



CITY OF TACOMA

2018 NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
PROGRAM REVIEW AND ORDINANCE
UPDATE

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON TACOMA
POLITICS, PHILOSOPHY AND PUBLIC
AFFAIRS

TLAW 486
FIELD WORK IN LAW AND POLICY

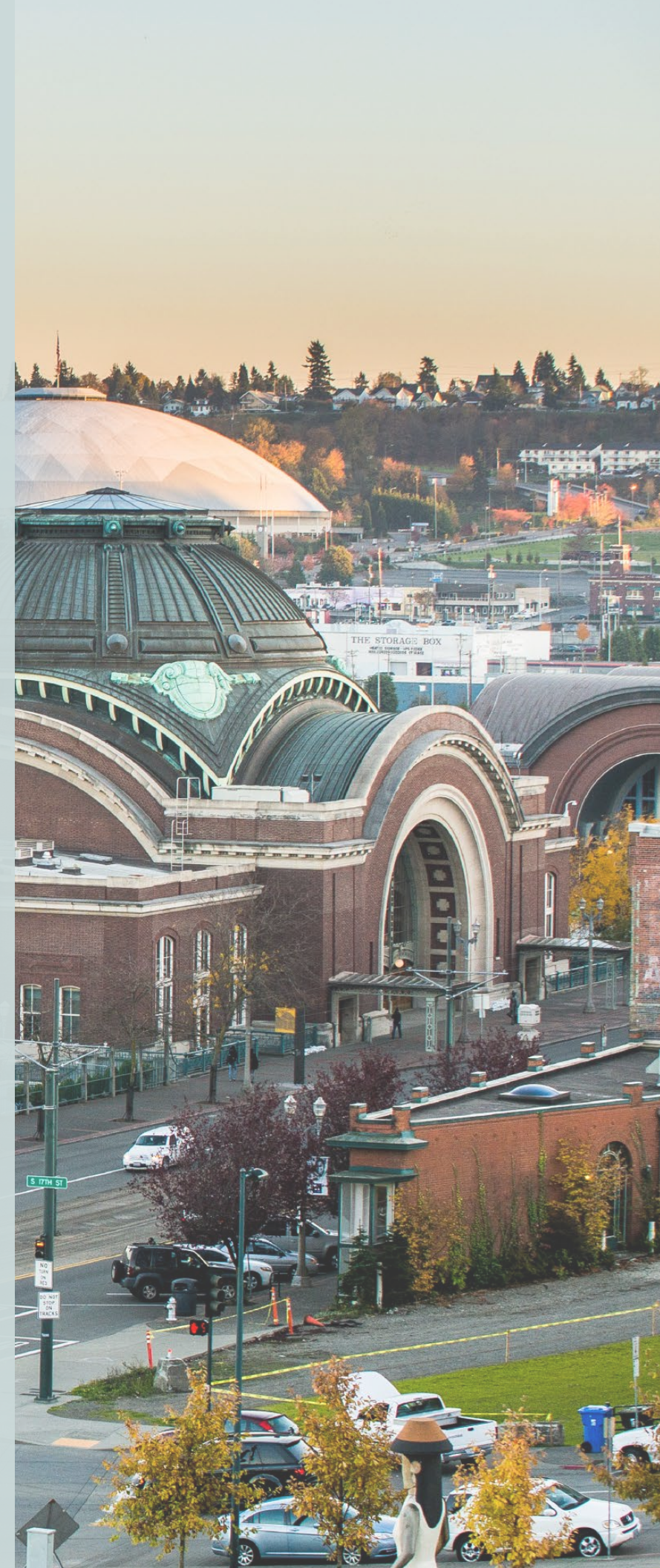
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LIVABLE CITY YEAR 2017–2018
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
CITY OF TACOMA

SPRING 2018





LIVABLE CITY YEAR 2017–2018
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We extend our gratitude to the City of Tacoma for providing this unique opportunity for us, students of the University of Washington Tacoma's Law and Policy program, to participate in a review of municipal programs and to gain first-hand understandings of how policies impact community members. Completion of this project was made possible via direct guidance from Carol Wolfe, of the City's Economic and Community Development Department. We thank Carol for her support and feedback. From the City's Neighborhood and Community Services Department, we thank Glenda Duldulao for meeting with us and offering us a view into the City's Neighborhood Council Program. From the City's Department of Information Technology, we thank Daniel Key and Adriana Ambramovich for helping us understand the nuanced ways in which technology impacts community engagement and democratic processes. We would also like to thank Media and Communications Director, Tanisha Jumper, for sharing about her work at anchor institutions in Tacoma and in developing community engagement goals. Thank you also to Rebecca Boydston, from the City Manager's Office, for sharing her unique perspective of the Neighborhood Council Program; her framing of the program helped us conceptualize complex situations.

