

TUMWATER CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
MINUTES OF VIRTUAL MEETING
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CONVENE: 6:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Mayor Debbie Sullivan and Councilmembers Peter Agabi, Michael Althausen, Joan Cathey, Leatta Dahlhoff, Angela Jefferson, Eileen Swarthout, and Kelly Von Holtz.

Staff: City Administrator Lisa Parks, City Attorney Karen Kirkpatrick, Assistant City Administrator Kelly Adams, Finance Department Director Troy Niemeyer, Fire Chief Brian Hurley, Community Development Department Director Michael Matlock, IT Department Director Lance Inman, Deputy Fire Chief Shawn Crimmins, and Deputy City Clerk Tracie Core.

**CITY ATTORNEY'S
OFFICE DEPARTMENT
UPDATE:**

City Attorney Kirkpatrick reported the City Attorney's Office provides general counsel services for the City and advice and support to the Council, the Mayor, all City employees, all special districts of the City, and all boards and commissions. The City Attorney's Office includes three FTE positions. An attorney position was approved in the budget and is currently vacant. The incumbent recently left the City after a year with the City. Staff is working with department directors to identify and determine if the job position should be modified prior to recruitment for the position.

Staff time is tracked by fund versus project. A majority of time is spent on dispensing general advice and preparation representing 40% of the total hours followed by reviews of contracts and purchases at 20%. Risk management consumes 15% of the time, litigation consumes 15%, with some time on overseeing prosecutions with Thurston County. The remaining 8% is spent on training and administration of the department.

The City Attorney's Office reviewed 400 documents in 2024 of which 60% were contracts and 40% were real estate, plans and policies, ordinances, resolutions, and code enforcement documents.

In 2024, the City Attorney's Office provided comprehensive legal services on all matters of City business, preparation and legal review of all documents to ensure legal sufficiency, ensured compliance with laws, as well as risk reduction and protection of the City. The City Attorney's Office represented the City in all actions brought on behalf of the City or against the City, revised and updated City policies, forms, the Purchasing Manual and contract templates, and provided a wide range of training on a variety of matters related to Open Public Meetings Act, Open Public Records Act, contracts, and first amendment auditor training. The risk management function was transferred to the City Attorney's Office in 2024. Staff continues to work on increasing awareness and best practices and was successful in reducing the City's cost by approximately \$200,000 by increasing insurance deductibles.

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In 2025, the City Attorney's Office will provide comprehensive legal services, monitor and advise on changes in laws that affect the City, assist with the update of the Comprehensive Plan and all implementing regulations, enhance the risk management functions, streamline and automate internal processes, and add capacity by filling the vacant attorney position, as well as increasing training of existing employees as a component of succession planning.

City Attorney Kirkpatrick acknowledged the support and efforts by Paralegal Sharleen Johansen.

**FIRE DEPARTMENT
UPDATE:**

Fire Chief Hurley provided an update on the Fire Department.

The City's fire department was first staffed by volunteers in 1973. Since then the department has expanded to administrative staff, firefighters, and emergency operations staff. Fire prevention and risk reduction are areas to be expanded. The Fire Department is responsible for overseeing emergency management for the City.

Currently, the department is authorized 62 employees. With the most recent conditional offer, the Fire Department will be at full capacity. Staffing includes seven administrative positions of Chief, Deputy Chief, Executive Assistant, Department Assistant, Fire Prevention Officer, Medical Services Officer (Battalion Chief), and a Training Lieutenant. Daily staffing of the department is 11 employees with nine personnel located in the City and two personnel located on the Medic Unit in the Rochester area. Fire engines are staffed with three personnel and Medic Units are staffed with two personnel. A Battalion Chief is also assigned. In 2026, day staffing will increase to 13 positions to accommodate the new Medic Unit 8.

The Department's mission is to provide excellent public service. The Department's motto is, "It's the Water and a Lot More" with "More" representing people delivering service. The City received permission from the Olympia Brewing Company to use the motto for the Fire Department in the 1970s.

