



Environmental Services Commission Minutes

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Center for Urban Waters located at 326 E D St, Tacoma, WA and via Zoom Meeting

January 9, 2025

Chair Beaumier called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m.

Commission Members Present: Chad Sutter, Mindi Keller, Karen DiNicola, Bruce Martin (arrived at 4:06 p.m.), Marty Campbell (arrived at 4:06 p.m.), Jonathan Paul (arrived at 4:32 p.m.), and Esther Beaumier*.

Commission Members Absent: Matthew Benedict, Jeff Paradise, Eric Sachs, and David Dailey.

Chair Beaumier noted the lack of a quorum. Informal discussion followed regarding:

Welcome

Chair Beaumier welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked for self-introductions. She highlighted that Mike Yaden, in attendance, will serve as a new Commissioner next month.

Commissioners Martin & Campbell arrived here, at 4:06 p.m.

Approval of the minutes of November 14, 2024

This item was postponed due to a lack of a quorum.

Public Comment

The public comment period is reserved for items on the current agenda only. Comments will be limited to the amount of time announced by the chair, presiding officer, or staff liaison, no more than five minutes per person per meeting.

Public Comment began at 4:04 pm

Name	Topic
Kit Burns	2025 Potential Topics

Public Comment ended at 4:10 p.m.

ES Director/ESC Coordinator Update

Kurt Fremont, Interim ES Assistant Director, provided an update on the City's recruitment efforts for a new ES Director. He noted that the recruitment is ongoing, and they hope to start reviewing applications soon. As the process continues, he will keep the Commission informed.

Commissioner Sutter asked if the applicants for the ES Director position were internal candidates. Mr. Fremont replied that the job announcement was posted externally, and he cannot disclose how many internal applicants have applied at this point.

Next, he reminded the Commissioners to complete the required Open Public Meetings Act training and to email him their completion certificates.

Election of Chair and Vice Chair

This Item postponed due to a lack of a quorum.

ES Organizational Structure

Mr. Fremont provided a handout that offered a high-level overview of each division within Environmental Services (ES) and highlighted some of the key programs within those divisions.

Commissioner Martin asked if the recent reorganization, which included the creation of a separate Asset Management division, had been discussed at the Commission. Staff confirmed that it had not been discussed previously.

2025 Meeting Schedule and Potential Topics

Mr. Fremont reviewed a list of potential topics of interest for 2025. He shared that the Commission will be taking a different approach this year, emphasizing a more fluid and flexible structure. Since this is a non-rate year, the focus will be on educating the Commission about the three Environmental Services (ES) utilities and their programs. Instead of sticking to a preset schedule of topics and tours, staff will leave space in meetings for items of specific interest that may arise. He also provided a brief overview of the Commission's objective as outlined in its Charter.

Discussion followed regarding the following:

1. Chair Beaumier expressed a desire to make the agenda more interactive and requested that Environmental Services (ES) staff share more of their successes and challenges in the upcoming year.
2. Vice Chair Sutter emphasized the importance of respecting staff's time and suggested leaving some spots on the agenda open so that urgent or time-sensitive items can be brought before the Commission more quickly.
3. Commissioner Campbell requested that acronyms, such as "FOG" (Fats, Oils, & Grease), not be used on the list of topics to ensure clarity for all members.
4. Commissioner Martin recommended adding a summary to each agenda topic to further explain what will be discussed.
5. Commissioner DiNicola asked that items be presented to the Commission before they go before the City Council for discussion.
6. Vice Chair Sutter inquired whether impact fees fall under the Commission's scope.
 - a. Staff clarified that system development charges are related to utilities, while impact fees are not. The Public Works Department is currently working on impact fees, but ES staff is working on a proposal for system development charges, which they plan to present to the Commission in the third quarter of this year.
7. Commissioner DiNicola requested a presentation on the City's Tree Canopy, specifically focusing on how to recover the canopy, for the February ESC meeting.
 - a. Staff noted that Urban Forestry staff would be presenting on the tree canopy to the Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee on February 12 and 26. Staff will share information from those meetings with the Commissioners and will check with Urban Forestry to see if they have the capacity to present at the ESC meeting in February.
 - b. Commissioner Paul asked whether Urban Forestry would be responsible for the tree canopy under the Home-in-Tacoma program.
 - i. Staff explained that while Urban Forestry is part of Environmental Services, the Planning & Development Services Department oversees the

Home-in-Tacoma part of the Municipal Code. However, Environmental Services will be involved in the process.

Staff stated they will update the list as requested, and presentations on the tree canopy and system development charges are expected to be important discussions for the year.

Commissioner Paul arrived during the discussion, at 4:32 p.m.

Chair Beaumier noted the presence of a quorum and requested revisiting the approval of the minutes.

Approval of the minutes of November 14, 2024

Commissioner Campbell moved to approve the minutes of November 14, 2024. Seconded by Commission Martin. Commission DiNicola asked that staff include the dollar values to the litigation costs that was presented. Voice vote was taken and carried. The minutes were approved.

Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Commission DiNicola nominated Commissioners Beaumier and Sutter to retain their roles as Chair and Vice Chair. Commissioner Beaumier requested to step down.

Commissioner DiNicola moved to elect Commissioner Sutter as the Chair and Commissioner Kellar as Vice Chair for 2025. Seconded by Commissioner Martin. Voice vote was taken and carried.

Staff Reports

Glass Recycling

Andy Torres, Solid Waste Management Assistant Division Manager, shared that the City is now recycling glass again. The glass is being sent to Glass to Glass in Portland, Oregon, and staff is still exploring other options for recycling glass.

