



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

TO: Mayor and City Council
FROM: Council Member John Hines and Christina Caan, Policy Analyst
COPIES TO: Hyun Kim, City Manager; Chris Bacha, City Attorney
SUBJECT: **Ordinance Request -- Amending Title 8 of the Municipal Code, relating to camping and storage of personal belongings on public property.**
DATE: October 1, 2025

We ask for your support for an ordinance amending Title 8 of the Municipal Code, relating to camping and storage of personal belongings on public property.

LEGISLATIVE INTENT

As the City of Tacoma expands more permanent shelter capacity and housing pathways, temporary and emergency shelter sites are concluding as planned, resulting in rapid changes to the City's prohibitions for camping and the storage of personal belongings on public property established by Second Amended Substitute Ordinance 28831.¹ Specifically, the planned closing of three emergency shelters has left neighborhoods across Hilltop and Downtown without any prohibitions for camping and storage of personal belongings on public property.

- In 2022, the City Council adopted Second Amended Substitute Ordinance 28831, which prohibited camping and the storage of personal belongings in a 10-block radius around temporary shelters, as well as Aspen Court (a City-permitted emergency and transitional housing facility), and all public property within 200 feet of Tacoma's mapped rivers, waterways, creeks, streams, and shorelines.
- As of July 31, three emergency shelters in Tacoma have concluded operations and therefore no longer provide the 10-block community buffer zones, including the Forging Path Community at 3561 South Pacific Avenue, Alzheimer Memorial Family Shelter at 1121 South Alzheimer Street, and RISE Freedom Project at 2135 Martin Luther King Jr. Way.²

Encampments are beginning to return to areas where the City's community buffer zones have been reduced, including some of Tacoma's lowest opportunity neighborhoods.³ Unauthorized camping and storage of personal belongings on public property impacts the surrounding community by creating public safety and public health hazards, including heightened risk of fires, criminal activities, illegal dumping, and sanitation issues. Camping activity also interferes with the rights of other members of the public to use public areas for their intended purpose.

- The community buffer zones established in Second Amended Substitute Ordinance 28831 proved to be an effective way to address the impacts of encampments. Since implementation began, the community buffer zones have enabled the City to remove 776 encampments in

¹ [City of Tacoma - File #: ORD28831](#)

² [Homelessness Services | City of Tacoma](#)

³ [City of Tacoma - File #: 25-0862](#)

prohibited areas. The Homeless Engagement and Alternatives (HEAL) Team, which has been fully staffed since September 2023, has also been able to offer services to more than 3,300 people in prohibited areas since implementation began, with a 64 percent acceptance rate. Acceptance rates for services have been consistently higher in the prohibited areas than outside them.

Updating the areas where camping and storing personal belongings on public property is prohibited can help build on the progress initiated by Second Amended Substitute Ordinance 28831 and ensure that the City of Tacoma meets its responsibility to keep public areas clean, sanitary, and accessible for all. To do so, we are proposing the following code updates:

- Updating buffer zones where camping and the storage of personal belongings on public property are prohibited to include areas within 10 blocks of a permanent or temporary shelter, including emergency or transitional housing, within 5 blocks of a public school (K-12), public park, public library, or within 200 feet of Protected Waters.
- Adjusting TMC 8.19.050 to stress that individuals subject to enforcement under TMC 8.19.030 or Section 8.19.040 and who are qualified will be considered for referral to therapeutic court. In 2023, Tacoma launched two therapeutic courts, including a Mental Health Court and a Community Court, that have now demonstrated success.⁴

ORDINANCE REQUEST: This ordinance amends Title 8 of the Municipal Code, relating to camping and the storage of personal belongings on public property.

