

## COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING-RETREAT

March 31, 2026 - 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Silver Cloud Hotel Point Ruston Waterfront, 5125 Grand Loop, Ruston, WA 98407

The Port of Tacoma Commission met for a Special Meeting-Retreat on **March 31, 2026**, at the Silver Cloud Hotel Point Ruston Waterfront, Onyx Room, located at 5125 Grand Loop, Ruston, WA 98407. Commissioners Kristin Ang, Deanna Keller, John McCarthy, Dick Marzano, and JT Wilcox were present at the start of the special meeting and a quorum was met.

The meeting was not streamed live or recorded but was open to the public.

### Staff in attendance all day:

Eric Johnson, Erin Galeno, Alisa Praskovich, Vanessa Audett, Martyn Adamson, Heather Burgess (Legal Counsel—Dickson, Frohlich, Phillips, Burgess), Sean Eagan, Helen Hickman, Sara Gangwish Ortquist, Lisa Carter, & Yvonna Peterson.

### Call to Order:

Commissioner Dick Marzano, Port of Tacoma Commission President, called the meeting to order at **9:00 a.m.** Introductions were made.

Eric Johnson, Executive Director with the Port of Tacoma, welcomed everyone to the retreat and introduced the first guest speaker, Mayor Anders Ibsen for the City of Tacoma (City).

### 1. External Relations

#### **A. Tacoma Mayor: Shared Vision/Growth Strategies Discussion**

Mayor Ibsen (City of Tacoma) spoke on the importance of partnership and open communication in building community. Topics discussed included: the new Maritime 253 Center, the importance of freight mobility within our corridors, and the work of the new City Manager (Hyun Kim). Open discussion and conversation ensued with regard to street vacations, attracting maritime trade, economic development, and maintaining cleanliness surrounding the businesses. The possibility of a future joint study session was mentioned.

#### **B. WPPA—Policy Outlook & Economic Growth Strategies**

Eric ffitch (Executive Director—WPPA) presented. He is in his fourth year as the Executive Director of the Washington Public Ports Association (WPPA). Their efforts in the 2026 WA State Legislative session were presented. The Washington trade strategy is of utmost importance, and WPPA takes their role in the Trade Association very seriously. The strategy reflects conversations and input from growers, shippers, and laborers, and included how the legislature could help ease some of the competitiveness issues within the state. Discussion ensued.

#### **C. TEMCO: Grain Terminal Business Update**

Mark Jensen (Terminal Manager—TEMCO) presented on the grain elevator in Tacoma. TEMCO (Tacoma Export Marketing Company) is a joint venture company, equally owned by Cargill, Inc. and CHS, Inc. It stores and moves grain from rail to vessels at the Tacoma grain elevator. The terminal can unload about fifteen rail cars per hour and typically loads a vessel in 5–6 continuous shifts, handling mostly feed grain from North and South Dakota and Minnesota. Most shipments arrive via BNSF (90%), with the remainder from Union Pacific (10%), and Korea and Japan are currently the top destinations. Tariffs have reduced soybean volumes to China, while corn volume is projected to increase by year-end. Discussion ensued.

**D. NWSA Auto Business Update**

Tong Zhu (Chief, Commercial & Strategy Officer) & Andre Elmaleh (Sr. Business Development Manager) with the Northwest Seaport Alliance (NWSA) presented. The presentation focused on the Port of Tacoma side of the auto market. Imports are down 45% as a direct result of tariffs. They expect to see some additional volume in Tacoma because of the electric vehicle trade between Canada and China. However, there has been a downturn in customer demand for vehicles and parts.

**2. Economic Vitality & Environmental Remediation**

Alisa Praskovich (Chief, External Strategy Officer) introduced the topic and speakers for this section of the retreat. Erin Galeno (Chief Financial & Administrative Officer) provided the 10-year operating revenue for NWSA as it feeds into the Port of Tacoma's revenue.