Basic response data in 2024 included approximately 6,000 calls for service with approximately 75% of those calls for emergency medical services of either advanced life support (ALS), paramedic calls, and basic life support (BLS) calls. The Fire Department provided service for good intent calls, such as false alarms. The categories of calls are dictated by national reporting criteria. The calls represent a decrease of approximately 1% to 2% from the previous year, a trend replicated across the county.

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Fire Chief Hurley reviewed responses by fire station with more calls to Station T2 than the Headquarters Fire Station. The dividing line for response by each station is Trosper Road.

Significant accomplishments in 2024 included:

- Completed update of the Strategic Plan
- Washington Survey and Rating Bureau Protection Class Upgrade to Class 3, (1-10 with 1 the highest in the state). The City's water supply factors highly in the Class rating. Many insurance companies use Protection Class ratings to set rates
- Updated Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan
- Expanded partnership with Thurston County Medic One - hosting new paramedic unit (Medic 8) to serve residents of Tumwater and Thurston County. Completed recruitment process for nine new Paramedic/Firefighters to staff the new unit
- In partnership with TCOMM 911, transitioned to TCERN System - New digital radio system project planned in phases over several years. All fire and police radios replaced as well as significant radio infrastructure upgrades at fire and police facilities
- Supported employee wellness - the Department worked with IAFF Local 2409 and other area agencies to support employee wellness through the County PEER Support Team. Continued participation in the L&I FIIRE program to support employee safety and wellness as well as reducing City L&I rates
- Completed Collective Bargaining Agreement with IAFF Local 2409

Goals for 2025-2026 include:

- Continue working on elements of the Strategic Plan
- Continue implementation of FD CARES program - developed partnership with Olympia Fire Department FD CARES program to expand services into Tumwater under interlocal agreement
- Implement crisis response partnership - Olympic Health and Recovery Services provides crisis response services for Thurston County, City of Lacey, and Mason County through contractual agreements. The City is collaborating with OHRS to pursue a new crisis response program model through the Fire Department
- Emergency Management Program partnership
- Implement Medic 8: Complete required paramedic and firefighter training for new employees who support Medic 8 by January 1, 2026
- Facility updates: Station T2 was built in 1995 and will be remodeled to accommodate additional Medic 8 staffing. Facilities staff and the Fire Department are working with an

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- architect on the remodel design
- Staff wellbeing: Department will continue to put staff wellbeing at the forefront, including peer support, cancer screening, and increasing staffing levels
- New equipment: Delivery of new fire engine scheduled for 2026 as well as replacement of three paramedic units (medic unit replacement funded by Medic One)
- Expand areas of community risk reduction program through public education, code enforcement, fire inspections, and risk assessments throughout the community such as reducing wildfire risk

Fire Chief Hurley addressed questions from the Council on how 911 will identify FD Cares calls and the current level of staffing in the Fire Department. The FD Cares program is a referral program rather than a response program. Typically, an engine company responding to a call for service may identify a patient or another member of a family who has needs that are not met by a fire or EMT crew but may require social service support, needs placement into another living situation, needs food, or requires assistance with medication. In those situations, fire crews can refer those individuals to the Cares Program. A resident willing to participate in the program receives coordination by Cares staff with different agencies to help support the individual. Typically, individuals are enrolled for a period of 90 days. The program is not intended to be a long-term process. At this time, the Fire Department is fully staffed based on budgeted positions for the department.

**FINANCE
DEPARTMENT
UPDATE:**

Director Niemeyer reported the Finance Department is staffed by 12 employees responsible for customer service, utility billings and cash receipts, assessment of Business and Occupation tax and violations, internal controls and compliance, budgeting and financial reporting, payroll, fraud prevention, and investments and banking, etc.

