

Tacoma City Manager Stakeholder Survey Feedback

To: Operational Strategy & Administrative Committee (OSAC)

From: City Manager Recruitment Team

Date: 12.12.2025

Subject: Summary of Stakeholder Survey Results – City Manager Recruitment

Purpose

This memo summarizes key themes from the 318-response stakeholder survey conducted to inform the recruitment of the City of Tacoma's next City Manager. The feedback reflects perspectives of community members, City staff, community leaders, and business owners and is intended to support OSAC's oversight of candidate screening and interview design.

Respondents were asked to identify their association with the City of Tacoma. Out of 318 responses, ~310 people identified a connection to Tacoma.

- Self-identified roles (not mutually exclusive):
 - Community Member: ~190
 - City Staff: ~124
 - Community Leader: ~49
 - Business Owner: ~31

Interpretation:

- We have a strong community voice and a significant staff voice, with overlap between the two.
 - This is a self-selected sample, so it reflects engaged/concerned stakeholders rather than a representative poll.
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Overall Message from Stakeholders

Stakeholders are seeking a steady, accountable, and fiscally disciplined executive leader who communicates clearly, manages complexity with integrity, and builds trust internally and externally. While expectations vary across stakeholder groups, there is strong alignment on the importance of accountability, transparency, and effective communication—particularly during a period of fiscal constraint and organizational change.

Respondents were asked to identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities they thought were most important for the next City Manager. Across open-ended responses, the most frequently cited attributes include:

- Fiscal stewardship and budget management, managing structural deficits, prioritization under constraint, data-driven tradeoffs
- Strong, values-based leadership – steadiness, clarity of direction, decisiveness with fairness
- Effective communication, transparent, plain-spoken engagement with Council, staff, and community
- Accountability and fairness, consistent standards, equitable HR practices, public trust

- Strategic mindset and complexity management, navigating competing priorities in a highly visible environment
 - People-centered leadership, employee wellbeing, healthy culture, inclusive community engagement
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When asked to rank the Council's eight City Manager competencies, the following received the highest priority across stakeholder groups:

1. Ensures Accountability
2. Communicates Effectively
3. Courage
4. Manages Complexity
5. Strategic Mindset

Lower relative priority was given to Drives Results and Drives Vision and Purpose, which stakeholders appear to see as implicit outcomes of strong accountability, communication, and fiscal management.

Key Issue Areas Raised in Stakeholder Questions

Stakeholder-submitted questions clustered around the following themes:

- Budget stabilization and long-term financial sustainability
- Council-Manager governance and political navigation
- Public safety, police accountability, and community trust
- Equity, housing, and inclusive economic opportunity
- Organizational culture, psychological safety, and leadership development

Several issue areas reflect tensions within the community, especially around public safety, taxation versus service levels, and equity investments.

Implications for Recruitment and Assessment

Stakeholder feedback strongly supports:

- Prioritizing candidates with demonstrated experience in fiscal turnaround, organizational stability, and complex political environments
- Weighting candidate evaluation toward:
 - Accountability
 - Communication
 - Authenticity
 - Complexity management
 - Strategic thinking
- Designing scenario-based interviews focused on:
 - Structural budget gaps
 - High-conflict public safety issues
 - Culture repair and workforce trust
 - Equity-centered decision-making

Next Steps

The recruitment team will use this feedback to:

- Work with Prothman to align interview questions and assessment exercises to stakeholder priorities
- Support OSAC and Council with a transparent recruitment framework grounded in community and employee input.