



City of Tacoma  
WASHINGTON

## Winter update from Council Member Bushnell

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Greetings District 5,

A lot has happened in the last few months, and I appreciate your patience as I bring this newsletter forward! There's information on our budget, highlights on some City services, a historical designation and more.

I'm happy to also inform you that I've recently taken on additional leadership roles on your behalf as Chair of the Military Communities Council at the National League of Cities and Chair of the Tacoma-Pierce County Board of Health. I was also re appointed to Chair the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency. Every day, The Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department (TPCHD) is hard at work so you can enjoy a meal, drink tap water, breathe clean air, and stay healthy and disease-free. That's why public health matters. I am committed to keeping people healthy and safe in our community. As Chair of the Military Communities Council, I will elevate the experiences and needs of veterans, as well as active duty families, at a national level. As a Marine Corps veteran, I am proud of the fact that Tacoma is home to such a large population of veterans and active duty families. With these additional leadership roles your voice is being heard at the local, regional and national levels.

I have a special message if you are able to make it to the end.

Thank you,  
Council Member Joe Bushnell  
City of Tacoma, District 5

### Topics in this newsletter include:

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## Adopting a Fiscally Responsible 2025-2026 Biennial Budget

The 2025-2026 Biennial Budget adopted by the City Council led with our values to be responsible stewards of public funds. During the City Council's budget discussions, I was a lead proponent in asking that the Budget *not* rely on any portion of the City's available cash reserves. These reserves are one-time funding and using them for on-going costs would only exasperate the deficit we face next biennium. Our budget acknowledged the impacts of inflation and a contracting economy, as well as the need for the City to take a proactive approach to begin addressing the structural deficit in the General Fund.

It is important to recognize that despite the impacts of rising inflation and a contracting economy that have tipped our finances out of balance in a long-term way, approximately two-thirds of our **\$634.8** million General Fund budget is dedicated to keeping our community safe. I also sponsored an additional \$2.5 million in one-time funding to support staffing in the fire department to address concerns around staff burnout and brown-outs of fire stations.

Looking ahead, we must remain vigilant. As shared throughout the budget process, a \$15 million structural deficit is anticipated in the General Fund in the 2027-2028 biennium, and we will need to continue working together to identify long-term solutions.

Every service the City provides is critical to our community, and made possible by outstanding, dedicated staff. One of my main roles is to help community understand the impact this has on making Tacoma an amazing place to live. This year I will use these newsletters to include City Service Spotlights to help you learn more about how the City is working for you.

## City Service Spotlight – Snowplow Ride Along



It's always a blast when our City get the first snow of the year, but we all know the impact it has on driving conditions. On February 4, I started my day learning more about how our Public Works department keeps our street clear so we can get around safely. See our crews and equipment at work in this [de-icing truck ride along video](#). Please join us in thanking our Street Operations crew members who work to keep roads safe while many of us sleep! You can find tips for inclement weather and our snow routes map at the [inclement weather webpage](#).

## Home in Tacoma implementation is live!



Following extensive community engagement, and [the adoption of Ordinance 28793 last November](#), the City of Tacoma's implementation of the Home in Tacoma zoning and standards package began on February 1, 2025.

The package introduces new zoning regulations aimed at promoting greater housing diversity and affordability throughout Tacoma, including the establishment of three new Urban Residential (UR) zones which will replace existing residential zoning. These zones will accommodate a variety of innovative housing types like houseplexes, backyard cottages, rowhouses, courtyard housing, and multiplexes.

In addition, the package revises minimum parking requirements, emphasizes tree preservation and planting initiatives, and allows for more flexible subdivision of lots and non-residential uses.

More information on Ordinance 28793 – including summary sheets, final code, an interactive zoning map, and other project materials – are available at [cityoftacoma.org/homeintacoma](https://cityoftacoma.org/homeintacoma).

Permitting information is available at [tacomapermits.org](http://tacomapermits.org).

Community members with questions on Home in Tacoma can contact Alyssa Torrez at [atorrez@cityoftacoma.org](mailto:atorrez@cityoftacoma.org) or (253) 878-3767.

## Wapato Park added to Historic Registry



*Wapato Park bathhouse, 2024*

[Wapato Park](#) started as a picturesque retreat, helped put people back to work during the Great Depression and is now protected as a Tacoma landmark. The City Council voted unanimously to add Wapato Park to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places after the Landmark Preservation Commission recommended the listing. Although it joins more than 180 properties citywide, it is one of only eight sites in the South End.

Today, 88-acre Wapato Park has the most WPA environmental and infrastructure improvements in all of Tacoma. The park bears character from the original construction in its walking trails, covered picnic areas, pergola, waterfall pond feature and stone entrance markers.

Improvements have also been made in recent decades. Little Wapato Lake was filled in to create a playfield in 1971, a playground came in 1977, a police substation began occupying the southeast corner in 2006 and capital improvements from the 2011-2014 bond brought in new fishing docks and replaced a baseball field with a dog park.

This shines a spotlight on one of Tacoma's amazing parks. Not only do we get to recognize the park as being a place for families to gather for well over 100 years, but we also get to tell the story of the Great Depression work relief programs that helped build up our parks to what we see today.

