



**TO:** Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager  
**FROM:** Council Member Robert Thoms  
**COPY:** City Council and City Clerk  
**SUBJECT:** **Resolution - amending the *Rules of Procedure of the Council of the City of Tacoma* to increase opportunities for public feedback to the Tacoma City Council during the COVID-19 declaration of emergency and for the duration in which the Tacoma City Council holds virtual business meetings - Requested for September 15, 2020**  
**DATE:** 9/10/2020

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**SUMMARY & PURPOSE:**

This resolution does four things:

1. For the purpose of utilizing technology to reinstate verbal Public Comment and to resume setting aside time at the start of each Council business meeting for public comment, Section A of Rule 9 of the *Rules of Procedure of the Council of the City of Tacoma*, entitled “Public Comment,” is amended as follows:
  - A. Public Comment. The City Council appreciates hearing from community members about items on its agenda, and desires to set aside time at the start of each Council business meeting for Public Comment. All comments must be limited to items on the agenda. Speakers are asked to identify the specific agenda items they wish to address. To ensure equal opportunity for the public to comment, a speaker’s comments shall be limited to up to 90 seconds per person, per meeting. Where necessary, due to the number of persons who want to address the Council, the presiding officer shall retain authority to limit all persons’ remarks to an equal period of less than 90 seconds. To further ensure equal opportunity for the public to comment, each person may address the Council only one time during the Public Comment portion of the meeting. Comments may be made on resolutions as well as first and final readings of ordinances. Comments shall not be accepted on ordinances forwarded to the Council by the Hearing Examiner for which a public hearing has been held. Written comments submitted prior to Council action shall be considered in the same manner as oral comments. In the event that the Council, after taking public comment, suspends its rules to include a new resolution or ordinance on the agenda, public comment will be taken at the time the Council considers the new resolution or ordinance. Where an ordinance has been substantially changed at its final reading, a person may speak to the changes. To request to speak during Public Comment, please press the Raise Hand button near the bottom of your Zoom window or \*9 on your phone. The last four digits of your phone number will be called out when it is your turn to speak. All remarks will be addressed to the Council as a whole.
- 2) For the purpose of continuing to reserve time on the City Council agenda for Community Forum on the second Tuesday of each month, Section C of Rule 9 of the *Rules of Procedure of the Council of the City of Tacoma*, entitled “Community Forum – Second Tuesday,” is amended as follows:
  - C. Community Forum - Second Tuesday. On the second Tuesday of each month, time shall be reserved for community members’ comments. The purpose of this forum is to assist the Council



in making policy decisions; therefore, items of discussion shall be limited to matters over which the City Council has jurisdiction. A speaker's remarks shall be limited to up to 90 seconds per person, per Community Forum. Where necessary, due to the number of persons who want to address the Council, the presiding officer shall retain authority to limit all persons' remarks to an equal period of less than 90 seconds. To further ensure equal opportunity for the public to comment, each person may address the Council only one time during the Community Forum portion of any meeting. Comment shall not be made in support of or opposition to any matter on the Council Agenda for which the time for public comment has passed.

- 3) For the purpose of creating a new opportunity for the community to share feedback, Rule 9 of the *Rules of Procedure of the Council of the City of Tacoma* is amended to add a new Section G, entitled "Virtual Forum," reading as follows:
  - G. Virtual Forum. On the fourth Tuesday of each month at 6:00 pm, or promptly after the adjournment of the Tacoma City Council meeting should it extend past 6:00 pm, there shall be held a "Virtual Forum" for community members' comments. The purpose of the Virtual Forum is to give community members an opportunity to share their thoughts and views to assist the Council in making policy decisions; therefore, items of discussion shall be limited to matters over which the City Council has jurisdiction. No action shall be taken by the City Council during the Virtual Forum. Speaker's comments shall be limited to up to 90 seconds per person, per Virtual Forum. Where necessary, due to the number of persons who want to address the Council, the presiding officer shall retain authority to limit all persons' remarks to an equal period of less than 90 seconds. To further ensure equal opportunity for the public to comment, each person may address the Council only one time during the Virtual Meeting. Guidelines set out in Rule 9 – Public Comment/Public Forum, Section B, Courtesy; Section D, No Use of Public Comment or Community Forum for Campaigns; Section E, No Use of Public Comment or Community Forum for Advertising; and Section F, Transgression, will apply to Virtual Forum.
- 4) The foregoing amendments to Section 9 of the *Rules of Procedure of the Council of the City of Tacoma* shall expire upon termination or revocation of the Proclamation of Emergency caused by the COVID-19 virus, and thereafter shall be of no force or effect.

