



TO: Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager
FROM: Allyson Griffith, Director, Neighborhood and Community Services (NCS)
COPY: Community Vitality and Safety Committee
PRESENTER: Sarah Bridgeford, Community Resources Analyst Principal, NCS
Keegan Buckley, Community Resources Analyst, NCS
Andrea Haug, Chair, Community Council of Tacoma (CCOT)
SUBJECT: Neighborhood Council Program Standards and Guidelines and Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) 1.45 Review Recommendations
DATE: December 12, 2024

PRESENTATION TYPE:

Request for Ordinance

SUMMARY:

Neighborhood and Community Services (NCS) staff, in partnership with the Community Council of Tacoma (CCOT) Chair, will be presenting recommendations made by Neighborhood Council representatives to update the Neighborhood Council [Standards and Guidelines](#) and [Tacoma Municipal Code \(TMC\) 1.45](#). The purpose of this presentation is to provide an overview of the proposed changes and request an ordinance to adopt changes to TMC 1.45. Staff recommend that the Community Vitality and Safety Committee (CVS) make a motion to forward the requested ordinance to the full City Council for consideration.

BACKGROUND:

The [Neighborhood Council Program](#) was established by [Ordinance 25188](#) in 1992. In January 2019, NCS assumed administration of the Neighborhood Council Program and, in partnership with the Neighborhood Councils, developed recommendations and brought several Code amendments forward for Council consideration in December 2019. TMC 1.45 mandates a review of the Neighborhood Council Program every five years. NCS staff, in partnership with the CCOT Chair and representatives from the Neighborhood Councils, began the 2024 Neighborhood Council Program review after presenting an overview of the review process to [CVS on April 11, 2024](#). NCS and the CCOT Chair presented an update on the outreach and engagement portion of this review to [CVS on September 12, 2024](#).

ISSUE:

NCS staff, in partnership with the CCOT Chair, held four meetings in October 2024 with Neighborhood Council representatives (“Champions”) to discuss their recommendations to update the Neighborhood Council Standards and Guidelines and TMC 1.45. Champions primarily used a consensus method for making recommendations and reviewed all their recommendations at their last meeting in October. The Champions’ recommendations were then internally reviewed by the City to assess if there were additional considerations that may cause staff to have an alternative recommendation. Staff determined that there were areas that needed alternative recommendations that take into consideration three main areas, which were the City’s risk of non-compliance in the Code, staff capacity, and concerns of community transparency. Staff held a follow up meeting in early November for the Neighborhood Council Champions to consider staff feedback alongside their recommendations, as well as presenting information to the CCOT, to provide additional opportunities for discussion, feedback, and edits.



The Champions’ recommendations in TMC 1.45 include:

- Reinstating language identifying the Neighborhood Councils as advisors to the City/Council,
- Reinstating language regarding the City’s responsibilities in the Code,
- Edits to improve the clarity and readability of the Code, and
- Extending the review period of the Neighborhood Council program.

The Champions’ recommendations in the Standards and Guidelines include:

- Aligning language between the Code and the Standards and Guidelines,
- Pausing the review of “Section 2: Neighborhood Council Program and Tacoma 2025” until the Tacoma 2035 strategic plan has been adopted and published,
- Removing specific expectations for their bylaws and term limits,
- Updating the Neighborhood Council expectations in a way that accounts for flexibility between Neighborhood Councils and accounts for volunteer capacity,
- Aligning language between various sections of the Standards and Guidelines, the Code, and duties,
- Updating language and minor changes to expectations for city staff, and
- Adding a statement in funding opportunities that references the contracting process.

Staff support most of the Neighborhood Council Champions’ recommendations, however, staff have alternative recommendations in a few areas of TMC 1.45 and the Standards and Guidelines for CVS consideration.

Attached to this memo are two companion documents for CVS review, the drafted recommendations within TMC 1.45 and the drafted recommendations within the Standards and Guidelines. In both documents, there are recommendations from the Champions in red font, and recommendations from staff in blue font. Some edits are for grammar and clarity, while the staff recommendations that are outlined in a box on the various pages are areas that staff would like to bring to CVS’ attention, as these are areas where staff recommendations differ compared to the Neighborhood Council Champions’ recommendations. These areas include:

Section	Champions’ Recommendation	Staff Recommendation
Tacoma Municipal Code TMC 1.45.020 Intent	Add language identifying the Neighborhood Councils as advisors to the City.	If “advisory” language is included in the Code, staff recommend that the Neighborhood Councils align with Committees, Boards and Commissions (CBC), which would include complying with Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) and other CBC requirements. The intent of the Neighborhood Council Program was not to create additional CBCs, and restructuring the program to align with CBC requirements would restrict the Neighborhood Councils’ independence. Additionally, further analysis of both City staff and Neighborhood Councils’ capacity would be necessary.



