

'SHAPING THE FUTURE OF

BY MALLORY KRUML

The Port of Tacoma and Tacoma Public Schools broke ground in January on the \$205 million, 20-acre Port Maritime Center, marking a transformative moment for the region's maritime industry.

Planned for port-owned land across the Thea Foss Waterway from downtown Tacoma, the “landmark campus” will house two facilities: Tacoma Public Schools’ Maritime Skills Center dubbed Maritime|253, opening in the fall of 2026, and a new port office building slated to open in 2027. Site plans also include public walking trails and shoreline access to the waterway.



Tacoma Public Schools Board of Directors President Corey Strozier at the groundbreaking.
Courtesy of the Port of Tacoma



MARITIME IN OUR REGION'

At the groundbreaking ceremony on Jan. 8, Tacoma Public School Board President Korey Strozier expressed his enthusiasm for the skills center, calling it a hub for innovation, education and economic development.

“This is a proud and exciting moment for all of us,” Strozier said. “Years of hard work, dedication, and collaboration have brought us here. We’re shaping the future of maritime in our region and opening doors for more young people to step into an industry critical to our community’s growth.”

The 35,000-square-foot skills center will cater to local high school students, offering free career and technical training to prepare them for maritime and industrial trade ca-

reers. Meanwhile the port’s new office space will span 60,000 square feet, providing a more accessible location for staff, commissioners and public engagement.

Beginning in fall 2025, the skills center will host workforce development programs at interim sites until construction is finished. Initial programs will focus on sustainability, transportation and technology. Once fully open and operational, the skills center, with indoor and outdoor classrooms and lab space, will serve about 600 students per day and expand to include logistics, manufacturing and skilled trades programs, all aimed at meeting the needs of the maritime industry, which relies on a skilled workforce to ensure safe and efficient operations.



Elected officials and executive directors from the Port of Tacoma and Tacoma Public Schools broke ground on Jan. 8.

Courtesy of the Port of Tacoma

Although the Tacoma School District is partnering with the port on the project, the skills center will be open to high school juniors and seniors from all Pierce County school districts. It may eventually expand to other districts, according to the school district.

Students will be able to attend classes at the center free of charge while continuing their regular high school classes.

The Port of Tacoma, founded in 1918, is a key driver of economic activity in Pierce County, employing more than 42,000 people and generating nearly \$3 billion in economic impact annually.

Eric Johnson, the port director, shared his excitement about the skills center providing local youth access to critical jobs.

“The working waterfront, especially the industrial working waterfronts, have traditionally been difficult for people to break

into; they’ve been a bit insular. The Port of Tacoma has not done that on purpose, but the fact of the matter is that it has been a place that is a bit intimidating,” Johnson said. “It’s not obvious if you want to get a job on the waterfront. So this is an exciting opportunity for us to address that in a county-wide way.”

Johnson separately mentioned that the port’s new office building will be more than a workspace — it will be a visible, accessible part of the waterfront, allowing for greater engagement between port officials, students and the community.

“We’re not really building it for the employees so much as building it for the public, a public building to be utilized by employees,” Johnson said. “We get the extra advantage since it will be accessible that we will have the opportunity to have community-type meetings on the occasion that people that live and work here can attend.



Port of Tacoma Commissioners and the Tacoma Public Schools Board of Directors unanimously approved the project in November, with each entity funding its portion of the campus.

The port estimated a total project budget of \$150 million, while the school district expects to spend \$55 million of state, district, and capital bond funds.

The collaboration was sparked by the Port of Tacoma's 2021-2026 Strategic Plan, which prioritizes workforce development.

"About five years ago, the commission said we would like it to be a focus area," said Port Commission President John McCarthy. "By happy coincidence the Tacoma School District was looking for a partner to create a maritime focused, state sponsored skills center."

Skill centers such as the one planned for Tacoma, are designed to prepare students for various career fields. Washington has 17 skill centers focusing on construction, health science, cosmetology and more.

"This one is going to be solely focused on maritime skills and maritime training," McCarthy said.

At the groundbreaking event, Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodward commended the port and the school district for the collaboration.

"The Port could have easily built their own building and been done with it, but they thought bigger than that, about how we can truly leverage this opportunity into something bigger for the entire community," Woodward said. "The school district could have said, 'We're going to work on building our own thing — we want to find our own space.' But you all got together and said, 'How do we leverage our limited resources to do what's best?' When we do that, this is what we get. We get everybody to come together and we're going to see this completed."

Between now and the launch of the skills center, the school district will finalize design plans and continue to work with port businesses and industry experts to design the curriculum. Once the curriculum is finalized, the district will hire staff members to lead its maritime programs.

Mallory Kruml is a staff writer for The Leader.



Courtesy of TCF Architecture/BNB Builders

By **Cara Kuhlman** on Jan 30, 2025

Tacoma leaders break ground on new maritime center



The 20-acre project includes a maritime skills center for high school students. (Cara Kuhlman/Future Tides)

 Sign up

On a sunny day in early January, attendees excitedly greeted one another at the groundbreaking ceremony for Tacoma's new [Port Maritime Center](#). The 20-acre project, including a maritime skills center for high school students, will transform the east side of the Thea Foss Waterway. It should be completed by 2026-2027.

The port commissioners gave their final approval for the project in November 2024. The event brought together leaders from the City of Tacoma, Port of Tacoma, Washington State Legislature and Tacoma Public Schools, who all have a stake in the promise, and potential, of the new center.

"This groundbreaking ceremony is not just about two new buildings, it's about building a brighter future for all of Pierce County."

— *John McCarthy, Port of Tacoma Commission president*

The new Port Maritime Center will be located along the Foss Waterway, south of the 11th Street Bridge, at the former site of the Wheeler-Osgood door mill. After environmental remediation, the parcel of land sat cleared with construction equipment waiting in the wings, and a dozen shovels staged for the event.

There will be two new buildings: a Port Business Center and a Maritime Skills Center. The plans also include public walking trails and shoreline access.

Port of Tacoma Commission President John McCarthy, who has been a commissioner for over 40 years and is a former longshore worker, thanked the Puyallup Tribe of Indians for their consultation on the project. A large area of the port falls within [the tribe's reservation](#). The land used for this project is in an area that was originally the site of a spuyaləpabš (the Lushootseed word for the Puyallup people) village.



First photo: The cleared site along the Foss Waterway awaits the groundbreaking ceremony. Second photo: Local elected leaders grab their ceremonial shovels. Third photo: Aprons, like those the Maritime 253 students will wear, were presented to public officials. (Cara Kuhlman/Future Tides)

Speakers praised the partnership and collaboration required for this project to come to fruition. The economic role of the port, along with the regional education and career opportunities through Maritime 253, also boosted support of the project.

Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards, who is in her final year in office, called the new center “a true testament” of investing in education and workforce development. She praised the port for thinking bigger, saying they could have just “built your own building and been done with it.”



Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards at the Port Maritime Center groundbreaking. (Port of Tacoma)

The port and the school district are the key partners, and future tenants, but a broader coalition of Pierce County politicians lent their support, including for funding from the Washington State Legislature.

"It takes so much to get from idea to groundbreaking, and this is what true partnership and true collaboration looks like. It's what true work looks like." — Korey Strozier, president of Tacoma Public Schools Board of Directors

The loudest applause of the day came when students were mentioned. [Maritime 253](#) is Tacoma Public Schools' new career and technical education center for transportation, logistics, skilled trades and manufacturing. Courses begin Fall 2025.



