



**TO:** Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager  
**FROM:** Council Member Sarah Rumbaugh and Senior Council Policy Analyst Lynda Foster  
**COPY:** City Council and City Clerk  
**SUBJECT:** **Resolution – Considering a Litter Reduction Public Education Campaign – April 30, 2024**  
**DATE:** April 23, 2024

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**SUMMARY AND PURPOSE:**

A Resolution directing the City Manager to review options for a public education campaign to reduce littering and increase participation in litter cleanup programs, and to share options and a proposal as part of the 2025-2026 biennium budget recommendation.

[Council Member Rumbaugh]

**COUNCIL SPONSORS:**

Deputy Mayor John Hines, Council Member Joe Bushnell, and Council Member Sarah Rumbaugh

**BACKGROUND:**

**The Council Member’s Recommendation is Based On:**

Litter-related Tacoma FIRST 311 requests on public property have been escalating for the past decade. In 2023, the City removed more than 4.9 million lbs. of litter, illegal dumping, and garbage from public areas. Littering raises public health, public safety, and environmental concerns. Not only does litter often include potentially dangerous items, such as glass, human waste, or cigarettes, that can carry germs and diseases, create fire hazards, harm people, and attract pests or rodents, but the presence of litter can also contribute to negative perceptions of safety and well-being. Tacoma’s proximity to the Puget Sound also creates environmental concerns regarding litter, given that littered items can pollute local waters and harm animals and marine life.

This resolution directs the City Manager to consider additional approaches to addressing the City’s litter problem through public education and increased civic participation and bring forward options for Council consideration in the 2025-2026 biennium budget discussions.

The proposals should focus on pedestrian-heavy areas, such as around parks, within neighborhood business districts, and along identified safe-routes to school.

The proposal should focus on inspiring the Tacoma community to care for and take pride in their neighborhoods, in order to reduce littering behavior and increase the likelihood of participation in local beautification efforts in these areas.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/ CUSTOMER RESEARCH:**

Residents in Tacoma frequently express concerns about litter, with 20 percent of the top ten Tacoma FIRST 311 requests in the past decade involving garbage, debris, and illegal dumping.

In summer 2023, the City engaged the community to help identify how and where the City should focus cleanup efforts as part of our Tidy Up Tacoma program. Engagement included an online survey and in-person outreach, with a strong focus on ensuring that historically underrepresented communities’ input were prioritized in engagement results. Community members were invited to share their cleanup priorities through an online survey and at in person events throughout Tacoma. Priorities are ranked below in order of most to least importance:

- Litter and debris cleanup
- Servicing public litter cans



- Graffiti removal
- Trail maintenance
- Supporting community-based cleanup organizations

**2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

**Equity and Accessibility:**

While large-scale littering and illegal dumping takes place across Tacoma, the Tacoma FIRST 311 requests for 2023 show that illegal dumping tends to be more concentrated in low equity areas of the city. In addition, litter hot spots that required multiple Community Service Work Crew cleanups frequently occurred in lower equity locations such as Downtown, South Hosmer Street, Tacoma Mall Boulevard South, Center Street, East Portland Avenue, South/East 56th Street, East McKinley Avenue, and South Tacoma Way.

**Economy/Workforce:** *Equity Index Score: Moderate Opportunity*  
Increase positive public perception related to the Tacoma economy.

**Civic Engagement:** *Equity Index Score: Moderate Opportunity*  
Increase the number of residents who participate civically through volunteering and voting.  
Increase the percentage of residents who believe they are able to have a positive impact on the community and express trust in the public institutions in Tacoma.

**Livability:** *Equity Index Score: Moderate Opportunity*  
Increase the number of Complete Compact Communities/ 20-Minute Neighborhoods throughout the city.  
Improve health outcomes and reduce disparities, in alignment with the community health needs assessment and CHIP, for all Tacoma residents  
Increase positive public perception of safety and overall quality of life.

**Explain how your legislation will affect the selected indicator(s).**

Littering raises public health, public safety, and environmental concerns for community members. Not only does litter often include items that can carry germs and diseases, create fire hazards, harm people, and attract pests or rodents, but the presence of litter can also contribute to negative perceptions of safety and well-being. Tacoma’s proximity to the Puget Sound also creates environmental concerns regarding litter because littered items can pollute local waters and harm animals and marine life. Public education to reduce litter and increase participation in litter clean up programs will help address these concerns throughout the City. This resolution will also enhance existing work to make equitable investments in our City in multi-modal transportation options, economic development, and safe-routes to school by providing a cleaner and safer environment for Tacoma residents.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

Alternative(s)	Positive Impact(s)	Negative Impact(s)
1. Seek options for public education similar to the “litter and it will hurt” campaign.	Washington state has data that shows increasing perception that you may be fined for littering decreases litter.	Does not create community pride and sense of belonging, or encourage behaviors to collectively maintain public space.



2. Do not make a recommendation on litter education focus.	Staff has feedback from Tidy-Up Tacoma survey they can act on.	Does not identify high-priority litter education goals from the City Council.
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**EVALUATION AND FOLLOW UP:**

the City Manager to review options for a public education campaign to reduce littering and increase participation in litter clean up programs, and to share options and a proposal as part of the 2025-2026 biennium budget recommendation.

**SPONSOR RECOMMENDATION:**

Sponsors recommend adoption of this resolution and discussion of how to structure public education campaigns to reduce littering as part of the upcoming biennium budget process.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

This resolution will result in fiscal impact in the 2025-2026 biennium. Staff will work to develop a detailed proposal during the 2025-2026 budget proposal process. This proposal will zero in on detailed outreach efforts, craft a timeline for the project, refine cost estimates, and identify funding sources.