



## CITY OF TACOMA, WASHINGTON OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL COUNCIL CONSIDERATION REQUEST

**TO:** Deputy Mayor Blocker & Members of the City Council  
**FROM:** Mayor Victoria Woodards and Chief Policy Analyst Melanie Harding  
**COPIES TO:** Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager; Tadd Wille, Deputy City Mgr.; Bill Fosbre, City Attorney  
**SUBJECT:** Commercial shipping and/or storage containers  
**DATE:** May 24, 2021

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**I ask for your support for a resolution to request the Planning Commission to review the prohibition of shipping containers for accessory building and/or storage uses as well as explore how the city could allow shipping containers to be adaptively reused for innovative housing solutions to address the housing shortage and affordability crisis in the City of Tacoma.**

### **LEGISLATIVE INTENT:**

With the exception of temporary uses subject to the limitations and standards in Tacoma Municipal Code Section 13.06.080.P, Commercial shipping and/or storage containers (also known as cargo containers or intermodal freight containers) are currently prohibited to be used as an accessory building and/or for storage in the City of Tacoma in residential, commercial, and mixed-use zoning districts. Unlike a number of other jurisdictions<sup>1</sup>, this prohibition is outright and does not allow for exceptions when conditions are met (such as design standards, landscape buffers, or sight-obscuring fences or walls) that either remove the containers from the sight of neighbors or passersby or ensure the containers are an aesthetically pleasing part of their surroundings.

Each year, thousands of shipping containers are left inactive and unutilized in America because the nation's imports exceed exports and the cost to return cargo containers to exporting countries can be high. In 2012 alone, US Department of Transportation statistics indicated there were more than 5 million 20-foot containers sitting dormant<sup>2</sup>. Reprocessing or melting down a used shipping container to repurpose the steel requires at least 8,000 kWh of energy<sup>3</sup>. If it can be done in a way that maintains the aesthetics of the surrounding neighborhood, reuse of used containers as building materials or as accessory buildings/storage uses in Tacoma could be a sustainable, energy efficient, and cost-effective way to repurpose them.

Overall, this Council Consideration Request recommends moving forward a resolution to request the Planning Commission to review the outright prohibition of commercial shipping and/or storage containers as accessory buildings and/or for storage in the City of Tacoma and determine if there design standards, siting requirements, or other conditions which may make these uses appropriate in specified zoning districts. Additionally, within subsequent phases of Home in Tacoma, look at how the City could allow shipping containers to be adaptively reused for innovative housing solutions to address the housing shortage and housing affordability in the City of Tacoma

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.piercecountywa.gov/FAQ.aspx?TID=168>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/ex/sustainablecitiescollective/are-shipping-containers-sustainable-building-block-we-need/1068046/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.worldsteel.org/en/dam/jcr:7e0dc90a-3efe-41bc-9fb4-85f9e873dfc7/Steel+-The+Permanent+Material+in+the+Circular+Economy.pdf>

DESIRED RESOLUTION DATE: June 8, 2021

**ALIGNMENT WITH TACOMA 2025 KEY FOCUS AREAS:**

This legislation, program, project, or event is best aligned with the following (Check all that apply):


**Livability:** *Equity Index Score:* Moderate Opportunity

Increase positive public perception of safety and overall quality of life.

How does your policy, program, or service help or harm the health of the natural environment? Reuse of the containers is a sustainable solution to accessory building/storage needs.


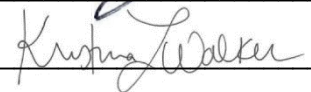
In you have a question related to the Council Consideration Request, please contact Chief Policy Analyst to the Mayor Melanie Harding at 253-591-5156 or [melanie.harding@cityoftacoma.org](mailto:melanie.harding@cityoftacoma.org).

SUBMITTED FOR COUNCIL CONSIDERATION BY:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mayor

**SUPPORTING COUNCIL MEMBERS SIGNATURES (2 SIGNATURES ONLY)**

*(Signatures demonstrate support to initiate discussion and consideration of the subject matter by City Council for potential policy development and staff guidance/direction.)*

1.  \_\_\_\_\_ POS# 5
2.  \_\_\_\_\_ POS# 8