Renderings of the new Port Maritime Center by TCF Architecture. BNB Builders is doing the construction which will be completed in two phases. (Port of Tacoma)

State House Speaker Laurie Jinkins reiterated her commitment to another \$4 million for the center, despite a state budget deficit. She called the port "the economic growth engine for our county."

"Hundreds of students are going to be here every single day, and it's going to connect our community even more strongly to this waterfront," Jinkins said.

While a long term endeavor, the groundbreaking comes at an uncertain time for additional investment in maritime infrastructure, potential trade wars, negotiations about the role of automation in port operations, and a slump in cargo volumes at the Northwest's seaports.



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EDUCATION

Here's what we know about the big project underway east of the Foss Waterway

By **Isha Trivedi**

September 26, 2025 5:00 AM  Gift Article

See What Tacoma's Maritime 253 Skills Center Will Look Like



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The Maritime 253 Skills Center in Tacoma is nearing completion, offering South Sound high schoolers industry-relevant training in maritime fields. Set to open in fall 2026, the center will provide up to 1,080 hours of training, credentials, and college credits, preparing students for careers in shipping, port operations, and more. By Brian Hayes

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Overlooking the Thea Foss Waterway and the future new headquarters for the Port of Tacoma is a sprawling, 21-acre construction project.

It's called [Maritime | 253](#) and is the result of about a decade of work to build a home for a career and technical education skills center managed by Tacoma Public Schools. When it opens in fall 2026, high school students from around the South Sound will be able to enroll in half-day programs that cover topics like maritime manufacturing, port operations and sustainability along with their every day high school classes, and they can do so right next to a potential future employer.

Students in the program will receive up to 1,080 hours of training, credentials and college credit to prepare them for jobs in shipping, maritime operations, marine engineering, programming and more. It's part of an effort to ensure that kids who grow up in Tacoma can afford to stay in Tacoma by arming them with qualifications they need for steady, reliable employment at the Port of Tacoma – which is among the city's top employers.

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Maritime | 253 will give “increased, equitable access to all of our learners to stay here, grow here, work here, live here, in livable wage jobs,” said Adam Kulaas, chief of schools for Tacoma Public Schools.

Since Tacoma Public Schools and the Port of Tacoma [broke ground on the project in January](#), crews with BNB Builders have set the building's foundation and put

the building's exterior and interior walls in place, according to the district. Staff with TCF Architects, which is also working on the neighboring new port headquarters, have been at work on designing the interior layout of the classrooms.

“All of our discussions on the design team side, working with the district, working with BNB, even going out and talking with the community about this cool project that I’m so lucky to be a part of – everybody has been just so excited,” said Sheena Hewett, an architectural designer at TCF architecture.



Tacoma Public Schools is partnering with the Port of Tacoma to build Maritime | 253, a program that offers students the chance to earn a credential in the maritime trades, on Wednesday, Sept. 24, 2025, in Tacoma. Brian Hayes
bhayes@thenewstribune.com

The project has been in the works for about a decade, Kulaas told The News Tribune. With a budget of \$42 million, the project is funded by a \$535 million voter-approved bond from 2020 to finance capital improvements at schools across the district.

Tacoma Public Schools offers summer classes related to maritime skills, but, once the building is up and running next year, the summer classes will be housed at the new building, Maritime | 253 director Kristie Wolford told The News Tribune.

About 350 students enrolled in the summer program this past summer, and up to 600 can enroll in the regular half-day program during the school year once it gets up and running next fall, district spokesperson Kathryn McCarthy told The News Tribune. The enrollment application for the 2026-2027 academic year at Maritime | 253 [will open on Oct. 27 of this year](#), according to the district's website.

McCarthy said the programming at Maritime | 253 will be open to Tacoma Public Schools students as well as students from school districts in Vashon, University Place and Sumner-Bonney Lake. About 70% of the spots in the program will be reserved for Tacoma students.



Tacoma Public Schools is partnering with the Port of Tacoma to build Maritime | 253, a program that offers students the chance to earn a credential in the maritime trades, on Wednesday, Sept. 24, 2025, in Tacoma. Brian Hayes
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The building is being built on the Tideflats adjacent to the Port of Tacoma's new headquarters, which also are under construction. Officials from Tacoma Public



“Not only are students getting exposed to what happens in the industry, seeing it daily, they also get to live it. And then the port will be coming in and supporting our students on site, as well as our students going on site with the port,” Wolford said.

Port of Tacoma commission president John McCarthy said workforce development is among the port's top priorities, and officials are excited to work

with the district to “train the workers of the future.”

“The maritime industry is facing a gray tsunami of retirements, and industry leaders are looking for more workers and there are incredible family wage job opportunities in the skilled trades in the maritime and logistic industry,” McCarthy told The News Tribune. “So we wanted to make sure more young people in our community have access to them and it will also benefit the port and our industry partners by helping to build a pipeline of workers in the maritime and trades industry.”

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Isha Trivedi *The News Tribune*  

Isha Trivedi covers city hall and education in Tacoma for The News Tribune. She has previously worked at The Mercury News, the Palo Alto Weekly, the Chronicle of Higher Education and the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting. She grew up in San Jose, California and graduated with a bachelor of arts in journalism and anthropology from the George Washington University. She is a proud alumna of The GW Hatchet, her alma mater’s independent student newspaper, and has been recognized by the Society of Professional Journalists for her work with the publication.

https://www.southsoundbiz.com/profiles/port-of-tacoma-project-updates-2025/article_5c2f2f4a-4ca4-4d13-9326-Odd047253721.html

FEATURED

The Port Projects You Should Know About

John Stearns
May 22, 2025



The new Port Maritime Center will feature the Tacoma Public Schools' Maritime | 253 skills center, right, and new Port of Tacoma administration building and public meeting facility, left.

All imagery courtesy of the Port of Tacoma

An advertisement for 1st Security Bank. The background is split into a green left half and a dark blue right half. On the left, the text reads: "Is your bank meeting your needs?" in white, "Experience the service you deserve:" in dark blue, and "Local Bankers. Local Decision Makers. Local Support." in white. On the right, there is a photo of a woman in a grey blazer, the "1ST SECURITY BANK" logo in white, and the text "FDIC Learn More" with a white arrow icon.

The Port of Tacoma has begun planning, building, and implementing several high-impact projects that port and economic development officials say will bolster the economy through increased commerce and job training, and also provide environmental benefits.

One project involves the Puvallup Tribe of Indians, which will build a second breakbulk

LOCAL BUSINESS INSIGHTS

Blair Waterway to expand cargo capacity at the
opens the waterway to improve navigational safety

and accommodate larger container ships with deeper drafts. Another project involves Tacoma Public Schools building a maritime skills center on port property to train high school students for work in the maritime industry. A third port undertaking involves ongoing efforts to reduce emissions by installing shore-to-ship electrification, and also using renewable diesel in vehicles.

“The Economic Development Board for Tacoma-Pierce County is excited about these three transformative projects at the port, each of which will have a lasting impact on the region’s economy and workforce,” Michael Catsi, the EDB’s president and CEO, said in an email.

Port Executive Director Eric Johnson and port Commission President John McCarthy, who’s also co-chair of the Northwest Seaport Alliance marine cargo operating partnership between the ports of Tacoma and Seattle, shared updates on the projects in late March.