Accomplishments in 2024 included:

- Continued implementation of the ERP, including the Human Capital Management module (HR/Payroll)
- Assisted with development and passage of the 2025-2026 biennial budget
- Continued promotion of electronic payments
- Worked with Communications and Water Resources and Sustainability Departments to promote utility assistance programs
- Coordinated several successful audits
- Administered the Tâlcñ Homes/Habitat for Humanity/Commerce CHIP grant and audit (23-24)

In 2025, the Finance Department assisted with or completed the

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following:

- Facilitated payments for the Israel Road and Capitol/Trosper roundabout projects
- Managed grant funding and compliance for the Tâlicn Homes, Habitat for Humanity project
- Assisted in the negotiation of the Fire Department labor agreement
- Continued to promote utility assistance programs (from 110 to 190 customers)
- Identified 294 additional utility customers who may qualify for the Lifeline program
- Defended against dozens phishing and spear phishing attempts
- Completed an audit of the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, a Single Audit (federal funds), an Accountability Audit, and audits of LERMS, the TMPD, ERP conversion, and a special investigation
- Successfully implemented three new accounting standards from the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB)
- Continued to implement the challenging ERP project and provided support to the Payroll Officer
- Provide the Budget and Finance Committee quarterly budget reports
- Production of a budget book (first budget book since 2020)

Councilmember Dahlhoff asked whether the department has a long-term goal to hire a payroll employee to manage entities with complex schedules, such as the Fire Department. Director Niemeyer affirmed the department is developing a plan to provide payroll support as the payroll for the Fire and Police Departments are complicated because of special provisions in labor contracts and work schedules.

Councilmember Von Holtz asked about any concerns by the City with respect to the state's budget deficit. Director Niemeyer said some information prior to the beginning of the legislative session spoke to a reduction in funding for law enforcement. Mostly, the concern surrounds federal grants and information from the Administration about the termination of grants. Although, the City benefits from grants, the City does not depend entirely on grants to the degree of balancing the budget. It is hoped that the City will retain some of the grants and possibly receive more grants.

Councilmember Dahlhoff inquired about the status of funds for two perspective projects in Tumwater involving a project at the Craft District and a community room at the new Operations and Maintenance Facility. City Administrator Parks advised that State Representative Parsley contacted her for additional information on the status of the two projects

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in terms of implementation. One would be funded by a \$200,000 grant to assist with a Craft District project with South Puget Sound Community College (SPSCC) to facilitate incubator space for new entrepreneurs in the craft distilling industry. The original funding request was for more than \$600,000. The issue is what can be accomplished with \$200,000. Staff is in contact with the President of SPSCC about different opportunities, as well as in discussions with the owners of the Craft District. The funding amount of \$150,000 was to be allocated for a large public meeting space in the new Operations and Maintenance Facility. The question from Representative Parsley was on the status of each project and outcome of the projects if the funds were not reallocated but funded in the supplemental budget. Because no finalization of plans has occurred, information was conveyed that the City would be amendable to the delay since the priority is maintaining the million-dollar allocation for habitat mitigation purchases.

**QUARTERLY
FINANCIAL UPDATE:**

Director Niemeyer reviewed the final 2023/2024 budget compared to the forecast for revenues and expenditures. During the development of the budget, staff anticipated the country experiencing a recession in 2023. The revenue forecast reflected budget assumptions of low revenues and usage of some savings to bridge the difference. Because the recession never materialized, the budget for 2023/2024 exceeded expectations. For example, sales tax revenue increased by \$3.2 million more than the budget forecast. B&O and Utility taxes were on target with the forecast.

Director Niemeyer reviewed other general fund revenue. New construction was projected to slow because of the forecasted recession; however, lacking a recession, new construction exceeded the forecast. The general fund for the last biennium reflected an increase in \$5.7 million than the budget forecast.

Director Niemeyer reviewed expenditures by department. Expenditures in most departments were under the budget forecast. Combined actual expenditures were \$5.6 million less than the budget forecast.

Director Niemeyer reviewed the status of the first quarter 2025/2026 budget. Many of the first quarter revenue receipts are based on timing, such as property tax collections. Most property tax is paid in April and October each year. First quarter property tax revenue reflects a prorated amount as the revenue is somewhat predictable except for new construction. Other revenue categories, such as grants and transfers were also prorated because of timing.

