



CITY OF TACOMA OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL ISSUE BRIEF

TO: Tacoma City Council
FROM: Bucoda Warren, Chief Policy Analyst to the Mayor; Mayor Anders Ibsen
COPIES TO: Ben Thurgood, OSAC Executive Liaison; Hyun Kim, City Manager; Allyson Griffith, Deputy City Manager; Nicole Emery, City Clerk;
SUBJECT: Mayor's Reimagined Community Forum Proposal
DATE: April 2, 2026

COUNCIL MEMBER QUESTION:

Following discussion at the Operational Strategy and Administrative Committee (OSAC), there was a motion to forward the Mayor's proposal to staff to incorporate feedback and discussion from the meeting and provide additional administrative context such as costs, logistics, staffing, and other considerations. The Mayor will present his updated proposal at a future Study Session to the full Council, and a finalized proposal may be included with other City Council Rules of Procedure updates.

BACKGROUND:

As a part of the Operational Strategy and Administrative Committee (OSAC) conversations Mayor Ibsen proposed a new format for community forum on March 10, 2026. This included language for a redefined purpose of the forum, and a new structure that would change the staffing requirements for Community Forum.

Currently, community forum is scheduled twice a month on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays in Council Chambers following the regular business meeting. At this time, a motion made the evening of March 10, 2026, has suspended the one-hour limit, has changed the time for each speaker not to exceed 3 minutes, and has cancelled the 4th Tuesday Community Forums in March, April, and May.

Mayor Ibsen's proposal discussed at OSAC is summarized as follows for clarity;

- Community Forum will now consist of 5 in-district meetings every other month throughout the year in which the Mayor and all Council Members are expected to attend. These meetings would be about 2.5 hours long, and under current practice would be considered special meetings.
- Community Forum will be held in public facilities like schools or community centers that allows for the greatest ease of access and set up and may be designed with Neighborhood Councils, Business Districts and community leaders from the District.
- Events will be attended by City personnel to support engagement, logistics, and follow-up. Staff may include policy staff, constituent relations and customer service staff, and various front-line staff to address common issues such as permitting, code enforcement, road use, encampments, and public safety or may be Director-level staff who can follow up on requests. Staff presence will accommodate City service requests through mobile requests, or on-site requests.
- The District Council Member would be the lead in facilitating the discussion portion of the forum.
- There will be no virtual participation or live broadcasting during the community forum, but a video recording will be released following it.
- Translation will be available on site for those that need it. The number of languages represented and the format to meet this goal can be done in various ways.
- Food and possible entertainment from the district will be highlighted during the event.
- A report following Community Forum on issues brought up would be responded to in some way at a Study Session within the next month.

STATUS OF THE ISSUE:

Based on the Mayor's proposal discussed during the March 13, 2026, OSAC meeting, cost, logistics, staffing, and other considerations Council must weigh in determining a final format are included below.

Cost Impacts

Several elements of the proposed structure would have cost implications, some more direct than others. The most direct and predictable costs include food service, interpretation services, and childcare.

Currently, individual Council Member town halls are allocated \$1,400 annually to support accessible and equitable community engagement. This funding was intended to help address barriers to participation by covering services such as interpretation, childcare, food, and meeting space. While this allocation provides a useful reference point, the events envisioned in the Community Forum proposal are expected to be larger in scale than traditional town halls and may require additional resources. It is also important to note that this funding level was established several years ago and may not reflect current service costs. In addition to this outreach example, the Mayor's State of the City each year varies in costs depending on scope and style but is budgeted up to \$18,000 annually, though costs has varied wildly year to year.

--Food Service--

Food costs will vary depending on whether the City provides food free of charge and the size of the audience. Based on costs associated with recent City events, such as the State of the City address, staff estimate approximately \$1,500 for a food truck or catered service capable of serving a larger audience. Costs may vary depending on vendor availability and capacity within each district.

--Interpretation Services--

Interpretation costs can vary significantly depending on the format used.

- Real-time captioning accessible through smartphones, similar to the service used during State of the City, could cost approximately \$600, though it requires significant staff coordination.
- In-person interpreters for the most spoken languages in a district may cost approximately \$600–\$900 per language, depending on availability of interpreters. Per industry standards, for events that last over an hour, two interpreters per language must be scheduled.
- Full simultaneous interpretation across multiple languages, similar to what was provided during the Charter Review process, could cost up to \$2,100 per language, depending on availability of interpreters. Technical staff support and additional rooms or space for interpreters would also be required.
 - May require adequate preparation time for the interpreters to become familiar with the content of the meetings.

In the City of Tacoma, the following list are those languages used in community in order of priority. Each district may vary for the top languages used.

- English
- Vietnamese
- Spanish
- Russian
- Korean
- Khmer
- Filipino
- Ukrainian
- Chinese (simplified)

--Childcare--

Childcare services may also be necessary to ensure accessibility for families attending Community Forums. Costs will vary depending on the number of providers required and the duration of the event.

--Facility and Equipment Costs--

Additional costs may include room rentals, sound systems, staging, or technical equipment where needed. Based on previous events, these costs could range from approximately \$200 to \$800, depending on the venue and technical requirements. Additionally, staffing support from locations that are not city controlled might have a direct financial impact.

Together, the total direct costs for Community Forum event could vary widely depending on the scale of the event, services provided, and venue requirements. If a live stream is desired, locations may be limited to those wired for live broadcast, or additional equipment may be needed to do so elsewhere.

Logistics

The proposal includes a communication mechanism that would allow residents to sign up to receive updates about upcoming Community Forums and access summary reports following each event. This could be accommodated through the City's existing GovDelivery newsletter system, which allows residents to subscribe to topic-specific notifications. Staff could establish a Community Forum subscription option to notify residents when events are scheduled and when follow-up reports are available. A quality summary report would be a significant life for staff, so the scope and detail of any summary or response would impact staff time.

