargement of the port of, no." (Giving the name of the port district which it is proposed to enlarge).

Such election, whether general or special, shall be held in each precinct wholly or partially embraced within the limits of the territory proposed to be annexed or included and shall be conducted and the votes cast thereat counted, canvassed, and the returns thereof made in the manner provided by law for holding general or special county elections. [2015 c 53 § 78; 1990 c 259 § 16; 1935 c 16 § 1; 1921 c 130 § 1; RRS § 9707. Formerly RCW 53.04.080 and 53.04.090.]

Elections: Title 29A RCW.

RCW 53.04.085 Petition for annexation to port district. If an area, not currently part of an existing port district desires to be annexed to a port district in the same county, upon receipt of a petition bearing the names of ten percent of the registered voters residing within the proposed boundaries of the area desiring to be annexed who voted in the last general municipal election, the commissioners of such port district shall petition the county legislative authority to annex such territory, as provided in RCW 53.04.080. [1990 c 259 § 17; 1971 ex.s. c 157 § 2.]

Effective date—1971 ex.s. c 157: See note following RCW 53.04.020.

RCW 53.04.100 Order of annexation—Liability of area annexed. If a majority of all the votes cast at any such election upon the proposition of enlarging such port district shall be for the

"Enlargement of the port of, yes" then and in that event the board of county commissioners shall enter an order declaring such port district enlarged so as to embrace within the limits thereof the territory described in the petition for such election, and thereupon the boundaries of said port district shall be so enlarged and the commissioners thereof shall have jurisdiction over the whole of said district as enlarged to the same extent, and with like power and authority, as though the additional territory had been originally embraced within the boundaries of the existing port district: PROVIDED, HOWEVER, That none of the lands or property embraced within the territory added to and incorporated within such port district shall be liable to assessment for the payment of any outstanding bonds, warrants or other indebtedness of such original port district, but such outstanding bonds, warrants or other indebtedness, together with interest thereon, shall be paid exclusively from assessments levied and collected on the lands and property embraced within the boundaries of the preexisting port district. [1921 c 130 § 2; RRS § 9708.]

RCW 53.04.110 Change of name. Any port district now existing or which may hereafter be organized under the laws of the state of Washington is hereby authorized to change its corporate name under the following conditions and in the following manner:

(1) On presentation of a petition to the commissioners of any port district now existing or which may hereafter be established under the laws of the state of Washington, signed by at least ten percent of the total number of voters of the port district who voted at the last general port election and asking that the corporate name of the port district be changed, it shall be the duty of the commissioners to submit to the voters of the port district the proposition as to whether the corporate name of the port shall be changed. The proposition shall be submitted at the next general port election according to RCW 29A.04.330.

(2) The petition shall contain the present corporate name of the port district and the corporate name which is proposed to be given to the port district.

(3) On submitting the proposition to the voters of the port district it shall be the duty of the port commissioners to cause to be printed on the official ballot used at the election the following proposition:

"Shall the corporate name, 'Port of.....' be
changed to 'Port of.....'..... YES
"Shall the corporate name, 'Port of.....' be
changed to 'Port of.....'..... NO"

(4) At the time when the returns of the general election shall be canvassed by the commissioners of the port district, it shall be the duty of the commissioners to canvass the vote upon the proposition so submitted, recording in their record the result of the canvass.

(5) Should a majority of the registered voters of the port district voting at the general port election vote in favor of the proposition it shall be the duty of the port commissioners to certify the fact to the auditor of the county in which the port district shall be situated and to the secretary of state of the state of Washington, under the seal of the port district. On and after the filing of the certificate with the county auditor as aforesaid and with the

secretary of state of the state of Washington, the corporate name of the port district shall be changed, and thenceforth the port district shall be known and designated in accordance therewith. [2006 c 344 § 35; 1998 c 240 § 1; 1990 c 259 § 18; 1929 c 140 § 1; RRS § 9689-1.]

Effective date—2006 c 344 §§ 1-16 and 18-40: See note following RCW 29A.04.311.

RCW 53.04.120 Transfer of port district property to adjacent district—Procedure—Boundary changes—Jurisdiction. Property may be acquired and owned by any port district, at least one boundary of which property is contiguous to or within one-quarter air mile of such port district and is also located in an adjacent port district, and such property may be transferred to the owning port district upon unanimous resolution of the boards of commissioners of both port districts authorizing the same. The resolution of the port district within which such property is located shall be a resolution to permit the acquisition and to make the transfer, while the resolution of the port district which owns the property shall be a resolution to acquire and own the property and to accept the transferred property. Upon the filing of both official resolutions with the legislative authority and the auditor of the county or counties within which such port districts lie, together with maps showing in reasonable detail the boundary changes made, such acquisition and ownership shall be lawful and such transfer shall be effective and the commissioners of the port district acquiring, owning and receiving such property shall have jurisdiction over the whole of said enlarged port district to the same extent, and with like power and authority, as though the additional territory had been owned by and originally embraced within the boundaries of the port district. [1979 c 72 § 1; 1977 ex.s. c 91 § 1.]