Port Maritime Center

Ground was broken in January for the Port Maritime Center, a two-building project that will include a new port business office and Maritime|253 skills center on port-owned land across from downtown Tacoma. Maritime|253 will provide free career and technical education to high school juniors and seniors from across Pierce County and help fill a growing need for workers in the trades and maritime industry.

The port views the skills center as a “tremendous hub of opportunity” for connecting to family-wage jobs, McCarthy said, calling it a game-changer for creating those positions. The project, with the accompanying port office and public meeting space, also will spark revitalization of the east side of the Foss Waterway that connects the port to the city and is highly visible from downtown.

“I think it’s going to be a landmark; it’s a catalyst,” McCarthy said. “It’s something that the port kind of stepped out of its normal range of practices, and it’s something that’s going to tie us closer to the community and tie that waterway and the east side of the waterway to Tacoma.”

Johnson also noted that the project removed dirt that was mildly contaminated from previous industrial uses. Additionally, the shoreline, where the Foss Waterway meets the Wheeler-Osgood Waterway, will be improved with beach sand and public access to the water for hand-launching kayaks. Additionally, the project team in April was examining opportunities to add a dock and its possible uses and size. Commissioners would have to approve any such recommendation.

Trees will be planted to buffer noise and views of the port's industry from the Maritime Center site, while retaining views of Mount Rainier, Johnson said.

"It's a real exciting project environmentally, economically, culturally," he said, adding the port is working with the tribe to ensure uses are sensitive to tribal culture that is inextricably linked to Puget Sound and the Puyallup River, which flows through the port.

The center's location just south of the Youth Marine Foundation office, which is the base for the foundation's 110-foot vessel, the Doolin-Rogers, and its myriad on-water programs, also presents strong partnership opportunities, Johnson said. The Sea Scouts program, for ages 14 to 21, also partners with the foundation. If a dock were built, and depending on its size, it potentially could accommodate the Doolin-Rogers for youth to board there for studies and programs.

McCarthy said the port has been taking a larger role in workforce development and introducing students throughout the county to the port through educational programs, learning the types of jobs available. He called the Maritime|253 skills center a "perfect marriage."

Maritime|253 will open to students in fall 2026, with the port business office opening in spring 2027.

EDB's Catsi said the Port Maritime Center project is a major step forward in workforce development.

"By partnering with the school district to create a student skills center, the port is investing in the next generation of maritime and port industry workers," Catsi wrote. "This initiative not only aligns with our broader economic development goals but also ensures that local students have direct pathways to family-wage careers in a vital industry right here in Tacoma."

NEWS, NEWS BRIEFS, PMM ONLINE NEWS

Tacoma Port, School District Break Ground on Port Maritime Center



Karen Robes Meeks

January 14, 2025



The Port of Tacoma and Tacoma Public Schools on Jan. 8 marked the official start of construction with a ground-breaking ceremony of the future Port Maritime Center, a 20-



Port of Tacoma officials recently took part in a groundbreaking ceremony for a new business office and a

Search ...



acre project encompassing a new business office for the port and the [Maritime|253](#) skills center.

maritime skills center. Photo: Port of Tacoma.

“The Port Maritime Center will be the new front door to the Port of Tacoma, allowing us to better connect with the community and bringing new life to the east side of the Foss Waterway,” Port Commission President John McCarthy said.

“Our unique partnership with Tacoma Public Schools makes this a transformational project that will help inspire and grow the future of the maritime industry in our region,” he added.

The Maritime|253 would offer Pierce County junior and senior high school students trade and maritime career and technical education such as manufacturing, maritime sustainability and logistics free of charge, according to the announcement.

Programs for Maritime|253 are set to start this fall at temporary sites while the permanent facility is being built. The new building is expected to open in Fall 2026, while the new 60,000–square–foot modern port business office is set to open in Spring 2027.

“Years of hard work, dedication and collaboration have brought us here,” Tacoma Public Schools’ Board President Corey Strozier said. “We’re shaping the future of maritime in our region and opening doors for more young people to step into an industry that’s critical to our community’s growth. This is a proud and exciting moment for all of us.”

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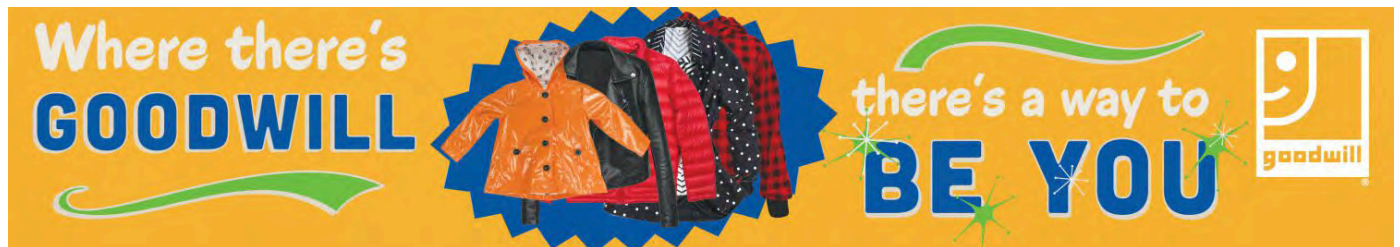


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NEWS > LOCAL

Groundbreaking launches Port Maritime Center

📅 Mon, Jan 13, 2025





Port of Tacoma President John McCarthy said the project is a “milestone” for the Port of Tacoma and Tacoma Public Schools.

After years of planning and forging key partnerships, a celebratory groundbreaking was held on Jan. 8 on the Tacoma waterfront for the Port Maritime Center and Maritime|253 skills center.

Gathering at the 20-acre construction site on the east side of the Foss Waterway, elected officials and invited dignitaries spoke of the historic partnership between the Port of Tacoma and Tacoma Public Schools to make the Port Maritime Center happen with its new Port business office and Tacoma Public Schools’ Maritime|253 skills center.

Maritime|253 will provide career and technical education to junior and senior-level high school students from across Pierce County, bringing opportunities to more members of the community and helping fill a growing need for workers in the trades and the maritime industry.

Port of Tacoma Strategic Project Chief Alisa Praskovich opened the event with a welcome.

“On behalf of everyone at the Port, thank you for joining us for this momentous occasion today,” she said and with that, the crowd heard from four speakers who supported the project since its inception.

First up was Port of Tacoma President John McCarthy.



front door to the Port of Tacoma, which is made even more exciting by the inclusion of Tacoma Public Schools' new maritime skills center."

McCarthy said Maritime | 253 will be "a gamechanger" for South Sound communities and maritime industry by providing a wider pathway to high-paying, in-demand careers throughout Tacoma's working waterfront for students across Pierce County free of charge.

The new Port Maritime Center office building will provide workspace for Port and Northwest Seaport Alliance employees and its location across from downtown Tacoma will make the Port more accessible to the community with public walking trails, interpretive signs, and shoreline access.



The 60,000 square foot Port business center will complement other architecturally significant buildings in Tacoma.

"This groundbreaking ceremony is not just about two new buildings. It's about building a brighter future for all of Pierce County. We hope that the Port Maritime Center will be a catalyst for rejuvenating the east side of the Foss Waterway as we continue realizing the vision that has been championed by so many Tacoma leaders."

Another aspect of the project is its positive environmental impact. McCarthy noted that while the Wheeler Osgood mill once stood at the site making products that helped build Tacoma's economy, it left behind a legacy of contamination.

"This project includes responsibly moving and replacing contaminated soil and this is just the latest example of the Port's remediation work in the Tacoma tideflats," he said.

we work together to create opportunities for students, businesses and our community.”