Sales tax revenue for the first quarter reflects actual receipts of 22.4% versus the forecast of 25%. As January follows a major holiday it is typically a slower month for purchases. February is a short month with fewer days. Sales typically begin increasing in late spring through the

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fall. Utility tax reflects slightly less than the forecast as it typically lags by one month. B&O tax is slightly more than the forecast of 25%.

Total revenue collected is 22% for the first quarter. The budget forecasts 25%. However, some revenue is seasonal and will be closely monitored during the year.

In terms of expenditures, general government expenses accounted for 20% of the budget year-to-date (below 25%). All other departments (police, fire, & public works) are below 25% with all expenditures reflecting less than the forecasted budget to date.

Director Niemeyer reviewed Utility expenditures. The budget for Utilities includes some large projects reflecting year-to-date expenditures of only 3.5%. Construction has not commenced for any of the larger projects, which does not reflect any debt financing or expenditure of funds for construction. The Utility budgets will reflect amounts substantially under the budget until projects are initiated. The Golf Fund is similar to the Parks and Recreation Department with most golf activities increasing during warmer weather and generating more revenue during those months of the year.

Councilmember Swarthout questioned the potential consequences of the Administration's actions with respect to tariffs and how it might affect the forecast for sales tax revenue and potential impacts to the City if the bond market is affected with respect to future financing of the City's new Operations and Maintenance Facility.

Director Niemeyer responded that he shares similar concerns. Although the stock market is the not economy it is one of many performance indicators. Recent activity is alarming and distressing especially for those who are close to retirement and cannot afford to suffer a loss in savings. Tariffs are inflationary if they remain intact as proposed. That situation is concerning because it could result in higher prices and lower spending power, which would affect sales tax revenue. The purchase of automobiles will be impacted, as they are expensive and could be more difficult for many families or individuals to purchase. In terms of the bond market, a potential exists of interest rates decreasing to balance problems in the economy to help stimulate the economy, which could benefit the City in terms of bond financing with lower interest rates.

**STRATEGIC PLAN
UPDATE:**

City Administrator Parks updated the Council on the strategic planning process and main sources of input as the Council engages in the update of the Strategic Plan. The 10-Year Financial Plan and the Community Survey will help inform the Council in its update process. The goal is to achieve solid alignment and prioritization of a strategic plan by the end of 2025 to assist in informing the budgeting process for the 2027/2028

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biennium budget.

City Administrator Parks displayed a timeline of the strategic planning process based on discussions with the strategic plan facilitator. In May, staff will identify all pending projects and initiatives, categorize the lists (projects mandated by state law or initiatives of priority by the City Council) and draft focus areas, goals, and develop a criteria the Council could use for prioritization. During May and June, the process includes an update on the financial planning process (initial outcomes, initial findings, and initial recommendations), followed by a review of some of the outcomes from the Community Survey. Most of the prioritization efforts will begin in July requiring input from the Council to help finalize the various focus areas and goals, as well as reviewing inputs and priority criteria.

Staff will use the list of priorities to develop specific work plans based on the priorities. In the fall, the Council will work with the consultant on the framework for implementing the priorities based on input from the strategic plan and work plans to create a clear framework and some agreements moving forward to complete the work efficiently and effectively. The intent is to produce a final Strategic Plan by the end of November.

The 10-Year Financial Plan entails ongoing work and will support strategic planning efforts. The Budget and Finance Committee has received several updates on the development of the 10-Year Financial Plan by the consultant. The consultant has initiated analysis and is working with the management team as well as conducting individual meetings with department directors. The consultant is currently preparing a draft of the technical memo. The process will result in a modeling tool the City will use to complete budget assessments of various scenarios to produce financial forecasts. The series of modeling tools will enable the City to evaluate over time, the impact of different initiatives, changes, and priorities. The consultant is scheduled to finalize the work at the end of 2025 followed by a presentation to the Council on a series of recommendations for approaches based on different scenarios to assist the Council in identifying biennial budget decisions with a clear understanding of any budget implications beyond the budget biennium.

