



**TO:** Hyun Kim, City Manager  
**FROM:** Council Member John Hines and Christina Caan, Policy Analyst  
**COPY:** City Council and City Clerk  
**SUBJECT:** Ordinance to amend Title 17 of the Municipal Code to add clarifications regarding the definitions of adequate care, adverse environmental conditions, and proper shelter, as well as the requirements for the humane restraint and confinement of an animal.  
**DATE:** April 21, 2026

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### SUMMARY AND PURPOSE

An ordinance to amend Title 17 of the Municipal Code to add clarifications regarding the definitions of adequate care, adverse environmental conditions, and proper shelter, as well as the requirements for the humane restraint and confinement of an animal.

### COUNCIL SPONSORS

Council Member John Hines, Council Member Sarah Rumbaugh, and Council Member Olgy Diaz

### LEGISLATIVE INTENT

**Ordinance Request:** Tacoma's animal control code lacks robust definitions regarding adequate care, adverse environmental conditions, and proper shelter for animals, as well as clear guidelines for the humane restraint or confinement of an animal. As a result, community members are frustrated and concerned that Animal Control officers are not well equipped to consistently manage situations that could pose a danger to an animal's welfare.

- Common definitions of animal welfare stress that the concept includes both the physical and mental wellbeing of an animal.<sup>1</sup> The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) adds that animal welfare is not just an issue of providing water, food, and health care, but also creating "an environment appropriate to their care and use, with thoughtful consideration for their species-typical biology and behavior."<sup>2</sup> The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals also specifically notes that animals should have "freedom from fear and distress by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering."<sup>3</sup>
- Failing to provide for the physical and mental wellbeing of an animal can result in a range of medical issues, including malnourishment or dehydration, and produce behavioral issues, such as anxiety or aggression.<sup>4</sup> These issues can in turn lead to serious injury or death for the animal or other animals and people in the vicinity. In addition, animals that have physical and behavioral issues are likely to be at a higher risk of abandonment or euthanasia.

Updating Title 17 of the Municipal Code would help ensure Tacoma's standards of care better align with our understanding of animal welfare. The proposed ordinance suggests the following changes:

- Update definitions in 17.01.010 regarding adequate care, adverse environmental conditions, and proper shelter to better meet current humane standards; and

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<sup>1</sup> [What Is Animal Welfare And Why Is It Important? | International Fund Animal Welfare](#); [Animal welfare | American Veterinary Medical Association](#); [Guiding Principles | ASPCA](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Animal welfare principles | American Veterinary Medical Association](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Guiding Principles | ASPCA](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Understanding Animal Neglect: Consequences and How to Help](#)



- Update 17.01.165 and 17.01.166 to clarify and expand restrictions regarding the use of a tether for restraining animals and adequate care for animals to ensure humane care and prevent dangerous conditions; and
- Update 17.02.070 to limit the number of animals that can be confined in a stationary vehicle, clarify the requirements for how they are confined, and set limits on the amount of time of the confinement to ensure humane care and prevent dangerous conditions.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Council Member John Hines met with community members who shared concerns about the welfare of animals that are kept tethered and experiencing prolonged confinement in a vehicle without adequate care, particularly during adverse environmental conditions. Council Member Hines also met with Tacoma Police Department Animal Control officers to better understand their ability to address tethered animals and the prolonged confinement of animals in vehicles, as well as their guidance for effective restrictions on these issues. Animal Control officers also helped to provide clarity for updating definitions regarding adequate care, adverse environmental conditions, and proper shelter.

**Equity and Accessibility:** Updating Title 17 to provide more detail and clarity would help pet owners better protect the health and wellbeing of their animals and enable Animal Control officers to address violations consistently across neighborhoods and circumstances. The resources pet owners may need to provide adequate care and proper shelter are widely available for free or low-cost in our community and would not create barriers for pet ownership.

**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.

**Livability:** *Equity Index Score:* Moderate Opportunity

Increase positive public perception of safety and overall quality of life.

**ALTERNATIVES**

Alternative	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Do not update any definitions or requirements in Title 17.	Tacoma would continue to have a range of legal requirements aimed at helping to enforce animal welfare.	Animal Control officers and the broader community would lack clarification on key issues regarding animal welfare, potential resulting in dangerous situations for the physical and mental wellbeing of Tacoma’s animals.
Prohibit any tethering or confinement of an animal in a stationary vehicle.	Animals would be more robustly protected from potentially dangerous conditions.	Such a sweeping prohibition would be difficult to enforce with current resources and could result in some pet owners abandoning animals.



**EVALUATIONS AND FOLLOW UP**

If approved, these code updates would be published on City websites and shared with relevant departments and animal shelters.

**SPONSOR RECOMMENDATION**

Sponsors recommend adopting this ordinance.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

All proposed code changes can be implemented and enforced with existing resources. The longer-term fiscal impact of this ordinance change cannot be determined at this time, as it does not create direct financial obligations. The addition of new enforcement tools may lead to minor increases in animals transported to and held at the humane society, which could result in additional expenses. The ordinance change may also generate small amounts of revenue through fines and fees associated with enforcement activities.

**What Funding is being used to support the expense?**

N/A

**Are the expenditures and revenues planned and budgeted in this biennium's current budget?**

N/A

**Are there financial costs or other impacts of not implementing the legislation?**

N/A

**Will the legislation have an ongoing/recurring fiscal impact?**

N/A

**Will the legislation change the City's FTE/personnel counts?**

N/A