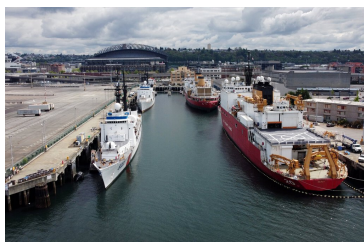


Local News
The Seattle Times

Coast Guard could triple base size on Seattle waterfront as U.S. ramps up Arctic presence

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This aerial view of the U.S. Coast Guard base in Seattle looks east, with T-Mobile Park in the background, Sunday. The Coast Guard is considering modernizing the facilities and expanding the base to accommodate more vessels. (Ken Lambert / The Seattle Times)



By **Hal Bernton** 

Seattle Times staff reporter

The U.S. Coast Guard is proposing a renovation and expansion of its Seattle waterfront base that during the next decade will be home to three new icebreakers, and probably other vessels.

The Coast Guard's aging Seattle operations hub supports Pacific Northwest and polar missions. It will have a higher profile role in the coming years as the U.S. ramps up its presence in an Arctic region rapidly changing as the climate warms.

One option for the base's makeover would result in more than tripling the Coast Guard's acreage along the waterfront, according to [a document published](#) last week in the Federal Register. One of three under consideration, it involves the "acquisition" of up to 54.1 acres, mainly at Terminal 46, which is adjacent to the Coast Guard's current waterfront base.

Port officials say they want to support the Coast Guard efforts to improve and grow the Seattle base, but are wary that a federal takeover of most of Terminal 46 would end an

ongoing effort to expand bulk cargo operations there.

“I want to know if we can provide this national service without impacting to an unreasonable degree our well-established uses of the waterfront,” said Fred Felleman, a Port of Seattle commissioner.

Lt. Russ Tippetts, a Coast Guard spokesperson, said that “we understand the concerns associated with such a major endeavor. We are committed to working with stakeholders, and the public through the environmental planning process to hear and address those concerns.”

He said that the Coast Guard is looking for the most cost-effective options for accommodating a modernized icebreaker fleet, and have not made any decisions on whether that would be a purchase of port land, or some sort of long-term lease.

The planning process for the base improvements kicked off last week with a notice in the Federal Register, starting a 45-day public comment period on what issues should be considered in development of an environmental-impact statement. By fall of next year, that statement is expected to be completed.

Three alternatives proposed

The Coast Guard has been operating out of Seattle since the late 19th century, and for much of the 20th century had cutter berths scattered about the waterfront. In 1966, the Coast Guard acquired what was then Pier 36, and consolidated operations at this 23-acre site. Currently, this Seattle base has some 900 people assigned to units there and berths three vessels: the Polar Star heavy icebreaker, the Healy medium icebreaker and a cutter.



This 23-acre site along the Seattle waterfront has been the U.S. Coast Guard's base in the city since 1966. Some structures are aging, and would be demolished under a Coast Guard renovation plan that... (Ken Lambert / The Seattle Times) [More](#) ▾

The Polar Star, which was commissioned in 1976, currently is the Coast Guard's only seagoing heavy icebreaker. The vessel is well beyond its 30-year service life, and has required numerous repairs. The Coast Guard has long sought congressional funding for a new generation of icebreakers.

The scope of the Coast Guard fleet of expansion in Seattle is still uncertain.

Congress has authorized construction of six new Coast Guard Polar Security icebreakers, which will help secure appropriations to get them all built. The Coast Guard in 2019 announced that Seattle would be the home port for the first three, one of which is expected to arrive in 2024.

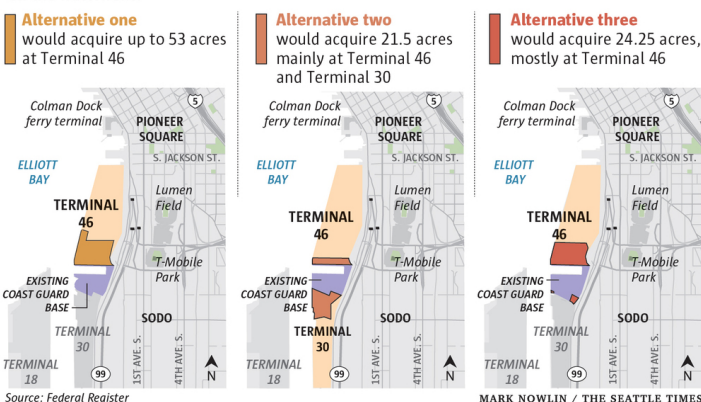
Four other new cutters without ice-breaking capability also may be home ported in Seattle, and they would replace two of the other vessels now based in Seattle, according to the Federal Register document.

That would be a lot of change for a base that, after more than 50 years of operations, has plenty of shortcomings. Problems include a lack of land and berthing spaces, traffic congestion and “out of date and inadequate facilities,” according to the Federal Register notice.

The Coast Guard's [three “action alternatives”](#) all involve demolishing five buildings, and building two new ones — one of which would be three stories tall for mission support and a second five-story building for administration. The Coast Guard also wants to improve communications, electrical service and other utilities, and realign parking, roadways and walkways.

Coast Guard proposes Seattle base expansion

The U.S. Coast Guard plans to station three new Polar Security icebreakers and likely other vessels at its Seattle base. To accommodate them, the Coast Guard has proposed three expansion options on the waterfront:



The alternatives vary in how much the base would expand, and where that would happen.

The first option would be the biggest expansion, and would involve the acquisition of 54.1 acres. All but 1.1 acres would be at the 87-acre Terminal 46, which once was operated by South Korea-based Hanjin Shipping, which in 2016 filed for bankruptcy protection.

Currently, Terminal 46 is managed by the Northwest Seaport Alliance and owned by the Port of Seattle. It is lightly used by Foss Maritime and Maxim Crane, according to Peter McGraw, a Port of Seattle spokesperson.

Under a second option the Coast Guard expansion would be smaller in area. It would involve the acquisition of 21.5 acres from the Port of Seattle, including 5 acres from Terminal 46 and 13.5 acres from Terminal 30.

A third alternative would involve 24.25 acres of expansion, mostly from Terminal 46.

The Coast Guard also will analyze a “no-action alternative,” which would result in “a loss of operational capability,” according to the document published in the Federal Register.

Felleman and Dick Marzano, co-chairs of the Northwest Seaport Alliance, said that the review should include possible impacts on existing maritime operations, the environment, tribal treaty rights and adjacent communities.

“We value the USCG’s long term presence in the Seattle harbor and the critical role it plays to advance national security, environmental protection and scientific research,” Felleman and Marzano said in a joint statement. “We look forward in engaging in the detailed process that lies ahead in advance of any decisions ...”

The Coast Guard also has launched a separate process to consider removal of contaminated sediment within the Harbor Island Superfund site.

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