



**TO:** Hyun Kim, City Manager  
**FROM:** Chris Seaman, Building Official, Planning and Development Services  
 Peter Huffman, Planning and Development Services  
 Sionna Stallings-Ala'ilima, Fire Chief SSA  
**COPY:** City Council and City Clerk  
**SUBJECT:** Ordinance – Replacement of the Board of Building Appeals with the Hearing Examiner  
**DATE:** March 9, 2026

**SUMMARY AND PURPOSE:**

An ordinance amending various sections of Titles 1, 2, and 3 of the Tacoma Municipal Code to change the method for the means of appeals to building and fire codes by eliminating the Board of Building Appeals and placing such appeals under the authority of the Hearing Examiner.

**BACKGROUND:**

When a decision is made by the Building Official or the Fire Code Official and that decision is believed to be incorrect, there is an opportunity for appeal. Staff are proposing an ordinance to change the method for the means of appeals to building and fire codes by eliminating the Board of Building Appeals and placing such appeals under the authority of the Hearing Examiner. Zero appeals have been brought to the Board of Building Appeals in the last decade.

Recruitment for the Board of Building Appeals has been challenging as the members must have the technical knowledge and experience necessary to understand any appeals brought to them. If a fully staffed Board cannot be maintained, it may leave developers, design professionals, businesses, and residents without a means to appeal decisions made by the Building Official and the Fire Code Official.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/ CUSTOMER RESEARCH:**

The use of the Hearing Examiner for appeals of decisions made by the Building Official is common. Some regional examples of cities that use their Hearing Examiner for appeals to building and fire codes are Bellevue, Spokane, Everett, and Kent.

**2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

**Livability:** *Equity Index Score:* Moderate Opportunity  
Increase positive public perception of safety and overall quality of life.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

Presumably, your recommendation is not the only potential course of action; please discuss other alternatives or actions that City Council or staff could take. Please use table below.

Alternative(s)	Positive Impact(s)	Negative Impact(s)
Retain Board of Building Appeals	Allows for direct public engagement	Staff time used for engagement with the Board, Council time interviewing and filling the Board, possibility of no means for appeals if the Board does not have a quorum



City of Tacoma

City Council Action Memorandum

**STAFF/SPONSOR RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends adoption of the ordinance to replace the Board of Building Appeals with the Hearing Examiner with an effective date of two weeks after second reading.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

No significant fiscal impact is expected. Appeals to decisions are rare and are not expected to burden the Hearing Examiner. A fee to offset the cost of administering appeals is included in the proposed ordinance. Where appellants prevail in their appeals this fee will be refunded.