



TO: Hyun Kim, Interim City Manager
FROM: Council Member John Hines and Christina Caan, Policy Analyst
COPY: City Council and City Clerk
SUBJECT: Ordinance Request -- Amending Title 8 of the Municipal Code, relating to camping and storage of personal belongings on public property – October 14, 2025
DATE: October 8, 2025

SUMMARY AND PURPOSE

An ordinance amending Title 8 of the Municipal Code, relating to camping and storage of personal belongings on public property.

COUNCIL SPONSORS

Council Member John Hines, Mayor Victoria Woodards, Council Member Sarah Rumbaugh, and Council Member Sandesh Sadalge

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 returning 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 prohibited areas. The Homeless Engagement and Alternatives (HEAL) Team, which has been fully staffed since September 2023, has also been able to

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

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

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



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 community buffer zones where camping and the storage of personal belongings on public property are prohibited to include areas within 10 blocks of a Temporary or Emergency Shelter located in the “Downtown Zone,” which includes the area north of S. 38th Street, east of S. Union Street, west of the Puyallup River, and south of Commencement Bay; 5 blocks of a Temporary Shelter or Emergency Shelter located outside of the “Downtown Zone;” or 2 blocks of a public school serving grades K-12, public park, or public library.
- 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

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 shelter locations. 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

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 adjust the community buffer zones to include public schools, public parks, and public libraries will help ensure accessible public spaces for all.

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 within 10 blocks of a Temporary or Emergency Shelter located in the "Downtown Zone," which includes the area north of S. 38th Street, east of S. Union Street, west of the Puyallup River, and south of Commencement Bay; 5 blocks of a Temporary or Emergency Shelter located outside of the "Downtown Zone;" or 2 blocks of a public school serving grades K-12, public park, or public library.

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 approving this ordinance.

FISCAL IMPACT

What Funding is being used to support the expense?

N/A

Are the expenditures and revenues planned and budgeted in this biennium's current budget?

N/A

Are there financial costs or other impacts of not implementing the legislation?

If approved, these ordinance changes are unlikely to require 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,



City of Tacoma

City Council Action Memorandum

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.

Will the legislation have an ongoing/recurring fiscal impact?

N/A

Will the legislation change the City's FTE/personnel counts?

N/A

Attachments:

1. Exhibit A: Proposed Code Updates for Chapter 8 of the Tacoma Municipal Code
2. Graphic 1: Map of proposed prohibited camping and personal storage community buffer zones



Exhibit A: Proposed Code Updates for Chapter 8 of the Tacoma Municipal Code

8.19.020 Defined Terms.

As used in this Chapter, the following terms shall have the following definitions:

“Aspen Court” means a city permitted emergency and transitional housing facility located at 8620 South Hosmer Street.

“Camp” means to pitch, erect, or occupy Camp Facilities, or to use Camp Paraphernalia, or both, for the purpose of, or in such a way as will facilitate, remaining overnight. The term shall not include overnight use of Public Property by the City or the governmental entity that owns or has a property interest in such Public Property.

“Camp Facilities” means, without limitation, tents, huts, and temporary shelters.

“Camp Paraphernalia” means, without limitation, blankets, pillows, tarpaulins, cots, beds or bedding, sleeping bags, hammocks, non-City designated cooking facilities, and/or other similar equipment.

“City” means the City of Tacoma, Washington, the area within the territorial limits of the City.

“Emergency shelter” means a shelter permitted under Tacoma Municipal Code 13.06.080.

“Temporary Shelter” means a shelter permitted under Tacoma Municipal Code 13.06.080.

“Pier” means any pier, wharf, dock, float, gridiron, or other structure where watercraft may anchor or moor.

“Protected Waters” means all public property, within 200 feet of mapped Rivers, Waterways, Creeks, Streams, and the Puget Sound Shorelines, including but not limited to the Puyallup River, First Creek, Roosevelt Ditch, T Street Gulch, Clear Creek, Swan Creek, Squally Creek, the Thea Foss Waterway, the Middle Waterway, the St. Paul Waterway, the Blair Waterway, Wapato Creek, the Hylebos Waterway, Hylebos Creek, and the shorelines of Commencement Bay.

“Public Property” means all property in which the City or any other governmental entity has a property interest, including easements. The term includes, without limitation, all parks, Piers, Streets, trails, forests, park museums, pools, beaches, open spaces, public squares, public schools and associated athletic facilities, grounds around City or other publicly owned or leased buildings, including, but not limited to, parking lots, and any other property in which the City or any other governmental entity has a property interest of any type.

“Store” means to put aside, accumulate, or leave on Public Property for later use, or for safekeeping.

“Street” means, without limitation, any easements, highway, lane, road, street, right-of-way, boulevard, alley, and all Public Property open as a matter of right to public vehicle travel or parking.