As a large part of our time was spent researching comparable jurisdictions, we would like to extend our thanks to Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods and to the staff members there who spoke with us about community engagement efforts they currently pursue. Living in such a metropolitan area as the Puget Sound region offered us invaluable opportunities to explore several different approaches to community engagement. Representing other jurisdictions, we thank Neighborhood Program Coordinators Toni Azzola from the City of Kent, Drey Hicks from the City of Renton, and David Wolbrecht from the City of Kirkland; each of these individuals lent their time and perspectives to helping us understand the policies we reviewed. Furthermore, we thank Julie Anderson, Pierce County Auditor, and Damon Townsend, Overseer of Elections, for not only providing a vast amount of demographic data to our class but for going beyond that to make the numbers come alive and tell stories of the communities of Tacoma. Most especially we would like to extend our deepest thanks to each of Tacoma's Neighborhood Councils, their board chairs, and members. To all those who took the time to sit down with us and share from your personal experiences with the program, the City, and your neighborhoods, we express our deepest thanks.

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ABOUT LIVABLE CITY YEAR

The University of Washington's Livable City Year (LCY) initiative enables local governments to engage UW faculty and students for one academic year to work on city-defined projects that promote local sustainability and livability goals. The program engages hundreds of students each year in high-priority projects, creating momentum on real-world challenges while enabling the students to serve and learn from communities. Partner cities benefit directly from bold and applied ideas that propel fresh thinking, improve livability for residents and invigorate city staff. Focus areas include environmental sustainability; economic viability; population health; and social equity, inclusion, and access. The program's 2017–2018 partner is the City of Tacoma; this follows a partnership with the City of Auburn in 2016–2017.

The LCY program is led by faculty directors Branden Born (Department of Urban Design and Planning), Jennifer Otten (School of Public Health) and Anne Taufen (Urban Studies Program, UW Tacoma), with support from Program Manager Teri Thomson Randall. The program was launched in 2016 in collaboration with UW Sustainability and Urban@UW, with foundational support from the Association of Washington Cities, the College of Built Environments, the Department of Urban Design and Planning, and Undergraduate Academic Affairs.

LCY is modeled after the University of Oregon's Sustainable City Year Program, and is a member of the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network (EPIC-N), the collection of institutions that have successfully adopted this new model for community innovation and change.

For more information, contact the program at uwlcy@uw.edu.



ABOUT TACOMA

The third largest city in the state of Washington, Tacoma is a diverse, progressive, international gateway to the Pacific Rim. The port city of nearly 210,000 people has evolved considerably over the last two decades, propelled by significant development including the University of Washington Tacoma, the Tacoma Link light rail system, the restored urban waterfront of the Thea Foss Waterway, the expansions of both the MultiCare and CHI Franciscan health systems, and a significant influx of foreign direct investment in its downtown core.

Washington State's highest density of art and history museums are found in Tacoma, which is home to a flourishing creative community of writers, artists, musicians, photographers, filmmakers, chefs, entrepreneurs, and business owners who each add their unique flair to the city's vibrant commercial landscape. The iconic Tacoma Dome has endured as a high-demand venue for some of the largest names in the entertainment industry.

A magnet for families looking for affordable single-family homes in the Puget Sound area, Tacoma also draws those seeking a more urban downtown setting with competitively priced condos and apartments that feature panoramic mountain and water views. The city's natural beauty and proximity to the Puget Sound and Mount Rainier draws hikers, runners, bicyclists, and maritime enthusiasts to the area, while its lively social scene is infused with energy by thousands of students attending the University of Washington Tacoma and other academic institutions.

The City of Tacoma's strategic plan, Tacoma 2025, was adopted in January 2015 following unprecedented public participation and contribution. The plan articulates the City's core values of opportunity, equity, partnerships, and accountability, and expresses the City's deep commitment to apply these values in all of its decisions and programming. Each Livable City Year project ties into the principles and focus areas of this strategic plan. The City of Tacoma is proud of its 2017–2018 Livable City Year partnership with the University of Washington and of the opportunity this brings to its residents.



TACOMA 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

The *Neighborhood Council Program Review and Ordinance Update* project supports the Livability and Equity and Accessibility goals of the Tacoma 2025 Strategic Plan and was sponsored by the City's Neighborhood and Community Services and Planning and Development Services Departments.

