



## **Tacoma Climate and Sustainability Commission**

March 19, 2026

Dear Chair Walker and IPS Committee,

The Climate and Sustainability Commission writes to express concern regarding the dissolution of the Environmental Services Commission (ESC) and the implications this decision has for public access, oversight, and informed participation in Environmental Services' work.

At present, the explanation provided by Environmental Services centers on staffing constraints. However, this rationale raises questions when considered alongside existing conditions. The Climate and Sustainability Commission has operated with one Sustainability Office staff for the past nine months while maintaining a full workplan and continuing to meet its obligations. In that context, the decision to eliminate a standing commission entirely, rather than adapt its structure or scope, warrants closer scrutiny.

More fundamentally, the removal of the ESC eliminates a key public-facing forum for understanding Environmental Services' operations. ESC meetings provided detailed briefings on infrastructure, capital planning, rates, and long-term system needs. That level of transparency is not replicated elsewhere. Without this venue, there is a loss of a functional mechanism for public understanding and engagement, where ratepayers and members of the public can learn how rates are developed, what they fund, how decisions are made, and provide meaningful feedback or recommendations to Environmental Services.

We are also concerned about the implications for transparency and accountability. The ESC played a defined role in reviewing long-term planning and proposed rate changes. If that responsibility is expected to shift to the Climate and Sustainability Commission, we may not have the capacity to absorb it. Our current workplan is already allocated, and while there is some thematic overlap, the make-up of the Climate and Sustainability Commission is mostly only renters and single-family ratepayers.

We are particularly concerned by the framing that future advisory structures may be considered only where there is a “clear business need.” For a public utility, informed public input should not be contingent or episodic. It should be continuous, structured, and accessible. A single annual presentation to IPS is not a substitute for sustained review, deliberation, and public transparency.

The timing and context of this decision also merit attention. Based on conversations with former ESC commissioners, the commission had recently experienced increased engagement, consistent quorum, and more substantive discussion of Environmental Services proposals. Notably, this included instances of questioning and dissent rather than routine approval. The decision to dissolve the commission following a period of renewed engagement raises concerns about whether robust public engagement is being treated as a liability rather than a function.

In light of these concerns, we request clarification on the following:

- What mechanism will replace the Environmental Services Commission’s role in providing public access to detailed information about rates, programs, and long-term planning?
- How the City intends to ensure meaningful public oversight of Environmental Services moving forward?
- Whether additional support or structural adjustments were considered prior to the decision to dissolve the commission?
- Whether there is a timeline or criteria for reestablishing a dedicated advisory body?

The Climate and Sustainability Commission has consistently emphasized the importance of transparency, accountability, and public engagement in environmental governance. The removal of the Environmental Services Commission moves in the opposite direction, reducing both access and input at a time when both are necessary.

We urge the IPS Committee to reconsider how these functions will be preserved and to ensure that the public retains a clear and accessible pathway to understand and engage with Environmental Services’ work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Hope Springer".

Hope Springer  
Co-Chair

***Laura Svancarek***

Laura Svancarek

Co-Chair

Climate and Sustainability Commission

Cc:

Ramiro Chavez, Environmental Services Director

Jacques Colon, Center for Strategic Priorities Director

Hyun Kim, City Manager

Anna Le, Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee Staff Liaison

Kristin Lynett, Sustainability Officer