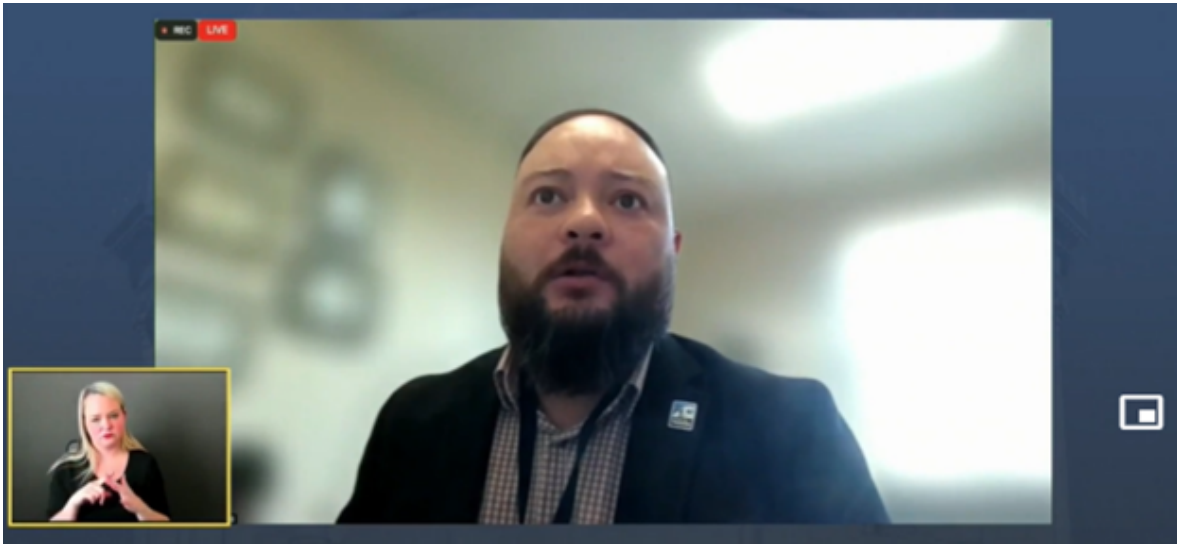


*Arial view of Wapato Park, estimated between 1970-1981*

## **Community Sponsorships Webpage & Application Live**

At the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency, we are committed to fostering cleaner air and reducing greenhouse gas emissions to protect public health. Our Community Sponsorship Program offers support to organizations and events that align with our 89 - 6 - mission to preserve, protect and enhance air quality and public health, enforce the Clean Air Act, support policies that reduce climate change, and partner with communities to do this work equitably. Visit our website <https://www.pscleanair.gov/686/Community-Sponsorships> to apply today!

## **From 1% to 3% – A small adjustment meets big needs**



*CM Bushnell testifying on [House Bill 1334](#), sponsored by Rep. Gerry Pollet (D-46th LD), which changes property tax revenue growth limits by replacing the 1% limit with inflation and population changes, with a cap of 3 percent.*

I recently joined Fire Commissioner John M. Linboe and Parks Tacoma Board President Andrea Smith in submitting an [op-ed to numerous publications](#) to talk about how Washington's property tax cap is draining local governments.

We often hear from our residents that they expect and need more from local government. Our communities want faster emergency response from police officers and firefighters, access to behavioral health services and substance abuse treatment, better roads (fix those potholes!), more sidewalks and an improved transit infrastructure, added housing that is affordable for all of us, more parks, more libraries...the list goes on. These are the valued public services our communities desperately want and need, and they look to their cities, counties, library districts, fire districts, public health offices, and others to meet these needs.

Local governments work hard to use every dollar efficiently to meet the needs of the communities they serve, but the reality is there are simply too many needs and not enough funding to cover them. Among various reasons for this funding gap is an outdated tax limitation that the 2001 state legislature passed, making it impossible to keep up with inflation. Expenses have been rising by 3% each year due to inflation but, for the past 24 years, this state law has limited property tax revenues to a 1% increase. It's no wonder local governments are forced to consider reducing or eliminating services to the communities they serve—because they don't have the resources to do it all.

Going from a 1% cap on property tax revenue to 3% isn't a quick fix for all funding challenges. It would, however, provide another option for jurisdictions to determine the best revenue structure to meet their communities' needs. It could also reduce reliance on more regressive taxes, such as sales taxes, which disproportionately impact lower-income residents.

Local mayors, council members and commissioners are directly elected by and accountable to residents. It's well past time to update this outdated and arbitrary cap and allow a small adjustment so that jurisdictions can make optional funding choices to best meet their communities' needs.

## **In the Community**



Radius Recycling Veterans Day Photo.



A photo from my HOPE Team ride along.



With community leaders at Lincoln Lunar New Year 2025.





I joined the South End Neighborhood Council SNAPs Walking Tour on Hosmer.



At the new Asia Pacific Cultural Center in South Tacoma, I got to sign my name!



Tet Lunar new year at Mount Tahoma High School.



APCC new year celebration at the Tacoma Dome with elected officials from all over the state, highlighting India!

## Special Message

There has been a lot of uncertainty at the federal level that has created concern about the future. I want to assure you that I remain committed to advocating for Tacoma—securing the federal funding and resources we are entitled to and protecting all of our residents from discrimination.

In times of upheaval, it's easy to get caught up in reactionary cycles. But true leadership means staying focused on what matters most: the well-being of our community. Responding for the sake of reaction does little to help those most affected by harmful policies or rhetoric. Instead, we must be steadfast, strategic, and nimble as a city.

The road ahead won't be easy, and this will be a marathon, not a sprint. But, I have no doubt that Tacoma will rise to the challenge. It is my honor to serve you, and together, we will come through this stronger than before.



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