



TO: Hyun Kim, Interim City Manager
FROM: Peter Huffman, Director, Planning and Development Services
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COPY: Infrastructure Planning and Sustainability Committee; Ramiro Chavez, P.E., PgMP;
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SUBJECT: Board of Building Appeals
DATE: February 20, 2026

SUMMARY:

Planning and Development Services staff is providing an update on the amendment of Titles 1, 2, and 3 of the Tacoma Municipal Code to replace the means of building and fire code appeals from the Board of Building Appeals to the Hearing Examiner.

BACKGROUND:

When a decision is made by the Building Official or the Fire Code Official and that decision is believed to be incorrect, there is an opportunity for appeal. Staff are proposing an ordinance to change the method for the means of appeals to building and fire codes by eliminating the Board of Building Appeals and placing such appeals under the authority of the Hearing Examiner. Zero appeals have been brought to the Board of Building Appeals in the last decade, and the use of the Hearing Examiner for such appeals is common. Some regional examples of cities that use their Hearing Examiner for appeals to building and fire codes are Bellevue, Spokane, Everett, and Kent.

ISSUE:

Recruitment for the Board of Building Appeals has been challenging as the members must have the technical knowledge and experience necessary to understand any appeals brought to them. If a fully staffed board cannot be maintained, it may leave developers, design professionals, businesses, and residents without a means to appeal decisions made by the Building Official and the Fire Code Official.

ALTERNATIVES:

The Board of Building Appeals may be retained, however it would require ongoing recruitment by staff, interviews by City Council Members, and appointment by the City Council as a whole.

FISCAL IMPACT:

No significant fiscal impact is expected. Appeals to decisions are rare and are not expected to burden the Hearing Examiner. A fee to offset the cost of administering appeals is included in the proposed ordinance. Where appellants prevail in their appeals this fee will be refunded.

NEXT STEPS:

An ordinance to amend Titles 1, 2, and 3 of the Tacoma Municipal Code to replace the means of building and fire code appeals from the Board of Building Appeals to the Hearing Examiner will be presented to the full City Council on March 31, 2026.