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U.S. Navy awards funding for next warship to be built in Marinette



The USS Milwaukee littoral combat ship built in Marinette was commissioned last year. Lockheed Martin Corp. has been awarded U.S. Navy funding up to \$564 million, to build another littoral combat ship in Marinette. Credit: Journal Sentinel files

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By [Rick Barrett](#) of the Journal Sentinel

Lockheed Martin Corp. has been awarded U.S. Navy funding up to \$564 million to build another littoral combat ship in Marinette.

LCS 25 will be the 11th ship procured under the contract, awarded in 2010, and the 13th ship of its kind overall. It is scheduled to be delivered to the Navy in 2020.

Lockheed Martin, through Marinette Marine Corp., has delivered three of the vessels to the Navy: USS Freedom, USS Fort Worth and USS Milwaukee, which was christened in Milwaukee in November.

Seven more of the warships are in various stages of construction in Marinette, while a different version is being built in Mobile, Ala.

Altogether the Navy wants 52 of the ships, although Defense Secretary Ash Carter has directed the service to cut that number to 40 vessels.

There is also pressure from the Defense Department for the Navy to select one version of the littoral combat ship over the other, which could take Marinette out of the program. That's an ongoing concern for northeast Wisconsin, especially, where the LCS program has been a mainstay of employment.

Lockheed's contract covers construction of LCS 25 plus integration and testing of selected ship systems and equipment, according to Friday's Department of Defense announcement.

Austal USA, the firm building littoral combat ships in Mobile, also was awarded up to \$546 million for its next vessel.

The cost of the ships is not to exceed that amount, set by Congress, and Navy officials have said the price has fallen as the shipyards have gained experience and efficiencies.

"Over 12,000 people and 500 suppliers in 37 states contribute to this critical program and will continue to do so as we transition to the new Freedom-class frigate in the coming years," Joe North, vice president and general manager of Littoral Ships and Systems at Lockheed Martin, said in a statement.

The littoral combat ship construction is scheduled to continue in Marinette for at least the next five years.

However, the ships have faced criticism over their performance and reliability, and some members of Congress have called for the Navy to put the brakes on the program until questions are answered.

Carter and his predecessor as defense secretary, Chuck Hagel, both questioned the ship's ability to withstand combat. In an annual report on major weapons, the Pentagon testing office said one of the vessels had difficulty in tests at sea defending against swarming vessels, such as those used by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards, and that both versions of the ship had extensive reliability problems.

The Navy and Lockheed Martin have said they remain confident in the ship's performance and reliability.

The modular design and price helps the Navy maintain a flexible fleet with a level of force that can deter and defeat threats, according to Lockheed Martin.

"USS Freedom and USS Fort Worth have demonstrated the Freedom-variant's value to the fleet with two successful operational deployments to Southeast Asia, sailing more than 180,000 combined nautical miles since delivery," the company said in a statement.