If Council wishes to partner with Neighborhood Councils to host or coordinate Community Forums, additional planning and coordination would be required. Some Neighborhood Councils may not have the capacity to dedicate one of their existing meetings to a special forum, and some meeting locations may not be suitable for larger audiences. One possible approach would be to engage Neighborhood Councils primarily as outreach partners, informing them of event dates and asking for assistance in sharing information with residents and identifying key issues within the district. Suitable public meeting spaces could also be coordinated in advance with Tacoma Public Schools or Parks Tacoma to ensure adequate capacity across districts.

Staffing of the Community Forums and staff presence would require clear expectations regarding the level and type of engagement expected. Council may wish to consider which departments should attend and what level of participation is most appropriate. For example, requesting department directors to attend differs from requiring frontline staff participation, which could create additional overtime costs. Additionally, for staff responding to 311 type service requests on site for residents, the lowest impact option would be to utilize mobile devices or laptops and have staff enter information on behalf of residents. Should Council want to explore a more intensive option like kiosks, they are generally more difficult to implement. Almost all modern software is built around a User Identity, so shared systems require additional design and implementation.

Staffing

The primary staffing considerations involve staff availability and potential overtime requirements. Under the current Community Forum framework, certain staff are already scheduled to support evening meetings. However, if additional events are scheduled outside existing meeting times including weekends or additional evenings which may require overtime for several departments. For example:

- Media and Communications staff may be needed to support recording and public communications.
- For live broadcasts ITD staff may be required to support operations and troubleshoot.
- City Clerk's Office staff may be required to support meeting documentation and formal procedures.
- Departmental staff may be needed to answer questions or provide programmatic information.
- Partner organizations or venues may require staff time to attend or staff to provide services during the event, which could result in additional costs.

Depending on the format for recording, streaming, or otherwise, more staff time may be required to ensure that level of service is met. Below are a summary of broadcast Staffing Options that are available. Costs reflect regular staff time and exclude travel and pre-event scouting to view the location and plan for MCO staff. Any live streaming considerations would require additional staffing above the full production level and involve ITD staff. For locations that are not owned by the City, IT staff from those organizations may be required to support operations.

- Option 1: Full Production (Video/Audio + TV Tacoma CART)
 - Highest quality, multi-staff production with full setup and post-production.
 - Staffing: 2–3 staff | Total Time: ~21.5 hours (plus travel/scouting)
 - Estimated Cost: ~\$1,500
- Option 2: Two-Operator Video Production
 - Two cameras (one static, one operated) with live switching.
 - Staffing: 2 staff | Total Time: ~12 hours (plus travel)
 - Estimated Cost: ~\$700
- Option 3: Single-Operator Video
 - One camera capturing both video and audio; minimal setup.
 - Staffing: 1 staff | Total Time: ~6 hours (plus travel)
 - Estimated Cost: ~\$350
- Option 4: Audio-Only Recording
 - Basic audio recording with simple post-production.
 - Staffing: 1 staff | Total Time: ~5.5 hours (plus travel)
 - Estimated Cost: ~\$325

Staff would also need to manage the coordination and planning of Community Forums. This could include preparing presentation materials for the forum prior to the discussion portion of the proposal, coordination of the date, time, location, and logistics, and following each event, staff would prepare a summary report outlining major themes, service issues raised, and recommended follow-up actions. Implementing this model would require assigning additional responsibilities to multiple staff members, which may affect existing workload capacity.

Other Considerations

In addition to budgetary and staffing considerations, Council may wish to clarify roles and expectations for both Council Members and staff during Community Forum events. For example:

- Council Members may serve as facilitators for the conversation, but expectations for participation by other Council Members may need to be defined.
- Staff may need guidance on what types of questions or concerns should be addressed during the event versus documented for later follow-up.
- Because meaningful dialogue has been identified as a key goal of these forums, Council may also wish to consider how the format can encourage more conversational engagement with residents while still ensuring clear communication about City processes and services.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND ALTERNATIVES:

This memo is intended to provide information for Council decision making and is not a recommendation.

Council is considering the balance to strike between accessibility, scale, cost, staff capacity, and the depth of community engagement for Community Forum. Each choice compounds into a more resource-intensive but more inclusive and robust model, while scaling back creates a lighter, more flexible but less comprehensive approach. Total cost could exceed \$15,000 at the higher end and be similar to a State of the City level production.

Decisions that the City Council can consider include, but are not limited to:

- Should this format replace, or supplement existing Community Forums in Chambers?

- How large and formal should the forums be compared to traditional town halls?
- What overall budget range is acceptable per event?
- How many events, and cadence, should this Community Forum format have?
- How long should each event be, and what should the agenda look like?
- Should food be provided, and what level of food service is appropriate?
- Should interpretation be provided, and what is the standard? (Smartphone captioning vs. in-person interpreters vs. full simultaneous interpretation)
- Should childcare be offered, and what does childcare look like?
- How should venues be selected, and what facilities must be available at a site?
- Should events be recorded, or live streamed, and should it be audio only or full video?
- How should the Council partner with neighborhood councils, business districts, and organizations to host and develop these forums?
- What staff should be attending? (Department directors vs. frontline staff)
- Is staff expected to actively engage during the event, or take notes and follow up after?
- Who facilitates the conversation for each event, and how are other Council Members involved?
- What type of questions are answered live, versus referred to staff for later follow up?
- How are follow up reports delivered, and by when?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- [2025.03.16 – Brief – Mayor Community Forum Proposal](#)