DESIRED FIRST READING DATE: October 14, 2025

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

City Council Members frequently receive complaints from local business and community members about the negative impacts they experience from encampments on public property, including concerns about safety and unsanitary conditions. In addition, Council Member Hines has received input from shelter providers requesting buffers around permanent shelters. The City of Tacoma declared homelessness a public health emergency in 2017, and addressing concerns regarding the impact of encampments remains a top priority for many residents.⁵ The Pierce County Point-in-Time count data shows that the number of people experiencing homelessness has risen annually since 2021, with almost 3,000 people experiencing homelessness in Pierce County in 2025.⁶

2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Equity and Accessibility: The conclusion of the community buffer zones in the Hilltop and Downtown neighborhoods make these low opportunity areas more vulnerable to the impacts of encampments, including public safety issues and impacts on local businesses. In addition, communities of color are being disproportionately impacted by encampments, suggesting that taking steps to improve the City's response to camping is vital for ensuring community well-being and accessible public spaces across Tacoma.

Livability: *Equity Index Score:* Moderate Opportunity

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

⁴ [Therapeutic Courts Overview | City of Tacoma](#)

⁵ [Tacoma Community Survey 2024.pdf](#)

⁶ [Pierce County 2025 Homeless Point-in-Time \(PIT\) Count Summary](#)

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Adopt a citywide camping prohibition on public property.	The legal status of camping and storage on public property would be less complex under a citywide prohibition.	The City would likely struggle to effectively enforce a citywide camping ordinance without increased HEAL and TPD resources, impacting community belief and trust in local government.
The City could adopt a different set of community buffer zones based on alternative criteria.	Different locations in the city could be prioritized and have a reduced community impact from encampments.	If alternative locations are prioritized, the City's limited resources would make it more challenging to address community frustrations about encampment impacts on public property within 10 blocks of a permanent or temporary shelter, including emergency or transitional housing, within 5 blocks of a public school (K-12), public park, public library, or within 200 feet of Protected Waters.

EVALUATIONS AND FOLLOW UP

If approved, Neighborhood and Community Services would continue to provide quarterly updates on implementation, enabling City Council to closely monitor community impacts. Tacoma FIRST 311 will also continue to track and monitor community outreach regarding encampment issues.

SPONSOR RECOMMENDATION

Sponsors recommend moving the ordinance forward to a first reading on October 14, 2025.

FISCAL IMPACT

If approved, these ordinance changes are unlikely to require immediate additional resources to implement. HEAL and TPD resources are already positioned to address illegal camping in prohibited zones and have ceased to enforce Title 8 in several of the original prohibited zones that no longer exist. However, due to limited resources, removals will likely need to continue within at least a three-day window. Therapeutic Courts are also already in operation, although increased enforcement of Title 8 could result in increased costs. Citations under the current ordinance have been limited and keeping citations low would minimize additional costs.

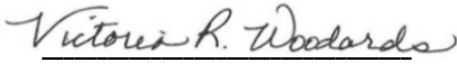
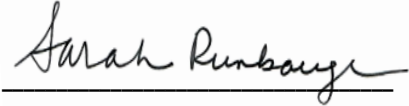
If you have a question related to the ordinance request, please contact Christina Caan, Policy Analyst, at (253) 219-0679 (phone) or ccaan@tacoma.gov.

SUBMITTED FOR COUNCIL CONSIDERATION BY:



Council Member John Hines

SUPPORTING COUNCIL MEMBERS SIGNATURES

1.  POS# __Mayor__
2.  POS# __2__
3.  POS# __4__

Attachments:

1. Draft Code Updates for Chapter 8 of the Tacoma Municipal Code
2. Comparison of 2024 and 2025 prohibited camping and personal storage zones

Draft Code Updates for Chapter 8 of the Tacoma Municipal Code

8.19.030 Unauthorized Use Of Public Property.

Unless otherwise permitted by the Tacoma Municipal Code, it shall be unlawful for any person to Camp within any Public Property that is within 10 blocks of a permanent or temporary shelter, including emergency or transitional housing, within 5 blocks of a public school, public park, public library, or within 200 feet of Protected Waters. ~~10 blocks of a Temporary Shelter and Aspen Court, as long as Aspen Court is permitted as emergency and transitional housing, provided that if the 10-block radius bisects a block or a public parcel, such as a park or a school, that the entire block or parcel shall be included in the prohibited area for camping; or within 200 feet of Protected Waters.~~

(Ord. 28831 Ex. A; passed Oct. 11, 2022)

