



City of Tacoma

City Council Study Session Minutes

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Webinar Link: www.zoom.us/j/89496171192 Passcode: 896569

August 17, 2021

12:00 PM

733 Market Street, Tacoma WA 98402, Conference Room 16
JOINT MEETING WITH THE PUBLIC UTILITY BOARD

Call to Order

Mayor Woodards called the joint study session to order at 12:06 p.m.

Roll Call

Present: 8 - Beale, Blocker, Hines, Hunter, McCarthy, Ushka, Walker and Mayor Woodards

Absent: 1 - Thoms

Public Utility Board Members:

Present: 5 - Bushnell, Cohen, Cooley, Patterson, and Watson

Council Member Thoms arrived at 1:22 p.m.

Council Members Hunter and Thoms, and Public Utility Board (PUB) Vice Chair Cooley participated virtually.

Joint City Council / Tacoma Public Utility Board Briefing Items

1. [21-0793](#) Legislative Update

At approximately 12:10 p.m., Anita Gallagher, Assistant to the City Manager, City Manager's Office (CMO), provided opening remarks on the legislative update and introduced Rosa McLeod, Government Relations Analyst, CMO; Clark Mather, Community and Government Relations Manager, Tacoma Public Utilities (TPU); and Logan Bahr, State Relations Manager, TPU. Ms. Gallagher presented the 2021 Washington State legislative priorities for General Government, including systems transformation; controlled substances and legislation related to the Washington Supreme Court decision in *State of Washington v. Blake*; the Northwest Immigration, Customs, and Enforcement Processing Center; affordable housing and homelessness; the

transportation revenue package; fiscal flexibility in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; a Capital Budget request of \$2 Million for the Links to Opportunity Project; community partner priorities and accomplishments; and the list of issues the City supports, opposes, and is monitoring. Mr. Bahr presented TPU state priorities, including power, noting the Clean Fuel Standard per Washington House Bill (HB) 1091, and conservation target flexibility per Washington HB 1446; water, noting the Public Works Trust Fund; rail, noting the Freight Rail Investment Bank; other notable issues, noting the Climate Commitment Act per Washington Senate Bill (SB) 5126, the Bonneville Power Administration Business and Occupation Tax exemption per Washington SB 5008, zero-emission vehicle forecasting per Washington HB 1287, and assistance for utility customers; and looking ahead. Ms. McLeod presented 2021 federal legislative priorities for General Government, including responding to the COVID-19 crisis, criminal justice system transformation, affordable housing and homelessness, economic security, infrastructure, congressionally directed spending for fiscal year 2022, human dignity and safety, and climate justice. Mr. Mather presented the 2021 federal priorities for TPU, including TPU-wide, water, rail, and power topics. Ms. Gallagher concluded with review of a calendar of PUB and City Council actions and next steps.

Discussion ensued regarding the City's decarbonization resolution and future upgrades to city facilities, coordination between General Government and TPU state and federal priorities, additional infrastructure and capital improvement project ideas, commercial property tax exemptions, accessibility of virtual and hybrid meetings at the state and federal level, options to incentivize electric power conversion, impacts of the Blake decision related to controlled substance possession, Washington State rule-making processes and lead agencies, and possible legislative changes to the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA).

2. [21-0794](#) Supporting Utility Customers in Post COVID Recovery

At approximately 1:15 p.m., Jackie Flowers, Director, TPU, provided opening remarks on connecting residential utility customers with COVID-19 bill assistance, including an agenda; an overview of Tacoma's utility customers; current support for utility customers, noting Governor Jay Inslee's utility disconnection moratorium. Mike Slevin, Director, Environmental Services, reviewed programs that support utility customers, and an increase of over 1000% in overdue balances from December 2019 to present.

Council Member Thoms arrived here, at 1:22 p.m.

Director Flowers and Francine Artis, Assistant Manager, TPU Customer Services, reviewed the distribution of residential overdue balances by amount; time-sensitive federal funds available; staff recommendations and future plans for customer outreach and support; and efforts to connect customers with help, noting the need for utility customers to take action to receive assistance, targeted multi-lingual messaging, and ongoing communications to all residential customers. Mr. Slevin concluded with a summary, noting goals to connect every customer possible with available assistance, continuing to work with customers, and establishing Tacoma’s bridge for utility customers when the Governor’s moratorium ends; and resources available online at PierceCountyWa.gov/housinghelp and mytpu.org/assistance, and by phone by dialing 2-1-1.

Discussion ensued regarding appreciation for staff; options for tenants and landlords to get assistance with unpaid balances; providing resources to eviction mediators; the number of customers with unpaid bills; flexibility for payment plans; strategies to connect customers to the available assistance programs, noting the need for a coordinated push with advertising, direct contacts, partners, and proactive communication to customers; the importance of compassion; impacts of the utility disconnection moratorium; erasing debt; opt-out program options; concerns about scams; confirming that funding is available to customers both inside and outside City limits; and outreach to students and related programs.

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The joint study session concluded, and the regular study session convened, at 2:13 p.m.