He said, "We're building a hub for innovation, education and economic growth. Maritime | 253 will prepare our young people for careers in ship building, logistics and engineering, environmental sciences and other related areas. Soon there is going to be hundreds of students walking this campus every single day.

"We're building a place where education, industry and community come together. This is a project for the community, built with the community, and together shaping a brighter future for Tacoma students and others in the region and the maritime industry itself."

Mayor Woodards addressed the impact the project will have on students who may never have thought that the waterfront was for them – that they would never get a job at the Port or even what that job looks like.

"We're going to provide opportunities to take this incredible asset we have in our Port and grow our own home talent. Most people have to look outside their cities but what an economic opportunity for us here," she said.

"Companies don't just locate in a place because they can get a slight tax break. They want to know if there is a good quality of life for the people who will work at their companies and if we have the talent. With this partnership, we will be providing the talent so that this city can continue to grow."

Woodards, too, commented on the critical partnerships that began forming two years ago as the Port Maritime Center and Maritime | 253 skills center were in the conception phase.





With shovels in hand, key partners in the project ceremoniously kicked off construction.

"The Port could have easily built their own building and been done with it, but they thought bigger than that, about how we can truly leverage this opportunity into something bigger for the entire community. The school district could have said, 'We're going to work on building our own thing – we want to find our own space.' But you all got together and said, 'How do we leverage our limited resources to do what's best?' When we do that, this is what we get. We get our partners from the state and city and federal delegation. We get everybody to come together and we're going to see this competed."

Both buildings were designed by TCF Architecture and will be built by BNBuilders. The Port business center will be a 60,000 square foot, two and a half story building, meant to invoke a maritime theme and complement other architecturally significant buildings in Tacoma. The building will have sustainable features such as solar panels and is expected to earn the equivalent of LEED Silver certification.

Construction of the Port business center is scheduled to be complete in late spring 2027. Maritime |253 construction is scheduled for completion in July 2026 and opening to students that fall. Prior to its grand opening, Maritime |253 programs will launch in the fall of 2025, using interim sites until construction is complete. Course offerings will include tracks in manufacturing, skilled trades, maritime sustainability, transportation, technology, and logistics.

State House Speaker Laurie Jinkins closed the program and got the crowd ready to move to the groundbreaking moment.



and be really ready to come out into the workforce,” she said.

"This is a historic collaboration that is going to benefit all the students, all the employers, all the families in Tacoma, Pierce County and the South Sound region. I am so honored to be part of it. Now let's go break some ground."



Port of Tacoma, Tacoma Public Schools Announce Groundbreaking on 60,000 SQFT Maritime Center

January 10, 2025



Rendering by TCF Architecture

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https://www.southsoundbiz.com/news/port-maritime-center-tacoma-opening/article_fb989690-ce89-11ef-a234-6f4bf2ad3220.html

FEATURED

Port, School Officials Break Ground on Port Maritime Center

John Stearns

Jan 9, 2025



This drone photo shows the site of the Port Maritime Center project, for which elected officials and executives from the Port of Tacoma and the Tacoma Public schools ceremonially break ground Wednesday.

Images courtesy Port of Tacoma

The Port of Tacoma and Tacoma Public Schools broke ground Wednesday on the 20-acre Port Maritime Center project that will include a new port business office and Maritime|253 skills center.

The campus will be built on port-owned land across from downtown Tacoma.

The Port of Tacoma's Capital Investment Plan budgets \$150 million for the port's portion of the project, with the port and school district each paying for their own building and the school district contributing to the cost of site development work, according to an earlier news release. Tacoma Public Schools' total budget for Maritime|253 is \$55 million.

Maritime|253 will provide career and technical education to high-school juniors and seniors from across Pierce County, bringing opportunities to more members of the community and helping fill a growing need for workers in the trades and the maritime industry, according to a news release issued after the event.

"The Port Maritime Center will be the new front door to the Port of Tacoma, allowing us to better connect with the community and bringing new life to the east side of the Foss Waterway," Port of Tacoma Commission President John McCarthy said in the release. "Our unique partnership with Tacoma Public Schools makes this a transformational project that will help inspire and grow the future of the maritime industry in our region. Thank you to all the Port staff and others who have worked so hard to get this project to where it is today, ready to break ground and start construction."



A rendering of what the Port Maritime Center will look like when completed.

“Years of hard work, dedication, and collaboration have brought us here,” Tacoma Public Schools’ Board President Korey Strozier added in the release. “We’re shaping the future of maritime in our region and opening doors for more young people to step into an industry that’s critical to our community’s growth. This is a proud and exciting moment for all of us.”

Maritime|253 will open to students in fall 2026, with the port business office opening in spring 2027.

Maritime|253 programs will launch in fall 2025, using interim sites until construction is complete in 2026. Courses will include tracks in manufacturing, skilled trades, maritime sustainability, transportation, technology, and logistics. The programs will be available to students from across Pierce County free of charge, the release added.

“Washington has been singled out as having the nation’s best economy, and we know a strong economy depends on a well-trained workforce,” House Speaker Laurie Jinkins said in the release. “This investment in our maritime workforce and the future of our state’s maritime industry will help keep us at the forefront of innovation and support good-paying jobs for Washington families.”

Added Mayor Victoria Woodards, “This collaboration between the Port of Tacoma and Tacoma Public Schools will serve as a gateway for our students — connecting them to hands-on, career-focused education in the maritime industry while completing their high-school studies. This project is a testament to what we can achieve when we invest in education, workforce development, and the industries that make Tacoma thrive.”



A rendering of a public meeting room at the Port Maritime Center.

The port business center will be a 60,000-square-foot, 2½-story building, meant to invoke a maritime theme and complement other architecturally significant buildings in Tacoma. The building will provide commission meeting chambers and workspace for employees of the Port of Tacoma and The Northwest Seaport Alliance. The building will include solar panels and is expected to earn the equivalent of LEED Silver certification, the release said.

Both buildings were designed by TCF Architecture and will be built by BNBuilders.

John Stearns

January 9, 2025

Port of Tacoma breaks ground on new maritime center

by [WorkBoat Staff](#) in News, Ports & Harbors, Business



Representatives from the Port of Tacoma and Tacoma Public Schools breaking ground on the new facility. Port of Tacoma photo.

On January 8, the Port of Tacoma and Tacoma Public Schools broke ground on the new Port Maritime Center project. The 20-acre facility, located on Port-owned land near downtown Tacoma, will include a new Port business office and Maritimel253 skills center. Port of Tacoma noted the Maritimel253 center will provide career and technical education for high school juniors and seniors from Pierce County, focusing on workforce needs in the trades and maritime industry.

The Port of Tacoma Commission and the Tacoma Public Schools Board approved the project in November 2024. Maritimel253 is scheduled to open in fall 2026, with interim programs starting in fall 2025. The Port business office is expected to open in spring 2027.

Maritimel253 will offer programs in manufacturing, skilled trades, maritime sustainability, transportation, technology, and logistics, a Port press release said. The programs will be free for Pierce County students.

The Port also noted that the business office will be a 60,000-square-foot, two-and-a-half-story building, featuring maritime-inspired design elements and sustainable features, including solar panels. The facility will also house Port of Tacoma and Northwest Seaport Alliance offices and meeting chambers. The project is being designed by **TCF Architecture** and built by **BNBuilders**.