Validity—Ratification—1979 c 72: "Any purchase or other acquisition of such property by any port district which occurred prior to the enactment of this 1979 amendatory act is hereby confirmed and ratified and shall not be deemed to have been ultra vires." [1979 c 72 § 2.]

Severability—1979 c 72: "If any provision of this 1979 amendatory act or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the act or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected." [1979 c 72 § 4.]

RCW 53.04.150 Alternative annexation methods—Petition for resolution—Districts authorized to use—Petition requirements. A port district that is less than countywide, and that is located in a county with a population of less than ninety thousand and located in either the Interstate 5 or Interstate 90 corridor, may petition for annexation of an area that is contiguous to its boundaries, is not located within the boundaries of any other port district, and contains no registered voters. The petition must be in writing, addressed to and filed with the port commission, and signed by the owners of not less than seventy-five percent of the property value in the area to be annexed, according to the assessed value for general taxation. The

petition must contain a legal description of the property according to government legal subdivisions or legal plats, or a sufficient metes and bounds description, and must be accompanied by a plat outlining the boundaries of the property to be annexed. [2000 c 200 § 2; 1999 c 250 § 2.]

Intent—1999 c 250 §§ 2-5: "The legislature intends annexation procedures set forth in sections 2 through 5 of this act to be alternative methods available to port districts that are less than countywide. The legislature does not intend the alternative procedures to supersede any other method authorized by chapter 53.04 RCW or other law for annexation of territory to a port district." [1999 c 250 § 1.]

RCW 53.04.160 Alternative annexation methods—Petition for resolution—Where filed—Commission's duties. If a petition meeting the requirements set forth in RCW 53.04.150 is filed with the commission, the commission shall determine a date, time, and location for a hearing on the petition and shall provide public notice of that hearing and its nature by publishing the notice in one issue of a newspaper of general circulation in the district and by posting the notice in three public places within the territory proposed for annexation. The commission may require proof of a petition's authenticity before complying with notice requirements imposed by this section and may require the signers of a petition to bear the costs of publishing and posting notice. [1999 c 250 § 3.]

Intent—1999 c 250 §§ 2-5: See note following RCW 53.04.150.

RCW 53.04.170 Alternative annexation methods—Petition for resolution—Hearing—Resolution. At the hearing, the commission may determine to annex all or any portion of the proposed area described in the petition. Following the hearing, the commission shall by resolution approve or disapprove annexation. Upon passage of the resolution, the commission shall file, with the board of county commissioners of the county in which the annexed property is located, a certified copy of the resolution. On the date fixed in the resolution, the area annexed becomes part of the district. [1999 c 250 § 4.]

Intent—1999 c 250 §§ 2-5: See note following RCW 53.04.150.

RCW 53.04.180 Alternative annexation methods—Annexation by written consent—Districts authorized to use—Resolution. (1) By a majority vote of the commission, and with the written consent of all the owners of the property to be annexed, a port commission of a district that is less than countywide, and that is located in a county with a population of less than ninety thousand and located in either the Interstate 5 or Interstate 90 corridor, may annex, for industrial development or other port district purposes, property contiguous to the district's boundaries and not located within the boundaries of any other port district.

(2) The written consent required by subsection (1) of this section must contain a full and correct legal description of the

property to be annexed, must include the signature of all owners of the property to be annexed, and must be addressed to and filed with the commission.

(3) If the commission approves annexation under this section, it shall do so by resolution and shall file a certified copy of the resolution with the board of county commissioners of the county in which the annexed property is located. Upon the date fixed in the resolution, the area annexed becomes part of the district. [2000 c 200 § 1; 1999 c 250 § 5.]

Intent—1999 c 250 §§ 2-5: See note following RCW 53.04.150.

RCW 53.04.190 Alternative annexation methods—Outstanding indebtedness. No property within the territory annexed under RCW 53.04.150 through 53.04.180 may be taxed or assessed for the payment of any outstanding indebtedness of the port district as it existed before the annexation unless another law requires the tax or assessment. [1999 c 250 § 6.]