		Considering these stipulations, staff do not recommend including the “advisory” language recommended.
Tacoma Municipal Code TMC 1.45.040 Neighborhood Council duties and expectations	Include language stating, “directly advise City government...”	Given the CBC considerations stated above, staff recommend maintaining the current language.
	Move one sentence from TMC 1.45.030, Standards and Guidelines, into this section (TMC 1.45.040) as the sentence better aligns with this section of the Code. The sentence references the program expectation and eligibility requirements to comply with the Standards and Guidelines.	Staff agree and recommend including this sentence. Staff also recommends adding language that references other documents that guide the Neighborhood Council duties, expectations, and eligibility requirements (i.e., the Tacoma Municipal Code and funding contracts) into this section of the code.
Tacoma Municipal Code TMC 1.45.070 City responsibilities	Reinstate language into the Code that was present prior to the 2019 Neighborhood Council Review (aside from minor edits).	The language being recommended is broad in nature, with references such as “any significant policy matter” and “all City departments”, which increases requirements and compliance risks for the City, and the likelihood that the City cannot comply with Code, in addition to considerations of staff capacity throughout the organization that would be required to meet these expectations. Additionally, there are processes in place outside of the Neighborhood Council Program (such as providing notices for: pending land use, State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), public hearings, and receiving other information from the City). Some processes have statutory public engagement processes (such as specific projects for SEPA), in addition to having established commissions that advise the City on these matters. Some notification processes have specific requirements for when they can or must be sent, and the city cannot change the timeline of notices outside the current processes by creating a process specific to Neighborhood Councils. The Champions’ recommendations raise concerns of duplicated efforts, staff capacity, risks of non-compliance, and potential conflicts in



		<p>noticing processes.</p> <p>Staff recommend that a high-level overview of City expectations is added to the Code, which directs readers towards the Standards and Guidelines for specific duties (in alignment with how the “Neighborhood Council duties and expectations” and “Community Council of Tacoma duties and expectations” are written in the Code). Staff also recommend including expectations and duties in the “Neighborhood Council Program Support” section of the Standards and Guidelines, which captures the Champions Code recommendation while considering feasibility and staff capacity.</p>
<p>Standards and Guidelines</p> <p>Section 1: Neighborhood Council Program Overview</p>	<p>Include language referencing the Neighborhood Councils’ role as advisors (in alignment with their recommendations in the Code).</p>	<p>Given the CBC considerations stated above, staff recommend maintaining the current language in the first and third paragraphs. Additionally, staff recommend edits to the second paragraph of the overview to align the language with the text in section “1.45.030, Standards and Guidelines” of the Code.</p>
<p>Standards and Guidelines</p> <p>Section 3: Bylaw Requirements, item number 1</p>	<p>Remove language that states that bylaws must not contain provisions which restrict board representation or participation based on “tenure of service to the Neighborhood Councils.”</p>	<p>This language was included in the Standards and Guidelines to promote an inclusive atmosphere that bolsters participation from new community members that may be interested in volunteering as a Board Member, without the requirement that they must attend a certain number of meetings or volunteer for a certain amount of time before joining the board. To support inclusion and participation on the board, staff recommend that this language is maintained in the Standards and Guidelines, in addition to adding examples to clarify and show the intent of this language.</p>
<p>Standards and Guidelines</p> <p>Section 4: Neighborhood Council Essential Duties and Expectations, item number 6</p>	<p>Remove the requirement to notify neighborhood council participants when decisions will be voted on at least 3 days in advance.</p>	<p>While taking into consideration the Neighborhood Councils’ primary concern related to their recommendation (volunteer capacity), staff recommend reducing the notification timeline stating that participants should be notified in advance of meetings, with a preference for notice at least 24-hours in advance, to support transparent</p>



		communication and community participation while recognizing demand on neighborhood council’s time. Additionally, staff recommend retaining the last sentence as it details that the advance notice is intended to address planned elections and votes, not matters brought up by the community or board members during a meeting.
Standards and Guidelines Section 6: Neighborhood Council Program Support, item number 10	Include language stating that the Neighborhood Councils can work with other City staff/leadership in an advisory capacity.	Given the CBC considerations stated above, staff recommend maintaining the current language. Additionally, staff included six new duties and expectations for the City to support the Neighborhood Councils that capture the Champions’ recommendation in TMC 1.45.070 “City responsibilities”, while considering feasibility and staff capacity.

ALTERNATIVES:

The Community Vitality and Safety Committee (CVS) may adopt any portion of the recommended changes to TMC 1.45 and/or the Standards and Guidelines. If CVS would like to adopt any recommendations to TMC 1.45, they can move forward a recommendation to the full City Council for consideration. CVS can adopt any changes in the Standards and Guidelines without going to the full City Council for consideration. If CVS chooses not to adopt recommended changes in the TMC 1.45 and/or Standards and Guidelines document, the program will continue to operate under the current guidelines.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Champions’ recommendations to add language referencing the Neighborhood Councils as advisors to the City, and their recommendations in TMC 1.45.070 “City responsibilities”, will have fiscal impacts due to the potential staffing needs to comply with the recommendations. If approved, Neighborhood and Community Services would need to work the Office of Budget Management to assess the full scope of the fiscal impact.

Staff recommendations have no immediate fiscal impact.

RECOMMENDATION:

The recommendations presented show the collaborative effort between the City, the Neighborhood Councils, and the Community Council of Tacoma for the 2024 Neighborhood Council Program Review. Staff agree with most of the Champions’ recommendations. However, staff have alternative recommendations in a few areas of TMC 1.45 and the Standards and Guidelines for CVS consideration, as detailed in the two companion documents (the drafted recommendations within TMC 1.45 and the drafted recommendations within the Standards and Guidelines).

Staff recommend that the Community Vitality and Safety Committee (CVS) make a motion to forward the requested ordinance to the full City Council for consideration.