**COUNCIL SPONSORS:**

Mayor Victoria Woodards, Council Member Lillian Hunter and Council Member Robert Thoms



**BACKGROUND:**

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

The Tacoma City Council appreciates hearing from community members about items on its agenda, and the Council’s Rules of Procedure includes Rule 9: Public Comment/Public Forum, which sets aside time at the start of each Council business meeting for Public Comment and during the meeting on the second Tuesday of each month for Community Forum. Public Comment limits speakers’ time to five minutes each whereas Community Forum limits speakers’ time to three minutes each. The presiding officer can reduce the amount of time for each speaker due to the number of persons who want to address the Council. Rule 9 also specifies instructions for how the public can sign up to speak at Public Forum, specifically providing instructions for in person meetings.

The Covid-19 pandemic is widespread in our region. As of September 9, 2020, there were 2,167 COVID-19 cases and 45 tragic deaths in the City of Tacoma. The State of Washington declared a state of emergency on February 29, 2020, limiting in-person meetings. On June 5, 2020, Pierce County entered Phase 2 of the state’s Safe Start Recovery Plan and while in Phase 2, the governor has prohibited groups of more than 5 meeting. The City of Tacoma proclaimed a State of Emergency related to COVID-19 on March 12, 2020.

The Tacoma City Council switched to a virtual meeting format and has adjusted its meetings as its technological capacity increased. On March 24, 2020, the Tacoma City Council unanimously suspended the rules in order to allow only written comments to be provided for the Public Comment and Community Forum portions of City Council meetings until the Proclamation of Emergency caused by the COVID-19 virus is terminated. City staff worked to expand verbal comment options, and the Tacoma City Council held its first virtual Public Hearings with verbal comments on May 5, 2020. At the Tacoma City Council meeting on July 7, 2020, the Council approved a motion to allow verbal comments to be taken for Community Forum during the virtual-only Zoom City Council meetings, with verbal comments commencing at the July 14, 2020 meeting. The City of Tacoma has proven it has the technological capacity to allow for verbal comments during the regular Public Comment period

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:**

The entire Council has received an outpouring of requests for more opportunities for the public to speak to the Council at meetings and in other settings about items on the agenda as well as other items under the jurisdiction of the Tacoma City Council. Limitations on in-person meetings and events have reduced the Council ability to hear from the community, identifying the need for more formal, verbal forums for community feedback. The Council has heard clearly from the Community wanting to address policing in Tacoma and the City’s ongoing work to create an equitable and anti-racist Tacoma.

**2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

**Equity and Accessibility:**

Switching to a social distanced, virtual format for meetings has shifted how the Tacoma City Council interacts with the public and changed how Council Members receive feedback from the community. Creating more opportunities for the public to provide feedback will formalize access to the City Council and allow more voices to be heard while the Council considers critical policies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Civic Engagement:** *Equity Index Score: Moderate Opportunity*

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.

Representation at public meetings will reflect the diversity of the Tacoma community



This resolution restores pre-pandemic opportunities to hear directly from the community, and creates a new forum for the community to provide feedback directly to the Council.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

Presumably your recommendation is not the only potential course of action; please discuss other alternatives actions for council or staff to take. Please use table below.

Alternative	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
1. No changes/ retain written Public comment.	Council Members would still receive public comment in written form	Community members would not be able to speak directly to Council
2. Only implement virtual Public Comment	Community members would be able to speak weekly directly to Council on topics on the meeting agenda	Less opportunity to speak to all topics under the City's jurisdiction

**EVALUATIONS AND FOLLOW UP:**

City staff will administer the new guidelines for Public Comment, Community Forum, and Virtual Forum.

**COUNCIL MEMBER RECOMMENDATION:**

The recommendation is to pass this resolution.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

None.