



Classification of City Employees & Compliance with Charter

City of Tacoma | Civil Service Board Chair (CSB), Eric Hansen

GPFC
September 16, 2025
ITEM 1



Presentation Type



- Informational in anticipation of request for Ordinance

OVERVIEW



- City Charter (Section 6.12) requires CSB to:
 - Advise Council on civil service and personnel administration
 - Investigate employment conditions
- Recent CSB investigation: improper classification of employees
- Amend TMC 1.24.290, new rule TMC 1.24.295

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BACKGROUND



Classified vs. Unclassified

- **Classified employees:**
 - Covered by merit system (testing, competitive hiring, just cause discipline)
 - Protected by Civil Service Board hearings
- **Unclassified employees:**
 - Limited group (e.g., elected officials, department heads, confidential assistants, special project staff, City Attorney staff)
 - Not protected by merit system or just cause

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- HR Department has improperly designated ~1/3 of workforce as unclassified
- Violates Sections 6.1 & 6.2 of City Charter
- Examples of wrongly unclassified positions:
 - Nurses, Engineers, Data Analysts, Case Managers, Budget Officers



Risks & Impacts

- Employee Morale: unfair treatment, low trust, lower productivity
- Legal Liability: Section 1983 lawsuits → damages, back pay, attorney fees
- Public Trust: risk of nepotism, cronyism in hiring/promotion
- Service Quality: unfair employment practices = weaker public services



Charter Authority

- CSB empowered under Section 6.14 to:
 - Make and enforce civil service and personnel rules
 - Act as sentinel safeguarding merit system (Yakima v. CSB case)
 - Council may amend or reject rules by 2/3 vote



TMC 1.24.290 (Amendments)

- Define “principal officers” & “assistants”
- Clarify “special inquiry, investigation, or examination”
- Reaffirm all others as classified

TMC 1.24.295 (New Rule)

- CSB must approve classification decisions
- Quarterly reporting by HR
- CSB authority to reclassify positions

••• BENEFITS OF REFORM



- Ensures compliance with Charter
- Restores fair treatment & merit-based hiring
- Protects City from litigation & liability
- Improves employee morale and performance
- Strengthens public trust

••• ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED



Status quo:

- Ad hoc, inconsistent designations
- Violates Charter, high risk exposure

Adopt new rules:

- Brings compliance
- Clear criteria, consistent process

●●● FISCAL IMPACTS



- No direct fiscal impact
- Potential cost avoidance from preventing lawsuits

●●● RECOMMENDATION



- Informational for your awareness
- Questions or input to shape future legislation

● ● ● CLOSING



- Not a critique of HR Department's broader work
- But correction is essential to uphold:
 - Merit system
 - Fair and equitable treatment
 - Public confidence in City governance

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● ● ● NEXT STEPS



- Council Committee Review
- City Council Consideration
- Ordinance Effective Date
- Additional Education & Outreach

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