



Commission Meeting Minutes Monday, March 9, 2026

Call to Order

Commission President Jasmine Vasavada called a regular meeting of the Port of Olympia Board of Commissioners to order and open to the public at 4:00 p.m., Monday, March 9, 2026, at the Percival Plaza, 626 Columbia Street NW, Suite 1B, Olympics Room, in Olympia, Washington 98501.

Present

Commissioners: Jasmine Vasavada – President, Sarah Montano – Vice President, Joel Hansen – Secretary, Jerry Toompas and Krag Unsoeld.

Staff: Alex Smith, Executive Director, Chris Pierce-Wright, General Counsel; Warren Hendrickson, Director of Operations; Shawn Gilbertson, Director of Environmental Planning and Programs; Taber Lee, Marketing and Outreach Senior Manager; Spencer Battersby, IT Manager; and Missy Goodell, Commission Coordinator.

Guests: Annette Roth, Executive Director, Evergreen Coast Regional Partnership; and Eric ffitich, Executive Director, Washington Public Ports Association (WPPA).

Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Unsoeld moved to approve the agenda, Commissioner Montano seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Executive Director Report

Alex Smith, Executive Director, reported on recent Port activities. She announced that the Port hosted C.R.E.W. (Commercial Real Estate Women), a networking group founded in Seattle that is looking to expand into the South Sound region. The vessel Poplar Arrow, carrying an import paper pulp cargo from Brazil, arrived this weekend. This week some port staff and commissioners will attend the Thurston County Chamber Forum on The Geopolitics of Geoducks. The forum will explore the opportunities and pressures shaping one of Washington's most distinctive and globally recognized industries. The March Port Pulse newsletter was distributed.

In addition, Alex reminded everyone of the ways they can communicate with the Commission. She stated there is a great deal of information available on the Port's website and encouraged everyone to check it out.

Public Comment

Four individuals provided public comment regarding lobbyists, e-bikes, Washington Public Ports Association, and thanking the Port for their work.

Commission Response to Public Comment / Follow-Up to Public Comment

Each commissioner provided input to public comments.

Partner Spotlight

Evergreen Coast Regional Partnership. Annette Roth, Executive Director of Evergreen Coast Regional Partnership described a development district, how it operates, and its goals.

The Evergreen Coast Regional Partnership is a regional economic development organization, focusing on Grays Harbor, Thurston, Mason, and Pacific counties. Washington State is home to ten economic development districts (Thurston County has never been a part of an economic development district until now.) Economic development districts were created by the federal government in 1969. The Evergreen Coast Regional Partnership co-locates with the Thurston County Economic Development council located in Lacey.

Economic development districts allow communities access to federal and state funding that they might not otherwise be eligible for.

One of the main differences between an economic development district and an economic development council, is that economic development councils generally focus on one county and get their statutory authority through the State of Washington through the Department of Commerce. Economic development districts focus on multiple counties and also get their statutory authority through the federal government.

The Evergreen Coast Regional Partnership is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, they have a board of directors, and each county gets an equal number of representatives. The organization does regional economic development planning strategy work. They look at things that are happening from an economic development perspective in each county: Where are the commonalities; where are the differences; what are the challenges?

The Evergreen Coast Regional Partnership looks to see if there are ways we can work together to help reduce redundancy in some of the economic development work that we do. The Partnership provides technical assistance to ADOs (Associate Development Organizations) and other organizations throughout the region as they ask for it and as they need. We want to ensure that we can be resilient collectively as a region. We have strategic priorities for the organization that guide how we approach this work.

Strategic Priorities: 1) Coordinated approach to economic development. Much of the work that ports do is in parallel with the work that the ADOs do; they want to ensure that there is no duplication of efforts, or perhaps some assistance can be provided through the Economic Development District. They coordinate with the ADOs very closely, but also ensure that other economic development agencies are being included across the region. Examples are improving infrastructure, transportation corridors, wastewater, growing key industries, forest products, agriculture and food processing, tourism and outdoor recreation and the marine sector.

Long term sustainability, workforce development,

This year their goal is to bring Lewis County into their Economic Development District. It can take up to a year to go through a whole new designation process in order to accomplish that. An economic development strategy needs to be redeveloped, which gives the Port an opportunity to get involved with what that could look like.

Their organization tracks what current projects exist, what projects are ready to be funded, what could be funded, and what needs support. Keeping track of that data over time is a way to measure how much impact the EDD is having in our region. They also do a lot of community outreach.

They are also looking to do an infrastructure project list update.

Also into bringing in funding to the organization and making sure that we can start getting out there and start getting funding into the community through grants and other things.

Interested in engaging with the Ports more.

Consent Calendar

Commissioner Hansen moved to approve the consent agenda as presented; Commissioner Unsoeld seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Action Calendar

None.

Action/Other Calendar

Washington Public Ports Association (WPPA) Maritime Industrial Base Coalition MOU. Alex Smith, Executive Director, introduced Eric ffitich, Executive Director of the WPPA, who brought this request to the Port of Olympia Commission.

Eric shared that WPPA recently kicked off a new initiative: the formation of a "Maritime Industrial Base Coalition" (MIBC) to explore the next steps for our region's maritime manufacturing, shipbuilding, and repair industry.

On Monday, January 26, 2026, the WPPA Executive Committee voted to approve the formation of the MIBC. A charter for the MIBC was created, along with a Scope of Work that will be executed by a consultant hired by WPPA and managed by the MIBC Steering Committee.

