



City of Tacoma Council Action Memorandum Analysis

-Report of Findings-

Problem Statement

The City of Tacoma's Council Action Memo (CAM) and Council Consideration Request (CCR) forms were last updated in 2019.

Since the last update, the City has adopted a new 10-year strategic plan, Tacoma 2035. The current CAM and CCR contain references to Tacoma 2025, creating the need to reflect the organization's adoption of Tacoma 2035 and the updated goal areas.

In addition to making updates to reflect Tacoma 2035, editing these forms also presents the opportunity to identify whether additional changes or updates would increase the effectiveness of the process, as well as the ultimate value to decision-makers.

Process

The City Council's Operational Strategy and Administrative Committee (OSAC) requested that staff look into potential updates to the CAM and CCR in early 2026.

In order to respond to Council's request and better understand the development and use of CAMs and CCRs, a series of interviews and workshops were held in March and April of 2026 with several different stakeholder groups:

- Eight City Councilmembers
- City Council and Mayor Policy Analysts
- Department Staff representing:
 - Community and Economic Development
 - Environmental Services
 - Finance
 - Human Resources
 - Office of Management and Budget
 - Public Works

Through those interviews and workshops, Center staff identified themes, which have been synthesized into the key findings of this report.

Staff anticipate coming back to OSAC to present these findings at the May 8 OSAC meeting. Upon approval and direction from Council, staff will then create a draft CAM/CCR template to reflect the findings and recommendations of this report, to be brought back to Council for further discussion and potential implementation in Q2 2026.



Key Findings and Recommendations

- **Finding 1:** Clarify the purpose of the Council Action Memorandum, the Council Consideration Request, and the Council Committee Memo.
 - Different parties view the documents as having different purposes, which impacts what they would like in the documents.
 - Purposes noted included:
 - Policy Development
 - Policy Analysis
 - Accountability/ Transparency
 - Records/ Archiving
 - Some comments noted that the purpose has changed over time, evidenced by some of the information being asked for in the fiscal analysis section (such as the General Ledger “GL” code)
 - ✓ **Recommendation 1:** Clarify the purpose of the Council Action Memorandum, the Council Consideration Request, and the Council Committee Memo to Council and staff, using this refresh as an opportunity to build understanding and buy-in from all parties.
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- **Finding 2:** There are many different types of CAMs that come before Council, and many of them create unnecessary work for staff and Council because not all sections are applicable to each of those use types.
 - Staff are unsure how to complete sections of the CAM/CCR that are not always applicable.
 - The diversity of things coming to Council, including purchase resolutions, board appointments, etc., requires some way of differentiating what needs to be filled out.
 - ✓ **Recommendation 2:** Investigate whether a pre-populated check box can automatically filter out the questions that are not applicable to that proposal type, and/or determine how to reduce the amount of time and work needed from staff for issues that are not relevant to the decision-making at hand. Potential “types” could include:
 - Grant Approval
 - Purchase
 - Board Appointment
 - Council Consideration Request (Policy)
 - Council Contingency Request (\$)
 - Setting a Hearing
 - Multi-Family Tax Exemption
 - Collective Bargaining Agreement
 - Proclamations/ Recognitions/ Ceremonials
 - and potentially others, to be determined with further research