The City has previously pursued some general updates to community surveys in three- to five-year increments. The new community survey is timely and will serve as a component of the strategic planning process. The City pursued a competitive selection process and selected a Washington-based company, DHM Research. The company was highly recommended by other municipalities in the state. A kick-off meeting was held with the management team. The consultant is developing

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questions and is scheduled to present information to the Council at its April 15, 2025 meeting.

Councilmember Dahlhoff noted that in the past, there have been comments that prior community surveys results were not representative of the demographics of the community. She asked whether the consultant plans to address the issue to ensure the results are representative of the population of the City. City Administrator Parks affirmed that the company is aware of that particular issue and will address the issue during the Council's briefing. The surveying process includes two separate surveys. The first survey will be a statistical survey geared and structured to represent the demographic makeup of the City. The same questionnaire will be released as a Community Survey for anyone to complete. The statistically valid survey and the community engagement survey are on different timeline tracks.

Councilmember Swarthout asked whether the City has utilized the company previously. City Administrator Parks explained that the company was selected through a competitive selection process. Both DHM Research and the previous company contracted by the City submitted good proposals. However, staff selected DHM Research primarily because of the way the company presented its information.

Councilmember Cathey commented on the importance of the survey and how future actions and goals of the City over the next several years would likely be influenced by the current political environment. Although it is preferable not to acknowledge the issue, it will be important not to avoid the issue as the situation is not temporary and will result in a tumultuous environment for the next four years. She is concerned as to how the survey is administered realistically, as well as the possibility that some Council goals might need to change as new needs in the community are identified because of the new environment. That may result in fewer projects to enable the City to address community needs. She is hopeful that the message can be communicated to the representatives from DHM Research that surveying the community at this time will be different.

City Administrator Parks responded that the representatives are highly qualified and represent a company that has a 40+-year history. She has confidence in their understanding of public policy and the different conditions that affect a community's sentiment.

City Administrator Parks reviewed the timeline for the statistically valid survey and the community engagement survey. Analysis of the statistically valid survey is scheduled during the community engagement survey with the analysis completed by May. DHM Research representatives are scheduled to brief the Council at its June 17, 2025

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work session to share some basic feedback or a final report. She encouraged the Council to submit any specific topics or issues that should be included in the survey within the next week.

Councilmember Dahlhoff asked about the possibility of a comprehensive list of questions that can be provided to the Council to enable Councilmembers to rank or score and submit to the consultants. City Administrator Parks said the request would need to be reviewed because that level of interaction is not included within the schedule. Staff is working through a list of over 60 questions categorized into different subjects based on input from the management team. The list could be shared with the Council to receive feedback.

City Administrator Parks responded to questions about the details of the competitive bidding process for the consultant. The process entailed a release of a request for qualifications followed by an evaluation of the submittals and a selection process. Staff utilized the roster offered through Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC) serving local governments throughout the state. MRSC offers a comprehensive list of all types of consultants in addition to a small public works roster.

City Administrator Parks displayed information on how the 10-Year Financial Plan, Community Survey, and the Strategic Plan are aligned. She identified a tentative schedule of strategic planning sessions with the Council and the scheduled topics. The schedule designates November 18, 2025 for adoption of the Strategic Plan and accompanying work plans.

Councilmember Cathey asked that the dates be distributed to the Council for calendar scheduling.

City Administrator Parks said the Strategic Plan covers a six-year period with updates each year of the work plans. Annual reviews of the work plans will track progress on different goals and priorities. She shared links to other strategic plans and work plans from other jurisdictions in the state. Most of the examples include core values and information on different focus areas and goals, performance measures, and work plans. Some jurisdictions feature Strategic Plan dashboards on the city's websites. The Strategic Plan is a guiding document that is policy-oriented within the full purview of the legislative body to develop, amend, and implement. The Strategic Plan enables the Council to focus efforts on priorities to make progress rather than focusing on too many different directions.