The MIBC goal is to restore Washington's primacy in maritime manufacturing and prepare ports and partners for significant federal investment in domestic shipbuilding, repair, and maintenance. There is an interest in making our manufacturing sector more competitive. Generally, many ports host manufacturing operations.

WPPA is asking interested ports to serve on the MIBC Steering Committee, and to sign an MOU between the participating ports and WPPA. The MOU will confirm our port's engagement in this work.

WPPA initially approached ports with shipyard tenants or maritime manufacturing operations to join the Steering Committee (signers so far are Ports of Seattle, Everett, Anacortes, Port Angeles, Kalama, and Skagit). Yet, WPPA also heard from other ports about participating in the MIBC – ports who could be part of a supplier network, who have land that could be used for future shipbuilding or repair options, or who are otherwise just interested in what this initiative will do for Washington’s maritime economy. Even ports without active ship building operations saw some potential benefit to an investment or an increased focus on maritime workforce development.

The coalition will also be open to other ports who would like to join, but who may not want to sign the MOU. WPPA is open to their support of this effort and who want to see our state’s maritime manufacturing industry succeed.

The roles and responsibilities of Steering Committee include:

- Designating a port representative to engage on the Steering Committee;
- Consistent engagement on the Steering Committee; Regular communication about the MIBC’s work to stakeholders in the port’s district; and
- Contribution to the effort through financial or in-kind support.

The Scope of Work calls for Landscape and Gaps analysis (Phase I) and Policy proposals and funding needs (Phase II). Blakely Rock Strategies has been hired as a consultant to execute on the Scope of Work.

This will begin with determining what is already occurring. The landscape analysis will be one-on-one, small group conversations, between the WPPA consultant, ports on the steering committee, our community partners, supply chain partners and our ship-building industry partners about what level of new work they can take on. Boat builders will be asked if there is really more capacity to do more maritime manufacturing in the state and ask them what some of their hurdles are. Is the lack of a skilled workforce challenging their ability to compete for new work and what would they identify as the needs there? From there, Phase II will include bringing forward some policy proposals and funding needs. Phase III would occur in 2027 *if necessary*. Consultants will bring back a report to WPPA in December 2026 in which they will also recommend whether additional study is necessary.

Eric shared the anticipated timeline and initial steps involved. Kickoff is expected at the end of March. Different levels of engagement available were discussed.

Motion: Commissioner Hansen moved to authorize the Executive Director to sign the Memorandum of Understanding with WPPA for the Maritime Industrial Base Coalition. Commissioner Montano seconded the motion. Motion passed with four votes in favor and one opposed.

Advisory Calendar

NonProfit Policy. Alex Smith, Executive Director, presented a proposed Public Benefit Rate Adjustment Policy for the Commission to review and discuss. The policy establishes a framework under which the Port may allow limited rate adjustments below standard market rates for certain nonprofit, governmental, and community-based organizations when those uses deliver measurable public benefits aligned with the Port’s statutory purposes.

The intent of the policy is to clarify when reduced rates represent a strategic investment in public benefit outcomes—such as workforce development, maritime education, tourism promotion, environmental stewardship, and community access—rather than a subsidy or donation.

Deschutes Estuary Restoration Briefing. Alex Smith, Executive Director, provided background on the Deschutes Estuary Restoration project, as this will be a topic at the joint Port Commission/Olympia City Council meeting in April. The role the Port plays in this project was shared, as was the financial impact of the project and how it aligns with the Port's Vision 2050 goals.

Commissioner Reports/Discussion

Commissioner Montano attended the Lacey Chamber Forum and a meeting with some interested citizens interested in using the rail line for a tourist trolley.

Commissioner Toompas reported that he attended a Sea Level Rise Collaborative meeting; and he was given a tour of the Thurston County Chamber, who shared what services they provide.

Commissioner Hansen had an appointment with a representative of LiUNA!, the laborers union, and gained a better understanding of their work; he met with County Commissioner Ty Mensor; and attended a Thurston County EDC Board Meeting. He spoke to a real estate group about ports and their role as economic drivers. He attended the 74th annual School of Engineering banquet at St. Martin's University. He sat in on a portion of the POCAC Budd Inlet Subcommittee meeting; he attended the TRPC meeting as they were giving updates on (Olympia, Lacey, Tumwater, Yelm, Tenino, the County) on their comprehensive plan updates. And he attended ecology walking tours on the story project.

Commissioner Unsoeld had lunch with Commissioner Vasavada and Tumwater Mayor Dahlhoff and Tumwater City Manager Paul Simmons; he attended a Sea Level Rise Collaborative meeting; he met with Peter Molton and Commissioner Hansen to discuss electrification of the maritime and airline portions of the Port. He also attended the Solid Waste Advisory Committee meeting and a Thurston Regional Planning Council meeting, where he was elected vice chair.

Commissioner Vasavada attended a meeting regarding using existing rail lines for a tourist trolley. And she agreed to be the TRPC Secretary.

Additional Public Comment

None.

Other Business

None.

Meeting Announcements

A list of upcoming events was displayed on the screen for viewers to see upcoming Commission and POCAC meetings. Executive Director Smith stated the next Commission meeting, a Work Session, will be held on Monday, March 16, at 4:00 p.m.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Port of Olympia Board of Commissioners, the Monday, March 9, 2026, regular meeting was adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

PORT OF OLYMPIA COMMISSION

Jasmine Vasavada, President

Joel Hansen, Secretary

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