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Tacoma maritime center project breaks ground



Image: TCF Architecture

The Port of Tacoma and Tacoma Public Schools are teaming up to develop a 20-acre campus on the east side of the Thea Foss Waterway. Tacoma's TCF Architecture is the designing the two-building project.

TCF ARCHITECTURE



By [Shawna De La Rosa](#) – Reporter, Puget Sound Business Journal
Jan 8, 2025



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The Port of Tacoma and Tacoma Public Schools broke ground Wednesday on their [20-acre Port Maritime Center campus](#).

The \$90 million joint project, which will house a port office building and a district-run maritime skills center, will be built on port-owned land on the east side of the Thea Foss Waterway, across from downtown Tacoma. Both entities gave their final approvals for the campus in November.

Construction on Tacoma Public Schools' 43,500-square-foot Maritime|253 building is expected to cost \$34 million, according to permit requests filed with the city of Tacoma. It's scheduled open to students in the fall of 2026.

The port's 62,000-square-foot office building is slated open in the spring of 2027 and has an estimated \$56 million project

cost, public filings show. It will house meeting chambers for the Port Commission and workspace for the port and Northwest Seaport Alliance.

Related coverage

- [Port of Tacoma approves funding to advance new headquarters project](#)
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BNBuilders is the general contractor for both projects, which currently share an address of 426 E. 11th St. TCF Architecture is designing both structures.

The port and school district shared the site development cost, which included remediation.

“The Port Maritime Center will be the new front door to the Port of Tacoma, allowing us to better connect with the community and bringing new life to the east side of the Foss Waterway,” John McCarthy, president of the Port Commission, said in a news release. “Our unique partnership with Tacoma Public Schools makes this a transformational project that will help inspire and grow the future of the maritime industry in our region.”

Though Maritime|253 won't until next year at the earliest, it will begin offering classes in the fall at interim locations. Course offerings will include manufacturing, skilled trades, maritime sustainability, transportation, technology and logistics. The programs will be available to students from across Pierce County free of charge.

“Washington has been singled out as having the nation’s best economy, and we know a strong economy depends on a well-trained workforce,” Washington state Rep. Laurie Jenkins, who represents Tacoma, said in the release. “This investment in our maritime workforce and the future of our state’s maritime industry will help keep us at the forefront of innovation and support good-paying jobs for Washington families.”

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https://www.southsoundbiz.com/news/tacoma-port-maritime-center-final-approval/article_a624c096-b717-11ef-9244-b32efaea957c.html

Tacoma's Port Maritime Center Receives Final Approval

Antoinette Alexander

Dec 10, 2024



Courtesy of Port of Tacoma

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It's official: Tacoma's Port Maritime Center project has received final approval from the Port of Tacoma Commissioners. Groundbreaking for the construction phase is expected early next year.

The Port of Tacoma Commissioners voted unanimously for final approval of the project, which is anticipated to be a catalyst for future development along the east side of the Foss Waterway, a release said. Days before the Port of Tacoma Commissioners' vote, Tacoma Public Schools Board members also gave their final approval.

"Developing this type of project on the Tideflats is a complex challenge that the port is uniquely qualified to take on. We are transforming historically contaminated land into collaborative ground where education, innovation, and opportunity can take root and thrive," said Port of Tacoma Commission President Kristin Ang in a press statement. "The Port Maritime Center is a once-in-a-generation investment in our community and our environment. Together with Tacoma Public Schools and our community partners, we are working to inspire and build the maritime workforce of the future."

The port-owned property will include Tacoma Public Schools' Maritime|253 skills center. The center will provide career and technical education free of charge to junior and senior high-school-level students from across Pierce County.

Construction of Maritime|253 is expected to be completed by the fall of 2026. Maritime|253 programs will launch in the fall of 2025, using interim sites until construction is complete in 2026.

Built alongside Maritime|253 will be a new port business center. This facility will include commission chambers for public meetings and workspace for employees of the Port of Tacoma and the Northwest Seaport Alliance. It is expected to open in early 2027.

The Port of Tacoma's Capital Investment Plan budgets \$150 million for the port's portion of the project. The port and school district are each paying for their own building, with the school district contributing to the cost of site-development work.

TCF Architecture/BNBuilders is the design-build team for the project.

Antoinette Alexander



NEWS, NEWS BRIEFS, PMM ONLINE NEWS

Tacoma Port Maritime Center Project Receives Final Approval



Karen Robes Meeks

December 3, 2024



Tacoma, Wash. harbor and school officials are expected to break ground in early 2025 on a 20-acre project that includes the “Maritime|253” skills center, shoreline access to the public and a new port business center.

On Nov. 19, Port of Tacoma Commissioners gave their final approval on the Port Maritime Center project on the eastern portion of Foss Waterway.

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This follows Tacoma Public Schools Board's Nov. 14 approval of the Maritime|253 skills center, a facility aimed at offering free career and technical education to Pierce County junior and senior high-school students.



A rendering of the "Maritime|253" skills center in Tacoma. Image: Tacoma Public Schools.

Set to launch in Fall 2025 at interim sites while the permanent facility is being built, Maritime|253 programs would offer courses related to logistics, manufacturing, maritime sustainability, technology, transportation and trades skills, according to a port announcement.

The port is budgeting \$150 million for its part of the project. The port and school district, which announced plans to partner on the project in 2023, are each funding their own facility. The school district is also funding part of the site development costs.

"This partnership with the Port of Tacoma opens doors to careers that students might never have considered," Tacoma Public Schools Board President Lisa Keating said. "It's about providing real-world skills that will serve them well beyond high school and empowering them."

The project also includes a port business center for future commission meetings and office space for port and Northwest Seaport Alliance employees.

Environmental remediation efforts on the site are expected to start before anticipated construction in early 2025.

Tacoma Public Schools said that it expects Maritime|253 to be completed by Fall 2026, while the port projects an early 2027 opening for the port business office.

“We are transforming historically contaminated land into collaborative ground where education, innovation and opportunity can take root and thrive,” Port Commission President Kristin Ang said. “The Port Maritime Center is a once-in-a-generation investment in our community and our environment.”

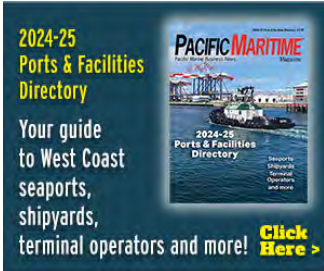
#maritime253

#portoftacoma




By Karen Robes Meeks

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 **INSIDE LOOK**

Sneak peek: Walking trails, water access are part of new Tacoma maritime center design

BY BECCA MOST

UPDATED MAY 29, 2024 12:51 PM

Port and Tacoma educators collaborate on new maritime skills center



00:00

00:54

Aerial drone video shows the location for both the Port of Tacoma's new headquarters as well as the Maritime Skills Center.

BY PORT OF TACOMA / TACOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS | PORT OF TACOMA / TACOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Port of Tacoma just released conceptual design photos for the [new \\$73 million Port Maritime Center](#) that's planned along the Foss Waterway in Tacoma.

Expected to open in spring 2026, it will feature a new Port of Tacoma office space and a more centralized [Maritime | 253 skills center](#) run by Tacoma Public Schools.

Preliminary photos show two sleek silver buildings with lots of windows along the Wheeler-Osgood and Thea Foss waterways just south of the Murray Morgan Bridge. Parking lots for the business center and skills center will be built along East 11th Place and East F Street, according to the draft site plan.