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



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:

- a. 10 blocks of a Temporary or Emergency Shelter located in the “Downtown Zone”, which is defined as the area north of S. 38th Street, east of S. Union Street, west of the Puyallup River, and south of Commencement Bay;
- b. 5 blocks of a Temporary or Emergency Shelter located outside of the “Downtown Zone”;
- c. 2 blocks of a public school serving grades kindergarten through 12th grade, public park, or public library;
- d. or within 200 feet of Protected Waters.

In the event that any radius outlined in subsections A through D above 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.

(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:

- a. 10 blocks of a Temporary or Emergency Shelter located in the “Downtown Zone”, which is defined as the area north of S. 38th Street, east of S. Union Street, west of the Puyallup River, and south of Commencement Bay;
- b. 5 blocks of a Temporary or Emergency Shelter located outside of the “Downtown Zone”;
- c. 2 blocks of a public school serving grades kindergarten through 12th grade, public park, or public library;
- d. or within 200 feet of Protected Waters.

In the event that any radius outlined in subsections A through D above 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.

(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.



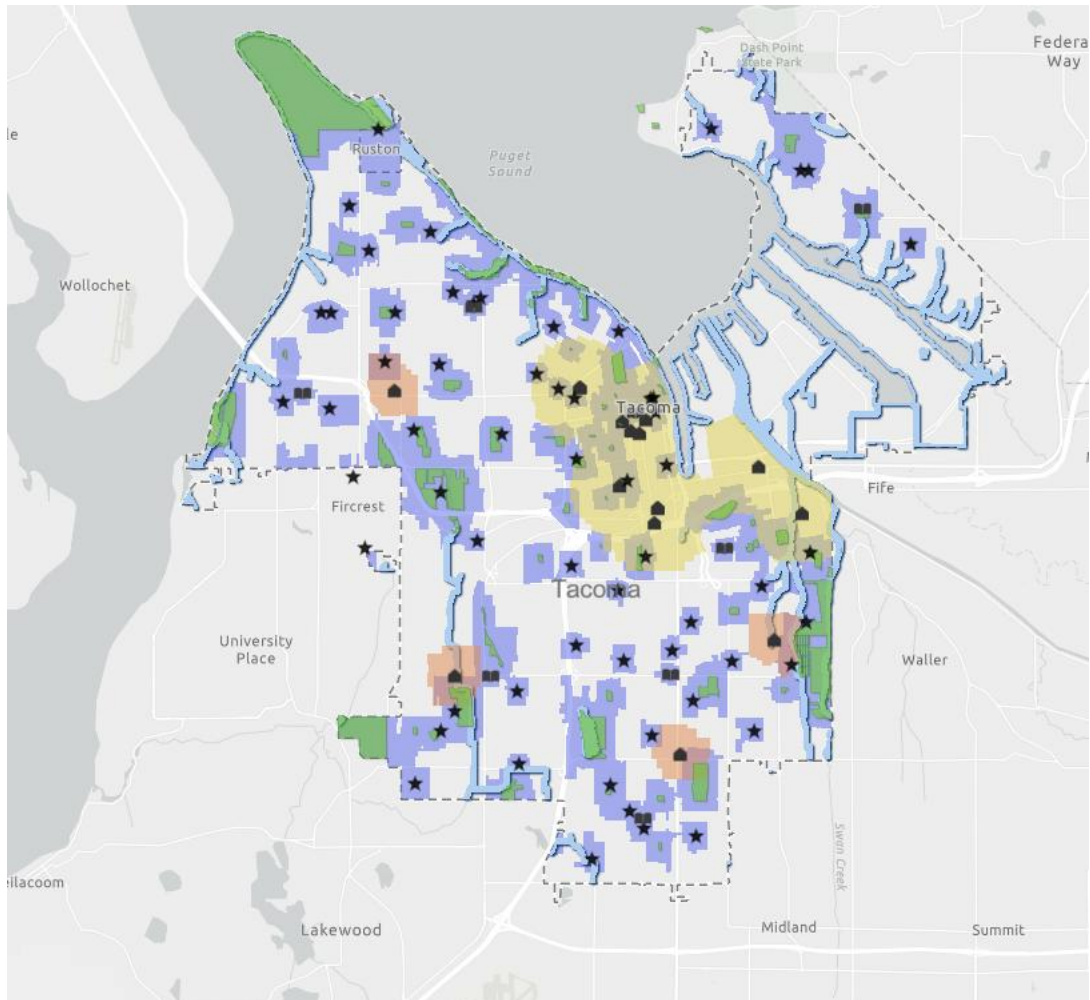
City of Tacoma

City Council Action Memorandum

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



Graphic 1. Map of new proposed prohibited camping and personal storage community buffer zones



Graphic Legend

- Yellow: 10 blocks of temporary or emergency shelters in the “Downtown Zone”
- Orange: 5 blocks of temporary or emergency shelters outside of the “Downtown Zone”
- Purple: 2 blocks of public schools (K-12), public parks, and public libraries
- Blue: 200 feet of Protected Waterways