- **Finding 3:** It is not always clear what problem the CAM/CCR is seeking to solve.
 - Some Council Members desire a clearly articulated problem that the recommendation is seeking to solve.
 - Some Council Members also desire to know not just what the recommendation is, but why it's important.
 - ✓ **Recommendation 3:** Include a question or portion of a question to determine what problem statement the recommendation is seeking to solve.
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- **Finding 4:** It is unclear, especially to newer Council Members, how the CAM/CCR is building off, or related to, past Council discussions and actions.
 - Currently, staff choose whether to include past Council and/or Council Committee meetings where the issue/recommendation was already discussed into the background section. If they do not, there is no trail to follow.
 - ✓ **Recommendation 4:** Include an opportunity for the author to expand on the Background section by clearly including past Council action or touch points, including past Council and Committee meetings.
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- **Finding 5: Currently, the “Background” and “Summary” sections are approached and filled out inconsistently.**
 - There is inconsistency in where to put certain key details such as important context for the decision.
 - The “Summary” can often contain extraneous contextual information, as opposed to clearly articulating the author's recommendation.
 - ✓ **Recommendation 5:** Edit the titles and descriptions of the sections to more clearly differentiate between them for the following functions:
 - Purpose and problem statement
 - Sponsor recommendation
 - Related governance/ Council action
 - Background context
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- **Finding 6:** The engagement section does not offer sufficient information about who was engaged, how the engagement was conducted, and what was learned from that engagement, especially if coming from a CBC
 - Current format does not indicate how the engagement was used, in terms of what changed or was helped shaped by that engagement.
 - Current format does not provide a summary of inputs/ perspectives.
 - This section may not be needed in situations such as issues coming before Council where it is mandated by State law.
 - ✓ **Recommendation 6:** Include clear prompts in the community engagement section that encourage the author to share what was learned from the engagement and how that engagement ultimately informed the recommendation.
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- **Finding 7:** The equity analysis section often doesn't accomplish the intent and could be improved by broadening the analysis.
 - Current equity analysis is based on the Equity Index, which is limiting to only geographic equity analysis.
 - Any citywide action is marked as moderate equity impact due to the quintile formula, even if there is a specific underserved population the recommendation is seeking to support.
 - ✓ **Recommendation 7:** Change the question that currently asks for an Equity Index analysis to a broader question that allows the author to identify how the recommendation is broadly reflecting the City's values and advancing access, increasing opportunity, and centering belonging for all Tacoma community members.
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- **Finding 8:** The fiscal analysis section contains more detailed information than is often needed, and the fiscal impacts noted are not always accurate.
 - There is no current need for the General Ledger (GL) code, Council does not need that information as part of their analysis.
 - Current fiscal analysis does not always accurately capture the true cost, especially for ongoing O&M costs. Some Council Members asked to consider whether Finance can/should sign off on the fiscal analysis to ensure accuracy and fiscal responsibility.
 - Current analysis of potential costs does not take into account what might be cut as a result to compensate for those costs.
 - Current format does not ask what the tradeoff is if it requires no new resources. For example, if no new resources are needed because a current staff member will be shifted to new work, that will likely have impacts to programs, other staff, etc.



- ✓ **Recommendation 8:** Simplify the fiscal analysis section to just the relevant information and find a way to incorporate the fiscal tradeoffs that are not currently captured in the process.
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- **Finding 9:** Alternatives presented often are binary (do this or don't do this), and do not present the alternatives considered during the development of the recommendation being brought to Council or provide a range of other options for Council to consider.
 - This section could be framed as "Alternatives Considered" as opposed to "Alternatives" to show alternatives considered, while still respecting that the sponsor's recommendation is recommended for a reason.
 - The current format of the alternatives section (positive and negative impacts) does not adequately capture the trade-offs of the potential alternatives.
 - There may be more standardized alternatives for people to respond to such as a first step, half-way, don't do it at all (what are the consequences of inaction?), increase partnership, etc.
 - ✓ **Recommendation 9:** Edit the Alternatives section to have the author describe: 1) what other alternatives can be considered by Council to address the problem or issue at hand, and 2) what alternatives were considered during the development of the CAM/CCR, and why those alternatives were not ultimately recommended.
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- **Finding 10:** Even though it is the headline part of the CAM/CCR, the sponsor recommendation is currently at the end of the document.
 - If the recommendation is the core of the CAM/CCR, then it should be clear and present in the opening of the document.
 - Some Council Members desired for there to be a summary, or conclusion, of why the author's recommendation was ultimately decided upon.
 - ✓ **Recommendation 10:** Move the staff recommendation section to the beginning of the document (so Council and the community see the recommendation immediately).
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- **Finding 11:** There is a desire for a clearer timeline, not just of when the item will be coming back to Council, but also the timeline for completion of the proposed action.
 - The Evaluation and follow-up section does not sufficiently ask when the proposed action will be completed, in addition to current ask of evaluation/ next steps.
 - Some Council Members desired a note in this section to identify whether the item will be getting a press release.



- Current format of document does not include a description of ongoing or future support needed from Council.
 - ✓ **Recommendation 11:** Include a proposed timeline or expectation of completion note to the evaluation and follow-up section. Include a clear follow-up that asks what the measurable follow-up will be, and how Council will know that the effort has been successful.
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- **Finding 12:** There is a desire to better understand what the potential impacts of the proposal will be, both positive and negative, in relation to Council goals/priorities, using measurables where possible.
 - Current CAMs and CCRs typically do not articulate details of (potential) negative impacts.
 - More information, especially on how it advances Tacoma 2035, would be helpful.
- ✓ **Recommendation 12:** Update the documents to reflect Tacoma 2035 goals, and update impacts section to ensure how the recommendation advances the relevant goal is adequately described.