8.19.040 Unauthorized Storage Of Personal Property On Public Property.

It shall be unlawful for any person to Store personal property, including, without limitation, Camp Facilities and Camp Paraphernalia, within any Public Property that is within 10 blocks of a permanent or temporary shelter, including emergency or transitional housing, within 5 blocks of a public school, public park, public library, or within 200 feet of Protected Waters. ~~that is within 10 blocks of a Temporary Shelter and Aspen Court, as long as Aspen Court is permitted as emergency and transitional housing, provided that if the 10-block radius bisects a block or a public parcel, such as a park or a school, that the entire block or parcel shall be included in the prohibited area for storage of personal property; or within 200 feet of Protected Waters.~~

(Ord. 28831 Ex. A; passed Oct. 11, 2022)

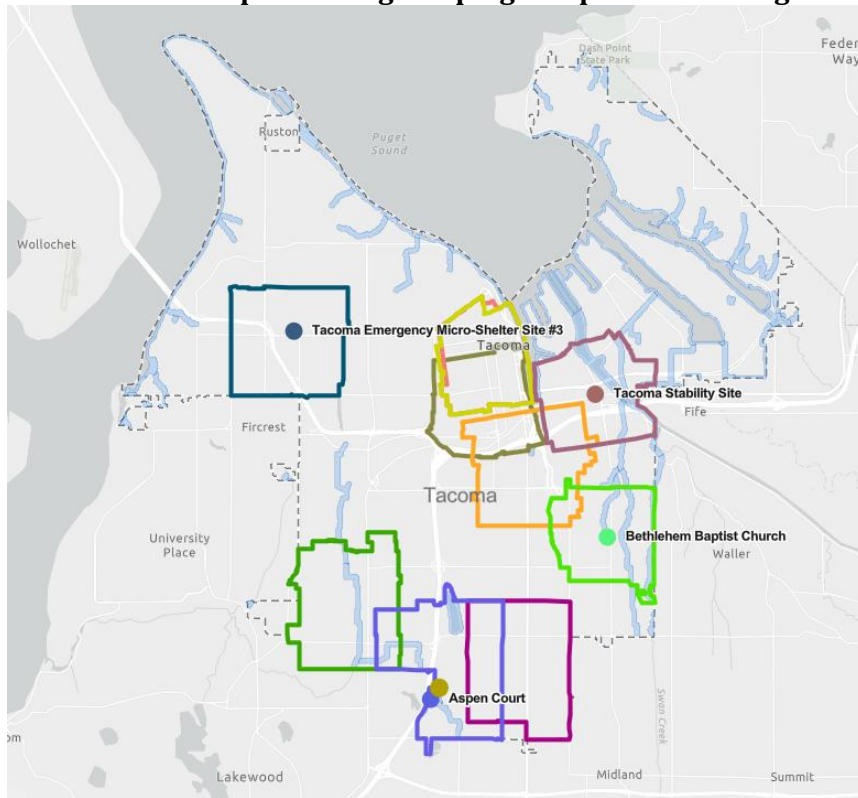
8.19.050 Penalty For Violations.

Violation of Section 8.19.030 or Section 8.19.040 of this Chapter is a misdemeanor offense and shall be punished upon conviction of such violation by a fine of not more than \$250, or by imprisonment not to exceed 30 days, or by both such fine and imprisonment. The City's intent is that individuals subject to enforcement under TMC 8.19.030 or Section 8.19.040 and who are qualified will be considered for referral to therapeutic court. ~~provided that, no less than two weeks prior to issuance of any infraction pursuant to this chapter, notice shall be posted at the location where camping or storage of personal belongings is occurring, so that the Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness can be notified and interested non-governmental organizations and mutual aid groups can offer assistance and resources as needed at this location; except that no posting of such notice, nor notice to any organization, is required when there is a reasonable belief there is significant risk to life, public health or safety, or property due to the camping or storage of personal belongings at this location as prohibited herein.~~

(Ord. 28831 Ex. A; passed Oct. 11, 2022)

Comparison of 2024 and 2025 prohibited camping and personal storage zones

A. Locations prohibiting camping and personal storage in 2024



B. Locations prohibiting camping and personal storage in 2025

