



**CITY OF TACOMA, WASHINGTON
OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL
COUNCIL CONSIDERATION REQUEST**

TO: Deputy Mayor Blocker & Members of the City Council
FROM: Mayor Victoria Woodards and Chief Policy Analyst Melanie Harding
COPIES TO: Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager; Tadd Wille, Deputy City Mgr.; Bill Fosbre, City Attorney
SUBJECT: Request for Resolution: A request to rename Fireman’s Park to Firefighters’ Park
DATE: April 22, 2021

I submitting a request for your consideration to rename Fireman’s Park to Firefighters’ Park and to request that a resolution proposing this renaming be brought to the City Council on May 4, 2021.

LEGISLATIVE INTENT:

In 2014, the City Council adopted an Equity and Empowerment framework which made equity a guiding principle across the organization and committed the City to changing practices which created or sustained inequities. On August 20, 2019, the City Council approved Resolution 40408 amending the City’s policy on place names and name changes. One of the primary recommendations for updating this policy was to align it with guiding City principles and include the concepts of equity, diversity, and inclusion when considering place names and name changes throughout the City. The policy amendment also provided the Mayor and City Council with the authority to make naming proposals.

Fireman’s Park is currently located at 801 A Street, Tacoma (see attached map).

Tacoma Fire Department (TFD) has been working to meet our organization-wide goal of having employees who reflect the diversity of Tacoma. Part of this work has included efforts to increase the representation of women in the TFD workforce. This renaming request seeks to acknowledge this work and align the name of this public park with the goals of the guiding city principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion, while continuing to recognize the history and many contributions of Tacoma’s Fire Department.

While women remain underrepresented in the field, the national history of women in firefighting goes back more than 200 years. In 1818, Molly Williams was recorded as being the first female firefighter in the United States. As a slave in New York City, she became a member of Oceanus Engine Company #11, a volunteer engine company. During the blizzard of 1818, male firefighters were scarce due to an influenza outbreak and Williams took her place alongside male peers, pulling the pumper to a fire through the deep snow.

The city’s first female firefighter, Eileen Lewis, joined TFD in 1981. In 2000, Lewis became TFD’s first female fire chief and the first woman in the United States to lead a large municipal fire department.¹ That same year, under Lewis’s leadership, Fire Station No. 10 gained national recognition for having one of the first all-female firefighting crews in the country.²

¹ <https://www.tacomadailyindex.com/blog/tacoma-fire-chief-lewis-will-retire/581969/>

²

<https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article241377011.html#:~:text=%E2%80%9COut%20of%20410%20fire%20fighters,24%20firefighters%20includes%20nine%20women.>

In addition to efforts to recruit a more racially diverse staff, targeted outreach to women is now a standard recruiting practice. TFD has partnered with our Human Resources Department on efforts like the 2019 “Women’s Firefighter Workshop.” In that workshop:

- Fifty women from the community attended to meet and speak with women serving as career firefighters;
- In addition to hearing from these experienced, highly-trained professionals, they were also provided hands on experiences and information on how to apply to join the Tacoma Fire Department.

In 2020, the Human Resources Department created virtual sessions due to COVID, and eighty women attended.

It is because of efforts like these that 13.4% (54) of TFD’s current 404 uniformed staff are women. This is significant because the percentage of women on almost all other departments across the nation is closer to 5%. Also, nine are Firefighter-Paramedics and seven serve in roles of supervision/leadership (including one who serves as an Assistant Chief). Additionally, one – Allison Hinzman – was elected to serve as the President of the Firefighter’s union, IAFF Local 31, in December 2020. She is the first woman to do so.

In acknowledgment that this career is not for men alone, TFD Lieutenant Marja Stowell took the initiative to request the renaming of Fireman’s Park to Firefighters’ Park in 2019, noting that “changing the name fits with the city’s values of equity.”³ An online petition was circulated in May of 2019 as part of that effort.

In response to Lt. Stowell’s request and in alignment with Resolution No. 40408, Mayor Woodards announced an intent to bring forward a proposal to rename the park in March 2020 during that year’s State of the City Address. Her renaming proposal was delayed due to COVID-related restrictions on the legislation that could be brought forward in newly virtual public meetings as well as the need to pivot attention to emergency response efforts. This year, she proposes that a resolution renaming the park be considered on International Firefighters’ Day: May 4, 2021.

As the Tacoma News Tribune Editorial Board noted at the beginning of the pandemic “we can and should mark the progress made by females in all careers, especially those most historically dominated by males— and those who are exemplifying true Tacoma grit during the novel coronavirus emergency.”⁴

In addition to forward the city values of diversity, equity, and inclusion, this proposal strives to retain recognition of the history and many contributions of the Tacoma Fire Department.

Tacoma was the first city in Washington State to establish a paid fire department. Within two weeks of the 1889 fire which caused extensive damage in Seattle, the Tacoma City Council voted to put its volunteer department on salary.⁵

On Saturday June 20, 1891 the Tacoma Fire Department moved into newly built Station No. 6 at 823 A Street. The two-story brick building, TFD’s first brick fire station, also became the headquarters for the Fire Department. According to the Old City Hall Historic District Nomination, an adjacent park was completed in 1894 and popularly called Fireman’s Park due to its co-location with Fire Station #6. While Fire Station #6 was torn down in 1974, Fireman’s Park has retained its name to date.⁶

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<https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article241377011.html#:~:text=%E2%80%9COut%20of%20410%20fire%20fighters,24%20firefighters%20includes%20nine%20women.>

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<https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article241377011.html#:~:text=%E2%80%9COut%20of%20410%20fire%20fighters,24%20firefighters%20includes%20nine%20women.>

⁵ https://www.iafflocal31.com/?zone=/unionactive/view_page.cfm&page=Local203120History

⁶ <https://cdm17061.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p17061coll21/id/12576/rec/3>

The park has recently been the subject of conversation around the deaccessioning of the Tacoma Totem Pole. The renaming of this park is not intended in any way to limit or restrict this process nor the placement of any future historical markers or art pieces relevant to other aspects of Tacoma’s history.

In addition to last year’s public announcement and as part of her outreach efforts, Mayor Woodards has sought the support of the Downtown Tacoma Partnership and IAFF Local 31. She will also provide notice to the City of Tacoma’s Landmarks Preservation Commission prior to City Council discussion of this item in Study Session.

In consultation with Public Works staff, the current sign is nearing the end of its useful life and the cost of replacing it with a sign of the same style can be covered within the existing budget.

DESIRED RESOLUTION DATE: International Firefighters’ Day – May 4, 2021

ALIGNMENT WITH TACOMA 2025 KEY FOCUS AREAS:

This legislation, program, project, or event is best aligned with the following:

Civic Engagement: *Equity Index Score:* N/A

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

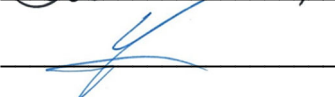
Increase positive public perception of safety and overall quality of life.

In you have a question related to the Council Consideration Request, please contact Chief Policy Analyst to the Mayor Melanie Harding at 253-591-5156 or melanie.harding@cityoftacoma.org.

SUBMITTED FOR COUNCIL CONSIDERATION BY: 
Mayor

SUPPORTING COUNCIL MEMBERS SIGNATURES (2 SIGNATURES ONLY)

(Signatures demonstrate support to initiate discussion and consideration of the subject matter by City Council for potential policy development and staff guidance/direction.)

- 1.  POS# 4
- 2.  POS# 7

ATTACHMENTS:

- A – Fireman’s Park Map
- B - Historic Photo of Fire Station #6