Debbie Shepack (Sr. Director, Real Estate) presented opportunities and challenges related to six properties below. Rob Healy (Director, Remediation & Water Quality) addressed environmental findings and cleanup details. Thais Howard (Sr. Director, Engineering) provided the permitting and stormwater details. Feedback from the Commission was solicited and discussion ensued as each property was presented.

- 4012 SR 509 S. Frontage Road (formerly Progress Rail)
- Alexander Avenue / Taylor Way
- Thorne Road Off Dock Container Yard
- 2901 Taylor Way
- 401 E. Alexander Avenue (Earley Business Center)
- Port Maritime Center – Adjacent Parcels

*The Commission broke for lunch at 11:56am and returned to order at 12:25pm.*

**3. Workforce Development**

**A. Workforce Central Update**

Katie Condit (CEO) and Christian Reed (Talent Pipeline Manager) from Workforce Central presented. The Port's investment over the past two and a half years has strengthened training programs, expanded paid internships, and created more pathways into maritime careers across Pierce County. By integrating interns into standard employee processes like onboarding, retention increased from 35% to 70%. This approach also helped reduce the perception of interns as temporary workers. Questions and comments followed the presentation.

**B. Maritime | 253 Curriculum Overview**

Dr. Josh Garcia (Superintendent) and Adam Kulaas (Chief of Schools) with the Tacoma Public School District provided an overview of the curriculum for the new, state-of-the-art maritime skills center and training facility. This is considered a regional Career & Technical Education center, with 220 students enrolled thus far. Pathways include: Advance Maritime Manufacturing, Port Operations & Logistics, Technology, and Sustainability. Discussion ensued.

**C. Port of Tacoma Workforce Development Strategy**

Sean Eagan (Director, Government & Community Affairs) and Leslie Barstow (Manager, Community Relations & Workforce Development) presented on behalf of the Port. Workforce development was incorporated into the Port's strategic plan with an emphasis on partnering with local and regional organizations. The goal is to expand career development opportunities in maritime, logistics, manufacturing, and construction trades. The 2026 major tasks planned to advance this initiative were reviewed.

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**4. Organizational Success**

**A. AI Strategy**

Martyn Adamson (Chief Information Officer) presented artificial intelligence (AI) use at the Port. AI is a computing field focused on building systems that can perform tasks that typically require human intelligence. Unlike earlier technologies based on fixed logic, AI can draw conclusions from the information it is given and can complete tasks—such as writing software code—much faster than humans. The Port described both the benefits and challenges of adopting AI and emphasized a measured, pragmatic approach. Key steps include creating an AI Governance Steering Committee, launching a Center of Excellence, partnering HR and IT to support change, prioritizing Microsoft tools, and leveraging existing software.

**B. Mentorship Program & Learning Management System**

Vanessa Audett (Chief Human Resources Officer) presented on behalf of the Port. The current learning management system was reviewed, as well as plans for an improved system open to all employees. It should be rolled out by the end of the year. A Mentorship Pilot Program was launched this year. The purpose of the mentor program is to: accelerate professional & personal development, create space for learning & growth, establish support, increase cross-functional collaboration & knowledge sharing, strengthen the organizational culture, and support strategic goals for employee engagement.

**C. Maritime Center—Commission Discussion**

Alisa Praskovich (Chief, External Strategy Officer) & Carol Bua (Director of Communications) with Port, led a discussion on conference room naming vs. use of a numbering system in new building. A numbering system is currently preferred, as it would include the floor number and provide a uniform system for the 20+ conference rooms. Options for other naming opportunities, dedications and land acknowledgements were also shared. Feedback from the Commission was sought throughout the discussion.

**D. Commissioner Travel Discussion**

Commissioner Dick Marzano sought input on creating some guidelines for Commission travel and asked for suggestions be sent to him.

**Adjournment:**

Commissioner Marzano thanked staff for their work on the retreat and adjourned the meeting at **2:29pm**.

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Attest:



Dick Marzano, President  
Port of Tacoma Commission



Kristin Ang, Secretary  
Port of Tacoma Commission



Helen Hickman, Clerk of the Port  
Port of Tacoma