A draft site plan of the Port Maritime Center and the Maritime | 253 skills center run by Tacoma Public Schools. *Port of Tacoma*

Architects are planning to add solar panels to the new port building, as well as public amenities like walking trails, a public plaza and waterway access, according to the Port of Tacoma.

The preliminary design for the new Port business office, which also will include Port Commission meeting chambers, is a 60,000-square-foot, two-and-a-half story building. It will accommodate about 150 Port of Tacoma and Northwest Seaport Alliance employees, according to the Port.

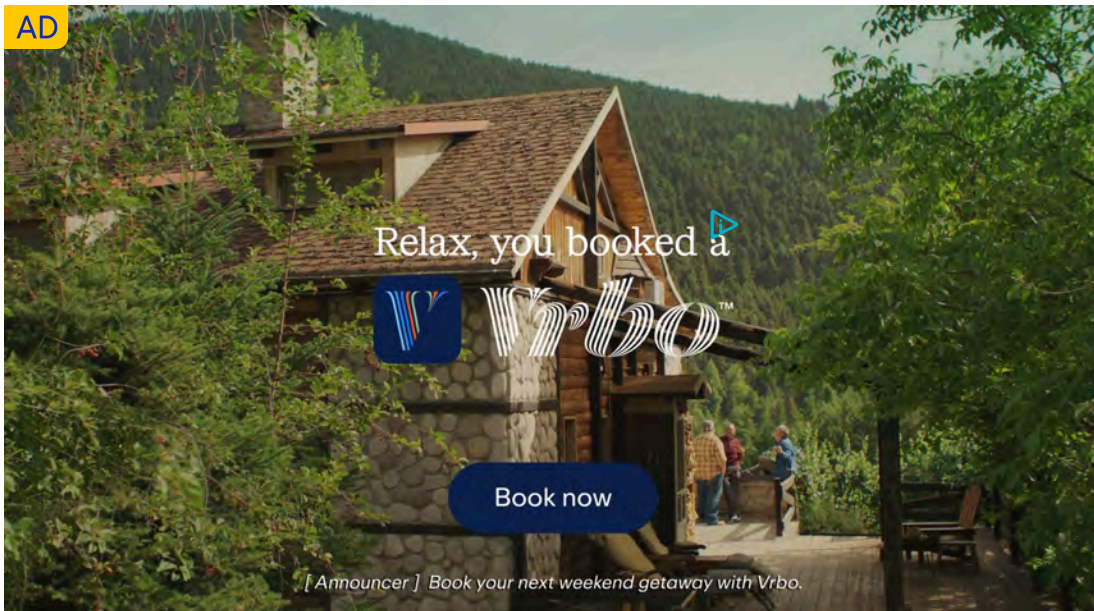
The Maritime | 253 skills center will be designed, built and operated by Tacoma Public Schools. It will provide career and technical education to Pierce County junior and senior high school students, preparing them for jobs in the maritime industry.



A rendering of what the new Port Maritime Center and Maritime | 253 skills center may look like once construction is completed in 2026. *Port of Tacoma*

It will cost the Port an estimated \$80 million to \$110 million to complete the project, which includes construction, site and shoreline improvements and environmental remediation, Port communications manager Graham Johnson told The News Tribune Wednesday.

TOP VIDEOS



“The Port’s current five-year Capital Investment Plan and operating outlook anticipates sufficient funds will be available. The Port does not anticipate the need to borrow additional money or raise property taxes to fund the Maritime Center project,” he said. “The school district is paying for its own building and sharing some of the cost of site work.”

The skills center has a construction budget of \$35 million, [as previously reported by The News Tribune](#). The state Legislature has \$8 million earmarked for the skill center over the course of the 2023-25 biennium, according to Tacoma Public Schools.

Master planning and design will continue through 2024 and construction will begin in 2025. Construction on the Port Maritime Center is expected to be completed in December 2026 and the Maritime | 253 skills center is expected to be completed in July 2026.



The Port of Tacoma released conceptual photos of what the new Port Maritime Center may look like once it's built in 2026. *Port of Tacoma*

This story was originally published May 29, 2024, 5:30 AM.

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FEATURED

Port Maritime Center Design Takes Shape

John Stearns
May 2, 2024



This rendering shows the Port Maritime Center from the Wheeler-Osgood Waterway, with the Port Business Center, left, and Maritime | 253 skills center, right.

TCF Architecture / Courtesy Tacoma Public Schools

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The Port of Tacoma and Tacoma Public Schools continue to advance plans for a prime parcel at the intersection of the Thea Foss and Wheeler-Osgood waterways that will include a maritime skills center to inspire and train high school students for careers in

the maritime industry, plus a new port administration building more centrally located for public meetings and port constituents.

The dual-purpose project, known as the Port Maritime Center, will sit on a 20-acre, port-owned site just south of the Murray Morgan Bridge that's meant to better link the city with its maritime heritage, including through a waterside walking path. The port also hopes, pending further discussions with the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, to include interpretive signs honoring the tribe, whose ancestral lands the port occupies.

Designs for the combined Maritime | 253 skills center and port administration building were released in mid-March, when the joint project reached 30% design status. The Port of Tacoma Commission on March 19 approved funding to move the project to 60% design by August.



This rendering shows Maritime | 253, left, and the Port Business Center, right.

TCF Architecture / Courtesy Port of Tacoma

Groundbreaking is projected in March 2025 on both buildings, with Maritime | 253 skills center completion by summer 2026, in time for students to begin taking classes that fall. The skills center will be a regional career and technical education center, CTE, that serves high school students from multiple school districts throughout Pierce County at no

charge. Students interested in maritime skills training will take advanced CTE courses at the center and courses at their high school required for graduation, splitting their day between the skills center and their high school.

“Maritime | 253 will be a key player in our South Puget Sound Region’s workforce development goals, with intentional programming to prime a professional pipeline to the maritime industry,” according to a school district document.

The port building is targeted for completion in December 2026 and includes public meeting chambers, Commission and conference space, and executive, administrative and technical staff space. It will house about 150 port and Northwest Seaport Alliance staff.



This shows the Port Maritime Center buildings' location on the Port of Tacoma property. The Port Business Center is at left, near the elbow of the Thea Foss and Wheeler-Osgood waterways, and Maritime | 253 is at right.

Courtesy Port of Tacoma

Total project cost, including all design and construction, is estimated at \$105 million to \$150 million, with Tacoma Public Schools contributing \$35 million to \$41 million, according to a port memo on March 11. The design-build team of Seattle-based BNBuilders and Tacoma-based TCF Architecture was selected last summer to design and build the complex. Maritime | 253 and the port building will be about 35,000 square feet and 60,000 square feet, respectively, with 300 total parking spaces.

With master-planning for the site continuing, the public is invited to an open house on the project from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., May 7 at the Foss Waterway Seaport, 705 Dock St., in Tacoma. Feedback received from public engagement efforts continues to be incorporated into design development.

“This is an exciting moment as we build a new front door to the Port of Tacoma,” Kristin Ang, president of the Port of Tacoma Commission, said in an email on the project’s conceptual design. “The way this project connects us to the wider community, and helps us build the workforce of the future, reflects how we’re seizing this once-in-a-generation opportunity.”

The project's genesis

In recalling the genesis of the project, Eric Johnson, the port's executive director, said that Tacoma Public Schools Superintendent Josh Garcia had expressed a desire for better connecting students to the port. At the same time, the port was considering moving its office to a more central location, had the land available, and saw the workforce development benefit.