Discussion followed regarding:

1. Chair Sutter asked how well residents are doing at keeping glass out of commingled recycling bins.
 - a. Staff reported that residents have been doing great at following the rules.
2. Commissioner Martin asked for more details about Glass to Glass.
 - a. Staff explained that while the City doesn't have a contract with them, Glass to Glass sells the recycled glass to Owens Corning, but they are not the company that produces the recyclables.
3. Chair Sutter asked how many glass recycling drop-off locations are available in the city.
 - a. Staff confirmed there are currently five drop-off locations, along with curbside pickup for businesses.
4. Commissioner DiNicola inquired about recycling black plastics and thermal paper.
 - a. Staff explained that neither of these items can be recycled and should be thrown in the garbage.
5. Commissioner DiNicola suggested that staff include information about what can and cannot be recycled in the EnviroTalk newsletter to help keep the community informed.

The City is making progress with glass recycling, and efforts continue to find more ways to recycle materials. The public has been doing well with recycling, and more educational efforts are being made to keep everyone informed.

Budget Update

Christina Curran, Rates & Budget Assistant Division Manager, shared that the 2025-2026 rates and budget were adopted in December 2024. She explained that while the General Fund budget has been adopted, work is still ongoing to address a budget shortfall. To help manage the shortfall, 27 positions are being eliminated, and there is a freeze on hiring, contracting, and travel.

Ms. Curran emphasized that any savings from Environmental Services (ES) will not impact the General Fund. She also mentioned that there will be another presentation to the City Council next week during a study session and at the Committee of the Whole. She noted the City is working to address the budget shortfall while continuing to manage its financial priorities. More updates will be shared with the City Council in upcoming meetings.

ESC Membership and Recruitment

Mr. Fremont shared that the Commission currently has four vacancies: Commercial, Multi-family, Residential, and Regulatory. He mentioned that he is vetting someone from the Department of Ecology to fill the Regulatory position.

Chair Sutter reminded the Commissioners of the importance of attending the monthly meetings, noting that it has been difficult to get a quorum lately. Attendance at meetings is crucial to ensure smooth operations and decision-making.

Fats, Oils, & Grease (FOG) Update

John Sunich, Environmental Compliance, stated FOG stands for Fats, Oils, and Grease, which include things like meat drippings, food scraps, gravy, salad dressings, milk, cream, cooking oil, butter, margarine, and high-fat foods. Tacoma's FOG program is needed to prevent problems like sewer line blockages, overflows, and backups, which can cause expensive repairs and maintenance. The program also helps reduce sewer odors, corrosion, and maintenance costs. The program includes rules for food service businesses, inspections, and education about how to properly dispose of FOG. Staff work with businesses to make sure they use the right grease removal devices, and inspections happen regularly to ensure the program runs smoothly. Education is also a key part of the program, with efforts to help restaurant owners understand and follow the rules, and work with the community to improve the process. The City is continuously working to improve the FOG program.

Council Member Diaz and the Planning & Development Services Department have been working on a FOG Education Flyer. Commissioner DiNicola asked about this flyer, and Mr. Fremont explained that it has not been created yet, but that Environmental Compliance will help make it.

Discussion followed regarding:

1. Commissioner Campbell pointed out that the FOG program should have been planned and ready to go before enforcement started.
 - a. Mr. Fremont stated historically Environmental Compliance has received positive feedback; however, there have been some recent issues, and the community's feedback has changed.
2. Commissioner Campbell talked about how former Council Member Ushka worked with restaurants to help them understand the rules. However, some restaurant owners are afraid to speak up.
 - a. Environmental Compliance is looking at ways to give restaurants more flexibility.

3. Commissioner Campbell also emphasized that discussions about FOG need to continue throughout the year, and Environmental Services should take the lead in the conversation.
4. Commissioner Martin asked if the Tacoma Municipal Code was limiting staff from finding flexible solutions. He suggested that staff talk with other cities to learn how they are dealing with similar issues.
5. Commissioner DiNicola asked if the rule of 40 meals per hour was a strict requirement and how take-out and delivery orders fit into the rule.
 - a. Staff explained that this rule is being applied as a guideline and on a case-by-case basis. It is still being refined and anticipate the pilot project would help improve the program over time.
6. Commissioner DiNicola wanted to know who in the City could help restaurants understand the rules.
 - a. Staff confirmed that Planning & Development Services, Shawn Madison in Environmental Compliance, and the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department (TPCHD) are available to assist.
 - b. Commissioners also suggested the Tacoma Business Council and TPCHD Food Advisory.
7. Chair Sutter asked about the costs of grease interceptors.
 - a. Staff explained that a hydro system costs between \$1,500 and \$5,000, while a gravity system can cost between \$30,000 and \$50,000.
8. Chair Sutter also asked who pumps and disposes of grease from systems.
 - a. Staff said they have a list of companies that handle this.
9. Chair Sutter requested that staff compare Tacoma's policies with other cities like Gig Harbor.
10. Commissioner Campbell asked if new owners of old restaurants need to comply with the City's current rules.
 - a. Staff explained that a new owner would usually trigger a compliance review.
11. Commissioner Paul pointed out that the earlier cost estimates were just for the grease trap systems themselves, and that the total cost for installation is often much higher.
12. Commissioner Beaumier suggested that, in addition to the initial costs, the maintenance costs for grease interceptors should also be clearly explained to restaurant owners.

The FOG program continues to evolve, with staff working on making it easier for restaurants to comply. More conversations and research are needed to find solutions that are flexible and fair for all businesses.

Commissioner Other Items of Interest

1. Commissioner DiNicola stated she reported numerous sweeper bristles littering the street.
 - a. Staff thanked her for making them aware of the issue, noting the Transmission group has rectified the issue with that street sweeper.

Mr. Fremont thanked Commissioner Beaumier for her service as the Commission Chair.

Adjournment

The meeting was declared adjourned at 6:23 p.m.