**MAYOR/CITY
ADMINISTRATOR'S
REPORT:**

City Administrator Parks reported the Tyee/Kingswood roundabout will be paved in the next several days. The City released bids for the 2025 Pavement Project with bids due on April 24, 2025. Another project

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scheduled for release for bids is the Ansten Street Sewer Project. Completion of the sewer project will enable inclusion of Ansten Street in the Pavement Project.

Green Business Awards are scheduled at the Thurston Chamber of Commerce Green Awards & Expo on Wednesday, April 9, 2025. The City plans to feature its fully electric sewer van as part of the display.

Some traffic lane restrictions on northbound Littlerock Road between Israel Road and Kingswood are scheduled on April 11, 2025 to accommodate night work on the project.

The 2025 "Where's the Peep?" virtual contest is scheduled from April 14 – 18, 2025, one week before the Easter Egg Dash. "Where's the Peep?" is a contest on Facebook featuring picture clues to guess the location of "peeps" hidden around Tumwater to earn prizes sponsored by event sponsor, Toyota of Olympia.

Councilmember Agabi shared that some individuals have posted information about construction activity occurring in the City. He recommended the City should consider publishing accurate information to the community about development occurring in the City. City Administrator Parks explained that the City's construction update notification process coordinated through the Communications Department provides a regular release of information on different construction projects. The Tyee and Kingswood projects are private projects. It has not been the City's practice to announce details of different private building projects.

Councilmember Cathey spoke to some concerns surrounding the City's response to immigrants in the community in terms of the City's responsibilities and the role of the Police Department with respect to stopping or questioning immigrants in the City. She asked whether the City is responding to rumors in the City about the treatment of immigrants and whether any City official is engaged in conversations with the Tumwater School District or the Board about the Tumwater Fresh Program for future collaboration. City Administrator Parks advised that Director Chuck Denney has been working directly with Tumwater High School and the Tumwater School District Superintendent for the last several months on collaboration by the City to help support the Tumwater Fresh Program. The City provides the space and invested funds to renovate the space, as well stipends for students to work through the summer. The program is a Tumwater School District program with the City serving in a support role. She understands that the assigned staff member devoted to the Tumwater Fresh Program has been transferred as a general science teacher and will no longer work in support of the program. Director Denney has additional details as to the

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issue and can follow up with the Council with more information.

In terms of immigrants within the community, the City's response is based on both day-to-day activities and calls for service that involves an issue of immigration. The Police Department's policy on immigration violations is consistent with the state's directive pertaining to immigrants and immigration. The City's awareness of issues is often through emails or day-to-day activities in addition to information provided by Councilmembers. Councilmember Jefferson forwarded an email about the World Relief program. Staff will review the program parameters to present additional information to the Council to determine if the City wants to provide any assistance.

Councilmember Von Holtz commented on her frustrations surrounding the lack of City information about a variety of topics as she is often asked about the status of issues in the City. During the stuffing of Easter eggs, she and Councilmember Swarthout received numerous questions about the development occurring off Littlerock Road. She was aware of some of the development activity but lacked information about other development. If the Council has questions, it is almost guaranteed constituents have questions. She would be appreciative of better lines of communication on information to help manage expectations of potential questions from the community. City Administrator Parks acknowledged the comments. Staff works to provide information in terms of understanding proactively what the community wants to know. Many different forums are available to communicate with the community. She invited the community to contact the City with any questions as the issue is not a matter of not wanting to communicate, but rather it is about continuing efforts to improve communications with the community through an increase in communications staff and development of a Communications Plan. The City publishes updates on events, construction activities, and Council and other meetings.

Councilmember Dahlhoff commented on the importance of a well-informed Council as the Council is often surprised by questions from the community or a newspaper article published about the brewery. She suggested implementing some kind of "heads up" process on activities so the Council is informed about what is occurring or is going to occur in the City. City Administrator Parks described some pending efforts to develop some capacity and tools to improve proactive communications and outreach to the Council.

ADJOURNMENT: **With there being no further business, Mayor Sullivan adjourned the meeting at 8:00 p.m.**