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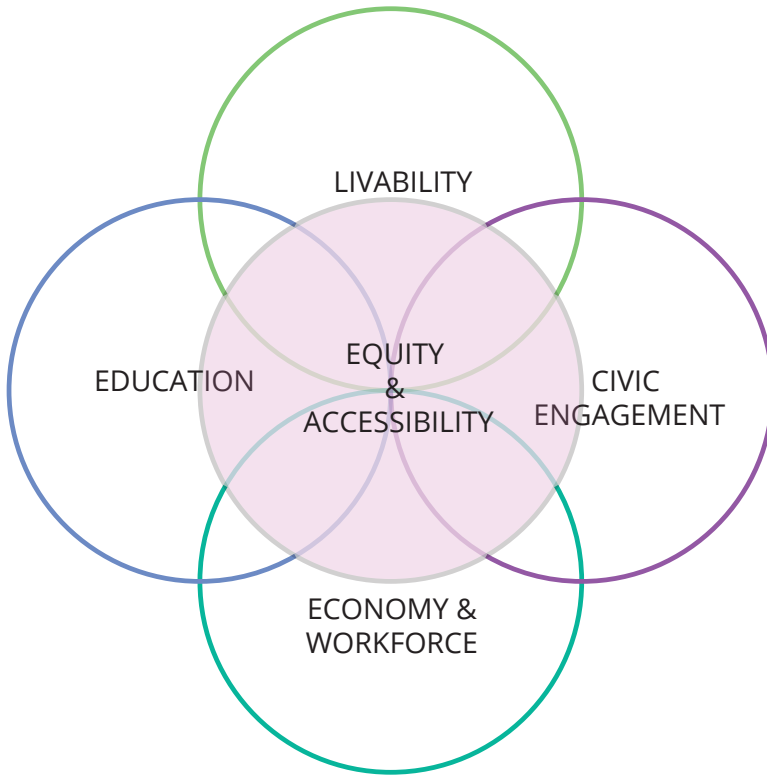
Goal #1 Livability
The City of Tacoma will be a city of choice in the region known for connected neighborhoods, accessible and efficient transportation transit options, and vibrant arts and culture. Residents will be healthy and have access to services and community amenities while maintaining affordability.
- 

Goal #2 Economy and Workforce
By 2025, Tacoma will be a growing economy where Tacoma residents can find livable wage jobs in key industry areas. Tacoma will be a place of choice for employers, professionals, and new graduates.
- 

Goal #3 Education
Tacoma will lead the region in educational attainment amongst youth and adults. In addition to producing more graduates from high school and college, more college graduates will find employment in the region. Lifelong learning and access to education will be prioritized and valued.
- 

Goal #4 Civic Engagement
Tacoma residents will be engaged participants in making Tacoma a well-run city. The leadership of the city, both elected and volunteer, will reflect the diversity of the city and residents and will fully participate in community decision-making.
- 

Goal #5 Equity and Accessibility
Tacoma will ensure that all residents are treated equitably and have access to services, facilities, and financial stability. Disaggregated data will be used to make decisions, direct funding, and develop strategies to address disparate outcomes.



RESOURCES

Tacoma 2025 Strategic Plan: https://www.cityoftacoma.org/tacoma_2025

Department of Neighborhood and Community Services
https://www.cityoftacoma.org/government/city_departments/neighborhood_and_community_services

Department of Planning and Development Services
https://www.cityoftacoma.org/government/city_departments/planning_and_development_services

Livable City Year: <https://www.washington.edu/livable-city-year/>

University of Washington Tacoma School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences: <http://www.tacoma.uw.edu/sias/pppa>

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

This University of Washington Livable City Year (UW LCY) report represents the work of junior and senior undergraduate students enrolled in the University of Washington Tacoma's (UWT) Fieldwork in Law and Policy course during the spring quarter of 2018. The framework of the course emerged out of a partnership between faculty from the University of Washington Tacoma and LCY, and the City of Tacoma's Community and Economic Development Department. In the scope of work, co-created by these parties, they stated their rationale and broad goal for this project: The perception exists that Tacoma's Neighborhood Councils do not adequately reflect the communities they are meant to represent within the boundaries defined...This can result in civic involvements that do not reflect equitable engagement. The goal for this project is to help create a meaningful, continuous improvement plan to address equitable engagement concerns during the City's review process of the existing Neighborhood Council Program. The City would like qualitative research data on best practice policy enhancements from comparable and proximate jurisdictions in Washington State.