“Josh Garcia had a vision: We're a port town, we should be creating port maritime jobs — we've got this big, wonderful, vibrant port ... we're looking at it every day, yet we aren't connecting our workforce training needs with our job opportunities ... and could we partner with the port?” Johnson said of conversations launched several years ago.

Eric Johnson, Port of Tacoma executive director

Courtesy Port of Tacoma

“The opportunity just sort of became obvious to us,” Johnson said, noting the port’s vacant property conducive to accommodating the needs of the school district, port, and community. “It’s going to be a co-located facility that’s going to allow kids in the community to really connect to the waterfront, which has traditionally been, unfortunately, a somewhat insular place — and we’re trying to fix that.”

Port Commissioner Deanna Keller has championed the idea from the start.

“It’s not very often where you can actually do something that really blesses our entire community ... but this is one of those projects,” Keller said. “It’s good for all of us. We need to do more public-to-public partnerships as well as public-private partnerships that benefit our community. There’s no reason why not to — and here’s a great story to be able to share with everybody. Let’s break down those barriers and let’s work for all of our people.”

Maritime | 253 will be the state’s 15th regional career and technical education skills center.

While Tacoma Public Schools will host and run the Maritime | 253 skills center, it will be open to 11th- and 12th-grade students from all South Puget Sound school districts, primarily those in Pierce County, according to Adam Kulaas, director of innovative learning and career and technical education, or CTE, for the school district. Some Federal Way School District schools also could participate, he said. It’s one of more than a dozen districts positioned for participation as the Tacoma district works to solidify partner district agreements.

Keller hopes some kind of public transportation access can be arranged to Maritime | 253 so students without transportation are not precluded from attending.

Stacy Page, facilities communication coordinator for Tacoma Public Schools, said in an email that conversations with transit partners and school districts are developing, “with innovative solutions to transportation that offer all students equitable access via transportation to the Skills Center.” Students in Tacoma Public Schools will travel to the center from their home school through the district’s current transportation system, Page said.

Kulaas said Maritime | 253, which received state authorization as a skills center in October, will have essentially four overarching career pathways: advanced manufacturing; transportation and logistics; maritime technology; and maritime sustainability. Program and course details will be refined through consultation with industry partners and other school districts, he said.

Maritime | 253 will be able to accommodate about 300 students in the morning and another 300 in the afternoon, with students completing the other half of their school day in their regular schools, Kulaas said.

Skills center credits apply to students' high school graduation.

Skills center credits are state equivalencies, with some as CTE credits, some as elective credits, and some as potentially math and lab science credits, depending on skills center courses, and all progress toward a diploma, he said.

While Maritime | 253 won't open for another two years, there will be maritime programming access this summer, Kulaas said. That includes relevant, ongoing, and expanded programs aligned to the skills center.



Students gather on the lawn outside the Port Maritime Center in this rendering.

TCF Architecture / Courtesy Tacoma Public Schools

“In terms of programs that we already have delivered and developed for multiple years now and continue to evolve and expand ... many of those ... existing programs are very maritime central or centered,” Kulaas said. “So our merchant mariner program, our transportation logistics program, our environmental program ... we’re going to expand our drone and ROV (remotely operated vehicle) program,” all with a maritime flare.

Skills center students have options of either going straight into the maritime industry workforce or using the training to prepare them for additional academic training in college. As Page noted, the center’s curriculum will maximize advancement toward attaining post-diploma degrees and credentials with partner community colleges, technical colleges, and universities.

Kulaas added on Maritime | 253, “While it absolutely creates opportunity for a student to go directly into employment, or apprenticeship, or any of our traditional kind of labor fields, it is also an extremely strong springboard into post-diploma learning opportunities, whether that be technical colleges, (or a) four-year university.”



The Port Business Center is seen at dusk in this rendering.

TCF Architecture / Courtesy Port of Tacoma

Skills center courses provide connections to programs from maritime management to computer science and cybersecurity.

“What we can see in terms of the port operations is amazing in terms of the terminals and just the magnitude of a global port, but there's so much behind all of that that gives students access to the future of work in the maritime industry that absolutely sets them up for all sorts of different post-diploma experiences,” Kulaas said.

Having Maritime | 253 in the port also immerses students in the port environment, introducing them in ways they might not get otherwise.

“Growing up in the region, I've seen, physically, the port for 40-something years now and it wasn't until a couple years back that I got to take a tour to ... open my eyes and brain to just the sheer magnitude of how incredible it is in terms of not only our regional economy, our state economy, but on a global scale,” Kulaas said.

Indeed, the port's economic impact is sizable. A study released in 2019 highlighted the economic impact of the port's real estate and marine cargo operations in 2017, noting the port supported more than 42,100 jobs, including direct, indirect, and induced. If farmers and manufacturers who ship products through the port were included, port activities affected 267,000 jobs overall in Washington, the study found.

It also found the port generated about \$3 billion in labor income, and \$9.3 billion in total business output, and generated more than \$100 million in state and local taxes.



A Lincoln High School student welds an aluminum boat his class is constructing. The Maritime | 253 skills center will offer manufacturing among its career and technical education, or CTE, programs.

Tacoma Public Schools

Kulaas said the school district has seen its own impact from introducing students to the port.

“Last year we provided access to port tours in partnership with the Port of Tacoma — tours for every ninth grader at Lincoln High School — and the feedback we got from students was just like mind-blowing,” he said.

Students who've lived locally their entire life and see the port every day were amazed by the port's myriad facets of operation after traveling through it, Kulaas said. Continuing that and celebrating the port's role in the ecosystem is important, he added.

The port will lease the property to the school district for a nominal fee, much as it does to the neighboring Tacoma Youth Marine Foundation.

"The nice thing about where the kids are going to be, and also where we are going to be, is we're closer in toward the city, so we have visibility," Commissioner Keller said. "The other nice thing is the maritime trade skills center is going to be close to UWT's Center for Urban Waters ... on the same street along with Youth Marine Foundation. The tie-in is just so beautiful and wonderful."

The port's Johnson believes the site, with its public access, will be a source of pride and enjoyment for the community.

"Right now, it doesn't look like much — it's kind of a blight to be honest with you — and we're going to turn it into something that the community really, really likes," he said.

John Stearns

December 5, 2023

Maritime education center, port office building, planned for Tacoma waterfront

By JOURNAL STAFF

A new career and technical education center, focused on priming students for work in the maritime industry, and a new office building for the Port of Tacoma are set for the city's waterfront.

The two-building project is being co-developed by the port and Tacoma Public Schools on two port-owned parcels along the east side of the Thea Foss Waterway at 1203 E. D St.

The project is about to enter the design phase. That will be spearheaded by TCF Architecture. The design-build team of BNBuilders/TCF Architecture was selected for the opportunity to develop, design, and construct the buildings in August, following a competitive request for proposals evaluation process.



Photo courtesy of Port of Tacoma [enlarge]

The two-building campus will be located at this port-owned site on the Thea Foss Waterway.

The port says the project will create a new “landmark campus on the Tacoma waterfront.” Its new office building, called the Port Maritime Center, will provide office space for about 150 Port of Tacoma and Northwest Seaport Alliance employees, and will also include a business operations center and meeting chambers for the Port Commission. There is also the potential to incorporate amenities such as public walking paths and access to the Foss Waterway as designs for the new building are developed.

The new career and technical education center, called Maritime 253, will be operated by Tacoma Public Schools, and will provide opportunities for high school students across Pierce County to develop skills and education leading to a career in the maritime and industrial trades. The building is likely to include both classrooms and lecture halls as well as labs and workshop and collaborative work areas for up to 300 students. There will also be office space for staff and faculty.