City Council Briefing Items

5c. [21-0815](#) Hybrid Study Session and City Council Meetings

Mayor Woodards discussed upcoming City Council study sessions and meetings and PUB meetings, hybrid meetings that allow both virtual and in-person attendance, COVID-19 case rate increases, OPMA requirements, and providing consistent communication with staff and members of the public.

Discussion ensued regarding hybrid meeting arrangements, guidance and mandates related to masking and vaccination, policy and leadership, benefits and limitations of virtual meeting options, public participation, risks and benefits to attendees, options for tonight’s City Council meeting, offering in-person access to government services, safety for those who cannot be vaccinated, how other entities are handling public meetings, offering

in-person options for topics of high public interest, the COVID-19 Delta variant, options for smaller or alternate meetings with the public, staff exposures and impacts, different needs for study sessions and regular business meetings, possible changes to the emergency proclamation, and OPMA rules.

5b. [21-0814](#) Afghanistan Refugee Support Letter

Council Member Thoms presented a draft letter to the United States Secretary of State, Antony J. Blinkin, regarding support for the expedited processing of Special Immigrant Visas for Afghan translators and interpreters, noting the urgent need for action.

Discussion ensued regarding Council Member support to sign on to the letter, volunteer opportunities, community partners, and communication with the Commission on Immigration and Refugee Affairs.

MOTION: Council Member Ushka moved for the full City Council to sign the letter to the United States Secretary of State, Antony J. Blinkin, regarding support for the expedited processing of Special Immigrant Visas for Afghan translators and interpreters.

SECONDED BY: Council Member Thoms.

ACTION: Voice vote was taken and carried. The motion was declared adopted.

Ayes: 8 - Blocker, Hines, Hunter, McCarthy, Thoms, Ushka, Walker and Mayor Woodards

Absent: 1 - Beale

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The study session recessed at 3:00 p.m.

The study session reconvened at 3:13 p.m.

3. [21-0795](#) American Rescue Plan Act Funding Update

Katie Johnston, Budget Officer, Office of Management and Budget (OMB), made opening remarks on the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding update, and introduced Reid Bennion, Lead Analyst, OMB. Mr. Bennion presented the ARPA update, including reporting back on Standing Committee discussions; a timeline; and 2021 ARPA distributions by priority area and status, noting affordable housing and homelessness. Jeff Robinson, Director,

Community and Economic Development, further reviewed property acquisition and other projects. Mr. Bennion continued with review of distributions, including restoration of services, livable wage jobs, community safety, health, belief and trust, and access; and an example of next steps.

Discussion ensued regarding divertible calls, proposed community safety programs and funding, programs that are funded at this time and the amounts originally requested, status of specific funding requests, the equity map and opportunity areas, hiring, the idea to shift allocations for different priority buckets, the status of non-profit funding and application processes, support for off-site improvements, the need to finish upcoming discussions at the committee and full City Council level, and next steps.

4. [21-0802](#) Systems Transformation

City Manager Elizabeth Pauli presented an update on systems transformation, including new items, noting the reconciliation project with NNSC, the staff team working on retention strategies, Tacoma Police Department (TPD) dashboard cameras, and legislation-related TPD policy updates; recent accomplishments, items in-progress, and upcoming activities; and short- and long-range transformation timelines.

Other Items of Interest

5. [21-0797](#) Manuel Ellis Investigation Update

Mike Ake, Interim Police Chief, TPD, presented an update on the Manuel Ellis investigation, including upcoming release of records from the Washington State Attorney General's Office, the investigation timeline, completion of non-involved officer interviews, and upcoming interviews with the involved officers.

Discussion ensued regarding the timeline to complete the investigation and recommendation, and the initial 90-day goal.

5a. [21-0813](#) Crime Response

City Manager Pauli presented foundational data related to crime response staffing and budget, including a request for Council Member questions at next week's more detailed presentation. Interim Chief Ake further reviewed the current status of the biennial budget, noting the requirement for \$5.2 Million in vacancy savings, overtime costs from 2019 to 2021, and budgeted versus filled full-time equivalents (FTEs); commissioned and non-commissioned

FTEs, noting vacancies, changes since 2011, and the division of TPD into three bureaus; and commissioned officer hires and separations between 2017 and 2021.

Discussion ensued regarding double shifts and overtime rates, response times, property crimes, onboarding timelines and alternatives, standards and long wait times for 9-1-1 calls, continued discussion of community safety recruitment strategies, hiring for existing unfilled positions, excessive overtime, best practices and comparisons to other agencies, non-emergency calls, and timelines for budget amendments.

5b. [21-0814](#) Afghanistan Refugee Support Letter

This item was discussed earlier in the study session.

5c. [21-0815](#) Hybrid Study Session and City Council Meetings

This item was discussed earlier in the study session.

Committee Reports

There were no committee reports given.

Agenda Review and City Manager's Weekly Report

6. [21-0798](#) Weekly Report to the Mayor and City Council, August 12, 2021

City Manager Elizabeth Pauli stated there is one ceremonial on tonight's agenda, recognizing Twin Tigers Taekwondo, and that no changes are expected to tonight's agenda.

Adjournment

On proper motion, the study session was adjourned at 4:33 p.m.

Victoria R. Woodards, Mayor

Doris Sorum, City Clerk