



**CITY OF TACOMA
OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL
ISSUE BRIEF**

TO: Operational Strategy and Administrative Committee (OSAC) members
FROM: Bucoda Warren, Chief Policy Analyst to the Mayor
COPIES TO: Mayor Anders Ibsen; Ben Thurgood, OSAC Executive Liaison; Hyun Kim, City Manager; Allyson Griffith, Deputy City Manager
SUBJECT: Proposed Reimagining of Community Forum
DATE: March 13, 2026

COUNCIL MEMBER QUESTION:

There have been clear frustrations with the current format of Community Forum by both the community and the City Council. The structure doesn't allow for dialogue, and topics often fall outside the City Council's jurisdiction, which can leave both the Council and community feeling dissatisfied. Mayor Ibsen is interested in reimagining how the City Council can host forums that meet the needs of the community and City Council.

BACKGROUND:

As a part of the Operational Strategy and Administrative Committee (OSAC) conversations February 27th, 2026, Mayor Ibsen took the lead on bringing a conversation to the City Council Study Session on March 10th, 2026, in preparation for drafting a proposal for OSAC's consideration. The final recommendation by OSAC will be drafted and included in the Council Rules updates coming in April.

STATUS OF THE ISSUE:

Currently, community forum is held twice a month on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays. Speaking time is limited to sixty minutes, and speaker's remarks are limited to up to 90 seconds per person, per Council Rules. There is also a virtual option through zoom, or by phone. Under the current council rules, the current purpose of this forum is to assist the Council in making policy decisions; therefore, items of discussion shall be limited to matters over which the City Council has jurisdiction.

To allow Council to focus on reimagining the Community Forum, a motion was considered on the evening of March 10, 2026, and suspending the one-hour limit, and cancelling the 4th Tuesday Community Forums in March, April, and May.

Below is the timeline of changes to community forum since its establishment in 1993.

- Community Forum (Citizens' Forum) was established in 1993 by RES32400, and was once a month (2nd Tuesday) and limited to 30 minutes total, with no person speaking longer than 10 minutes
- In 2002, Community Forum (Citizens' Forum) was once a month (1st Tuesday), no total time limit, individual speakers limited to 3 minutes
- In 2011, Community Forum (Citizens' Forum) was changed back to 2nd Tuesday.
- In December 2017, [RES39882](#) amended Rule 9 of the Rules of Procedure of the Council of the City of Tacoma relating to Public Comment/Public Forum to suspend Citizens' Forum on the second Tuesday for one-year to allow for a revised Citizens' Forum pilot project; authorizing the one-time use of up to \$25,000 of Council Contingency Funds, to assist in evaluating and developing the pilot project; and directing the City Manager to negotiate an agreement with the Center for Dialog and Resolution for said purpose. The [scope of work can be viewed here](#). The final report can be found here: [CDR community forum report.pdf](#)

- In June 2018, [RES40017](#) reinstated Community Forum (Citizens' Forum) on the second Tuesday of every month.
- In 2019, [RES40508](#) formally changed the name to Community Forum.
- In 2020, in response to changed practices brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, Council adopted [RES40652](#) which:
 - Limited speakers at community forum to 90 seconds.
 - Created a “virtual forum” on the fourth Tuesday of each month with the same rules as Community forum.
- In 2022, [RES41093](#) replaced virtual forum with a second Community Forum, and limited both Community Forums to no more than 60 minutes.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND ALTERNATIVES:

Based on feedback from the City Council on March 10th, 2026, Mayor Ibsen proposes the following draft purpose statement and format to replace the current community forums.

Purpose of Community Forum

The purpose of this forum is to provide residents with an accessible and inclusive opportunity to engage with the City Council on policies, services, and matters within the City’s jurisdiction. The forum serves as a space for community input that informs Council policy decisions, addresses service issues, supports civic education, and helps build trust, transparency, and stronger relationships between residents and their local government.

Structure of Community Forum

- Community Forums will no longer be held during City Council meetings or in the Council Chambers.
- The City will instead host in-district community meetings in partnership with Neighborhood Councils (NCs), aiming to utilize their established times and networks.
- A total of five district meetings will be held annually, occurring every other month.
- Meetings will rotate among Council districts each year to ensure equitable geographic coverage.
- Meetings will be hosted in high schools or other community spaces that can accommodate larger public participation.
- Events will be fully staffed by City personnel to support engagement, logistics, and follow-up.
- There will be no virtual participation or live broadcasting during the community forum, but a recording will be released following it.
- Language translation services will be provided for the top languages in a district.
- Each event will feature catering from a local business, highlighted as part of the gathering.

--Pre-Meeting Preparation--

- Residents will be encouraged to submit issues through Council Comment Forms or the 311 system, ensuring requests are tracked and routed appropriately.
- Staff will be present to assist residents in submitting service requests on their behalf at the event.
- A GovDelivery newsletter specific to the forums will be established to provide reminders and after-action reports to residents.
- TV Tacoma will be scheduled for recording during the event.

--Meeting Format--

Community Gathering (30 minutes)

- Informal time for food, fellowship, and community building.

District Issues Briefing (30 minutes)

- Presentation by staff of 311 and constituent service data highlighting:
 - A map of reported issues
 - Data trends
 - The top three district concerns
 - Updates on progress, timelines, and processes for addressing them.

District Conversation (60–90 minutes)

- Facilitated discussion led by the District Council Member.
- Town-hall style conversation focused on:
 - District-specific needs
 - City services
 - Relevant policies impacting the community.

Closing and Next Steps (10 minutes)

- Staff summarize key themes and concerns raised.
- Residents are given ways to stay engaged, continue reporting issues, and when the City will report back.
- A summary report of themes, service issues, and follow-up actions will be presented at a Study Session within the next month to ensure transparency and accountability. This may include case work, answers or next steps, or clear communication on why certain requests cannot be completed.