According to the school district's website, the curriculum is currently in development with industry advisors. It will comprise four focus pathways that include skilled and technical trades, transportation and logistics, technology and innovation, and sustainability. Courses and participation will be offered at no cost to students.

The port and school district are each conducting their own design process, with each organization paying for the construction of their own buildings.

The Puget Sound Business Journal reports that the port is eyeing a 60,000-square-foot building for its portion, whereas the school district building is likely to be between 30,000- to 35,000 square feet.

The design process for the entire campus will begin in early 2024. The port is aiming for 30% design of its building by March.

The campus is slated to cost \$73 million to develop. PSBJ reports the port's share of the project is \$38 million, while the school district's budget is \$35 million.

“This will be a new landmark on the Tacoma waterfront that represents our commitment to workforce development, job creation, and strong community connections,” Port of Tacoma commission president Deanna Keller shared in a press release. “We're excited to take the next steps on this signature project.”

“This unique Maritime 253 Skills Center will provide a pathway for high school students into living wage jobs that strengthen our vital maritime-related industries,” Tacoma School Board president Elizabeth Bonbright added.

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<https://www.bizjournals.com/seattle/news/2023/11/30/port-maritime-center-planned.html>

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Port, Tacoma Schools plan \$73M maritime skills center on waterfront site



Image: Anthony Bolante | PSBJ

The campus will be developed on a port-owned site just south of the 11th Street bridge on the east side of the Thea Foss Waterway. The bridge is seen here from the north.

ANTHONY BOLANTE | PSBJ



By [Shawna De La Rosa](#) – Reporter, Puget Sound Business Journal
Nov 30, 2023

Preview this article 1 min

The campus will be on a 17-acre site on the Thea Foss Waterway owned by the port.

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EDUCATION

Maritime trades need workers. New Tacoma student skills center aims to provide them

BY CRAIG SAILOR

UPDATED NOVEMBER 21, 2023 10:27 AM



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Aerial drone video shows the location for both the Port of Tacoma's new headquarters as well as the Maritime Skills Center.

BY PORT OF TACOMA / TACOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS | PORT OF TACOMA / TACOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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Today's high school students could be tomorrow's stevedores, tugboat captains, green-energy developers and other professionals tied to the shipping industry.

At least that's the hope of the [Port of Tacoma](#) and [Tacoma Public Schools](#).

In fall 2024, the [Maritime | 253](#) program should be teaching skills to high school students from across the South Sound. The program will be based at the new estimated \$73 million [Port Maritime Center](#) — the port's new headquarters — which will be built on the Foss Waterway, just south of the 11th Street Bridge.

“The vision here is for this to be kind of a comprehensive job skill training center that keys into our natural advantage of being a port city,” said Eric Johnson, [the port's executive director](#).

Funding for the program is coming from the state and the port.

EXISTING AND NEW PROGRAMS

Maritime | 253 is evolving from an already existing program Tacoma Public Schools (TPS) offers in summer. Currently, eight programs offer credentials in merchant mariner, warehouse and logistics, drones, electrical, environmental services, roofing, plumbers and pipefitters and wildland-fire certification. Students can learn to drive forklifts and operate cranes.



Students at the School of Industrial Design Engineering and Art (IDEA) work along teachers to build a wooden boat as part of the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program.

A total of 127 students completed a credentialed program this past summer, TPS said. The program makes them eligible for their merchant-mariner card and apprenticeships.

The new school year-synced programming will be “next level” according to Adam Kulaas, director of innovation learning and career tech education for TPS. While some area high schools have similar programs in manufacturing, welding, boat building and wood technology, Maritime | 253 will focus on four areas: skilled and technical trades, transportation and logistics, technology and innovation, and sustainability.

COUNTY WIDE

Maritime | 253 will offer a centralized location that students from 11 South Sound school districts could attend.

“This is a chance to kind of put it in one place and serve kids throughout the region,” Kulaas said.

The skills center has a construction budget of \$35 million. The state Legislature has \$8 million earmarked for the skill center over the course of the 2023-25 biennium, according to TPS.

The port worked closely with TPS to develop the curriculum after both Tacoma and Seattle ports identified future needs and the jobs necessary to fulfill them.

“And so this priority urgency was around designing access points, equitable access points to countless career pathways within maritime,” Kulaas said.

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT SHIPPING

Most of the skills learned in the program would be transferable to a variety of associated industries, Kulaas said.

“There’s crossover to all sorts of career opportunities for students that are high wage, high demand, high skill,” he said.

Drone piloting, for instance, could be used in real estate, land surveying, environmental assessments and general photography. Sustainable fuels could be applied to a multitude of industries.

THE STUDENTS

Students interested in maritime and other industrial career programs are racially diverse, Kulaas said. The summer maritime program was evenly split between girls and boys.

“The two strongest welders in our district are both female; One’s a senior, one’s a junior,” he said. “And so it’s exciting and kind of a pride point that we’ve done something in terms of making sure that we create access and opportunities.”



Lincoln high school students in welding shop.

Kulaas hopes to have 150 TPS students and 150 students from the other school districts enrolled in the program in fall 2024. After the new building is completed, programs should be able to accommodate 600 students in morning and afternoon schedules.

For the port, the center could be a boon for new employees in a tight job market.

“The maritime sector, they’re just like every other sector of the economy, and they are desperately worried about having an adequately trained workforce coming online over the next three to five to six years,” Johnson said.

NEW PORT HEADQUARTERS

Currently, a maze of streets leads to the port’s headquarters at the base of the Sitcum Waterway. It’s a dramatic location with cargo ships tied up just a few feet away and straddle carriers working nearby. But, it’s not convenient to reach from downtown Tacoma.

The new location is on the east side of the Foss Waterway, just south of the 11th Street Bridge and adjacent to a thumb of an inlet called the Wheeler-Osgood Waterway, once an outlet of the Puyallup River.

Today, the site is a dirt lot with down-on-its-luck machinery and vehicles.

“It’s kind of an eyesore, to be honest with you,” Johnson said. “There’s not much there.”

Testing confirmed that the site was once open water and not land occupied by the Puyallup Tribe, he said.

Johnson doesn’t expect the new headquarters, with a \$38 million construction budget, to be any bigger than its current building. It’s not been decided if the port’s headquarters and the skill center will be two buildings or one.

The current administration building will stay in place but it’s eventual purpose has yet to be determined, according to port spokesperson Graham Johnson. It’s likely that operations will stay in the building, he said.



Marine biology students at the Science and Math Institute (SAMI) go out on the Doolin Rogers boat. Through a partnership with the Youth Marine Foundation and through Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming students are able to conduct class in Commencement Bay on the water. Courtesy *TPS*

SKILL CENTER PARTNERSHIP

Port of Tacoma [Commissioner Deanna Keller](#) said she heard from a number of people, both constituents and fellow government officials, that port jobs were difficult to access, particularly for women and people of color. She thinks the skill center would help level the playing field.

Her fellow commissioners immediately embraced the idea that could potentially create a pipeline for students into skilled, high-paying jobs.

“I think it’s a new era,” Keller said. “And I think it’s a new opportunity for all of us to take a look as governments to come together and to pool our resources for the benefit of the citizens we serve.”

A public open house on the project will be held on Nov. 29 from 4:30-7:30 p.m. at [Foss Waterway Seaport](#), 705 Dock Street, Tacoma.

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