



TO: Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager
FROM: Mayor Woodards and Interim Chief Policy Analyst Bucoda Warren
COPY: City Council and City Clerk
SUBJECT: Resolution selecting Dennis Ball to fill the vacant judicial position in Tacoma Municipal Court, Department No. 3 until the general election in 2022.
DATE: March 1, 2022

SUMMARY AND PURPOSE:

A resolution selecting Dennis Ball to fill the vacant judicial position in Tacoma Municipal Court, Department No. 3 until the general election in 2022.

COUNCIL SPONSORS:

Mayor Woodards

BACKGROUND:

Judge Dwayne Christopher vacated his position as judge for Tacoma Municipal Court, Department No. 3 to accept an appointment to the Pierce County District Court bench. The Municipal Court anticipates a large backlog of cases will be filed in the coming months with the lifting of many COVID restrictions and it needs an experienced judicial officer that can manage a heavy case load immediately upon appointment.

Washington State law allows the City to determine what process it wants to use to fill a vacant judicial position, and list qualifications an appointment must have. The individual must be an attorney and live in Pierce County on the date of appointment. There is currently not an established process for appointing a judge to the Tacoma Municipal Court, and only once before has the City Council made this appointment. In 1994 the Council passed Resolution No. 32834 asking the local bar association to review the candidates and make recommendations. The full Council then interviewed the finalists and made a selection.

With the filing deadline for this year coming in May and the court's work seeing heavy backlogs, a quicker process was proposed by Mayor Woodards. It was proposed that the council consider a current Commissioner of the Municipal Court as he is a retired judge with vast experience, and has no intent to run for the position.

Current Commissioner Dennis Ball sent a letter of interest in the position on February 25, 2022. Dennis Ball served for 29 years with distinction as a Tacoma Municipal Court Commissioner, and recently retired from the Municipal Court in June 2021 where at the time he was the most senior commissioner for all Municipal and District courts in the State. Commissioner Ball is the only Commissioner on the court for consideration.

If appointed, he would begin on March 9, 2022 and serve through the fall until the general election process concludes and the term of the new . Commissioner Ball does not intend to run for the position, so the seat will be open for this election cycle.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/ CUSTOMER RESEARCH:

The City of Tacoma has done its due diligence and has completed a background check, and a disciplinary records check with both the Washington State Bar Association and the Washington Commission on Judicial Conduct which returned no negative records.



2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Equity and Accessibility:

By appointing a retired, long serving, and experienced commissioner to this position until the general election, it allows a neutral individual with no interest in running for the position to assist in the workload of the court now while allowing for an open seat. This open seat and the May filing deadline allows candidates equal access to compete.

ALTERNATIVES:

Alternative(s)	Positive Impact(s)	Negative Impact(s)
1.Do not appoint Commissioner Ball		The court remains understaffed and will be unable to address the growing workload.
2.Seek a new appointment		The court remains understaffed and the time needed to identify a process and a new candidate will result in more delays.

STAFF/SPONSOR RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council accept Mayor Woodards’ recommended process and appoint Commissioner Ball to fill the vacant judicial position in Tacoma Municipal Court, Department No. 3 until the general election concludes and the term of the successor begins.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Salary and other compensation is available for this position in the Municipal Court budget.