The City of Tacoma extended this unique opportunity to students, to examine the operations of each of Tacoma's eight Neighborhood Councils and to measure the degree to which each Neighborhood Council engages its residents equitably. The City also asked students to devise a set of recommendations for it to utilize to improve the way it supports the Neighborhood Council Program.

Students began with an examination of a case study presented in 2009 by two Urban Studies researchers, Yonn Dierwechter and Brian Coffey. This helped them view the Neighborhood Council Program's historic origins, forming, and overall efficacy. Next, students completed a review of academic articles, comparing various approaches to resident engagement in cities across the country. Their literature review occurred simultaneous to field observations. Students gathered qualitative data from interviews with City staff and Neighborhood Council board members. Many students ventured to nearby jurisdictions, like Bellevue, Kirkland, and Seattle, to meet with and learn from the representatives of Neighborhood Councils elsewhere in the Puget Sound region.



The University of Washington Tacoma is an urban-serving university. The students involved in this project offer a set of recommendations to the City of Tacoma to apply toward achieving equitable engagement of residents through the Neighborhood Council Program. UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON TACOMA

With the intent to focus on whether, and if so how well, Tacoma’s Neighborhood Council Program provides a mechanism for equitable engagement of residents, students sought to identify the barriers that may prevent all residents from accessing and benefitting from the program. Ultimately, students identified several barriers to equitable access. The following barriers disproportionately impact low-income people:

- 1. Participation Costs
- 2. Transportation
- 3. Work Schedules
- 4. Language
- 5. Technology
- 6. Time

Students also identified two key areas for the City to focus efforts to improve access and equity:

- 1. Opportunities for Youth Engagement
- 2. Systemic Disconnects

The students encourage the City of Tacoma to consider the following recommendations which target increasing public access, investing in the youth of Tacoma, empowering Neighborhood Councils, and developing beyond the Neighborhood Council Program.

- 1. **Increase Public Access to Neighborhood Councils**
 - a. Offer participation by correspondence
 - b. Revise Neighborhood Council boundaries
 - c. Create a Civic Education Program
 - d. Establish Community Connections
- 2. **Create a Tacoma Student Ambassadors Program**
- 3. **Empower Neighborhood Councils**
 - a. Create a Neighborhood Council Grant Program
 - b. Establish a City of Tacoma Civic Service Department
 - c. Offer Grant Writing Classes
 - d. Partner with UW's Center for Service Learning
- 4. **Reach Beyond the Neighborhood Councils**
 - a. Audit and Redefine the Neighborhood Councils
 - b. Create an Atmosphere of Active Listening
 - c. Provide Community Engagement Trainings
 - d. Enhance the Role of Community Liaisons
 - e. Create a Community Resources Website



City of Tacoma Municipal Building. CITY OF TACOMA

TACOMA'S NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL PROGRAM

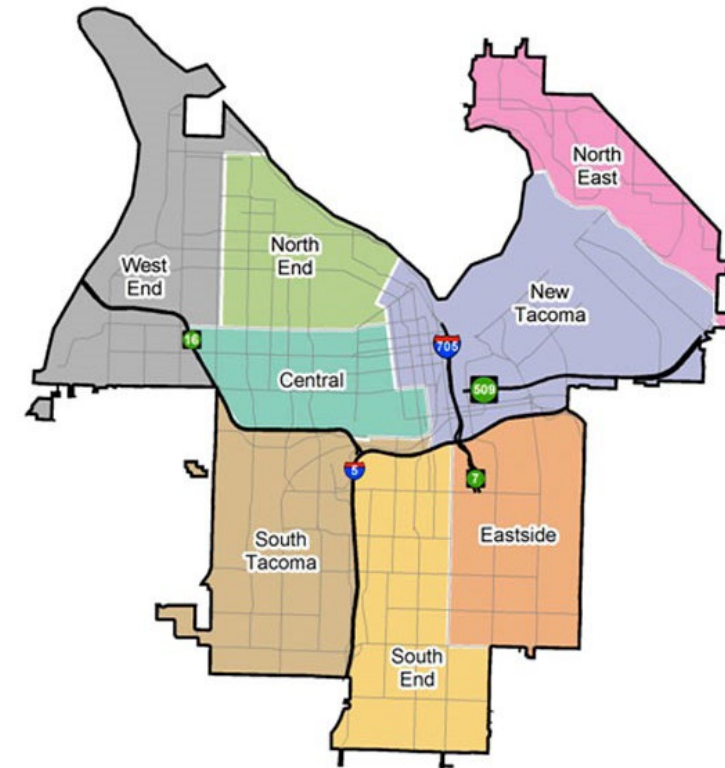
In 1992, The City of Tacoma founded the Neighborhood Council Program, summarizing its purpose with the following statement:

It is the intent of the City to engage its neighborhoods as broadly as possible in the issues and concerns that directly affect them. The City will support and promote a Neighborhood Council Program to foster open communication between the City and its neighborhoods and to create an environment in which residents are afforded an opportunity to participate in City government decisions in an advisory role (Tacoma Municipal Code).

Tacoma's Neighborhood Council Program emerged from a series of meetings in which nearly one thousand Tacoma residents gathered to discuss, prioritize, and outline their hopes for the future of their neighborhoods. The City of Tacoma currently describes the purpose of the Neighborhood Council Program to serve as "an independent, non-profit, citizen organization to promote citizen-based efforts for neighborhood improvement" (City of Tacoma 2018). For twenty-six years, since the City of Tacoma established the program, eight different Neighborhood Councils have represented eight delineated neighborhoods: West End, North End, New Tacoma, Northeast, Central, South Tacoma, South End, and Eastside. Each Neighborhood Council is formed to represent and serve the thousands of Tacoma residents who live within its bounds. Upon their establishment, each Council earned its status as a 501(c)3 non-profit; this allows them more flexibility to acquire funding. Although the Neighborhood Councils operate independently, each receives \$4,000 in funding from the City of Tacoma each year.

The five-year review is one way the City can assess how well the program meets the needs of an always changing population.

Map of Neighborhood Council Areas



The City created the Neighborhood Council Program in 1992, designating the eight official neighborhoods shown in this map. CITY OF TACOMA

One of the important elements of Tacoma's Neighborhood Council Program is its inclusion of a five-year review. There is no set process for this review, but it should be conducted by the Neighborhood Council Program Coordinator and presented to the Tacoma City Council. This is part of ensuring that "City Council goals and objectives are being met as well as the goals and objectives of the Neighborhood Councils and the neighborhood groups within the Neighborhood Council boundaries" (Neighborhood Council Standards and Guidelines 2013, 8). The five-year review is one way the City can assess how well the program meets the needs of an always changing population. The City of Tacoma extended an invitation to our team of eight undergraduate students to participate in the Neighborhood Council Review for 2018.

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL PROGRAM REVIEW

As a focus for this Livable City Year (LCY) project, the City of Tacoma's Economic and Community Development Department, headed by Supervisor Carol Wolfe, invited our team to pay attention to concerns related to equitable engagement of community members and to the tensions that arise among community stakeholders and the Neighborhood Councils themselves, and between the Neighborhood Councils and the City of Tacoma. In addition, the City asked for recommendations on how the Neighborhood Council Program could fit into the City's ten-year strategic plan and vision, known as Tacoma 2025. This plan seeks to align the visions and goals of Tacoma to broader planning policies, like the Washington State Growth Management Act and the Puget Sound Regional Council's Vision 2040. The five broad goals for Tacoma 2025 target improving: livability, economy and workforce training and opportunities, education, civic engagement, and equity and accessibility. Since the City's Community and Economic Development Department specifically asked students to consider equity and access, students focused their review of the Neighborhood Council Program on the degree to which all residents gain access to and receive representation and support from their respective Neighborhood Council.



View of downtown Tacoma and the Port of Tacoma from the Hilltop neighborhood, with the Tacoma Municipal Building shown in the far right. The City of Tacoma seeks to align the Neighborhood Council Program to the strategic plan, Tacoma 2025. JACOB ROSE

Purpose of the Neighborhood Council Program

Students learned that the original intention of the Neighborhood Council Program was to ensure representation of the City's distinct communities and to empower dialogue and partnership among residents, represented by the eight Neighborhood Councils, and the City of Tacoma. The City intended to create a pathway for two-way communication to occur between its departments and each Neighborhood Council.

The City asked for recommendations on how the Neighborhood Council Program could fit into its ten-year strategic plan, Tacoma 2025



Residents and Livable City Year students participating in a South Tacoma Neighborhood Council meeting in May 2018. TERI THOMSON RANDALL

EXPERTS’ REVIEW OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL PROGRAM

Difficult Origins and Forming

In 2009, two UW Urban Studies researchers, Yonn Dierwechter and Brian Coffey, examined what they termed the, “Neighborhood Council experience in Tacoma, Washington” (Dierwechter and Coffey 2010). They noted a contentious relationship between the City of Tacoma and the eight Neighborhood Councils, characterized by key tensions emergent during the program’s early years, and possibly tied to the City’s previous reluctance to allow residents to organize their own councils. For example, in the 1980s, a decade prior to the City’s adoption of an ordinance to create the Neighborhood Council Program, a former Tacoma Mayor rejected a proposal to establish one. In their analysis, Dierwechter and Coffey posit that many City Council members, at the time, feared the program and actively worked to thwart its forming. At the time, one City official called the ordinance to establish the program, “a presumptuous usurpation of powers and authority that more appropriately belong to the City Manager and/or to the Council.” This person added that the Neighborhood Councils would, “dilute the powers...of the [City] Council and literally cripple the City Manager [and] department and agency directors” (Dierwechter and Coffey 2010).

Even with the successful establishment of the program in 1992, Dierwechter and Coffey suggest that the City’s fear of residents’ hidden agendas, and of their potential to usurp power, stirred a climate of mistrust and wariness between the Neighborhood Councils and the City. This impeded the development of bilateral partnerships, informed by two-way communication, intended for the Neighborhood Council Program. Although these sentiments and attitudes, laid out in past and present

Fear of residents’ usurption of power stirred a climate of mistrust and wariness and impeded the development of bilateral partnerships informed by two-way communication.

contexts, tie to significant disconnects between the City and the eight Neighborhood Councils, there remains hope that the City can improve its approach to community engagement by maintaining the Neighborhood Council Program, but altering it to ensure it engenders inclusion and equity through deliberative, collaborative engagement processes. Indeed, the City displays a sincere commitment to improving the program through its request that students take up this project.

There remains hope that the City can improve its approach to community engagement by altering the program to ensure it engenders inclusion and equity.



Victorian row houses line a segment of South J Street in Tacoma's Hilltop neighborhood, considered part of the New Tacoma Neighborhood. Tacoma's current Neighborhood Council boundaries slice the Hilltop in half. JACOB ROSE

Our team began this project with a scholarly review of articles focused on topics of public engagement and political efficacy. We also gathered research to compare diverse Neighborhood Councils, some from the greater Puget Sound region and others from places farther afield, in cities like Bellevue, Kirkland, Seattle, Boston, and Los Angeles. Our analysis of these cities' Neighborhood Council systems helped us form generalized understandings of the purpose, form, and functions of Neighborhood Council programs. This investigation expanded our view of how Neighborhood Councils set goals and implement courses of action toward achieving their goals.

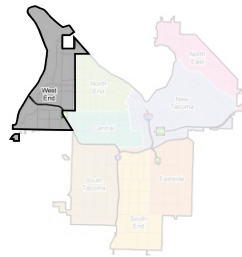
Shifting our view back to the local level, we compared demographic data from the Pierce County Auditor for the eight official neighborhoods of Tacoma, taking note of key similarities and differences. We used this review to illuminate degrees of variance in Tacoma's composition at the neighborhood-level. We considered this essential knowledge to bear in mind while grappling with concepts like fair representation, accessibility, and equitable community engagement. We added to this body of research essential primary evidence from interviews with City staff and board members from the Neighborhood Councils. One student carried out a small, door-to-door survey in his neighborhood to gauge the willingness of his neighbors to connect with one another. Our encounters with City staff and residents add depth to our understandings of how Tacoma's Neighborhood Council Program works and how it serves board members and residents. We used our understandings of Tacoma's Neighborhood Council Program, along with key lessons learned from our review of other Neighborhood Council systems, to develop a set of recommendations for the City of Tacoma to use to increase public access to the Neighborhood Councils for residents.



Community members and city staff participated in a recent community input meeting on the topic of housing, hosted in Tacoma by the UW Livable City Year program. TERI THOMSON RANDALL

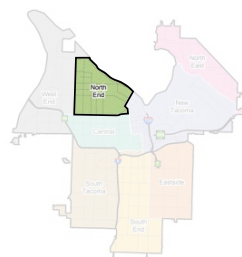
AT A GLANCE

During our review of the Neighborhood Council Program, we identified a set of barriers that prevent more residents, especially low-income community members, from accessing and participating in their Neighborhood Councils. As part of our approach to responding to the City's request to focus on equitable engagement, we began by looking for major demographic differences in the recognized neighborhoods. We theorized that we would be able to connect these differences to the development of eight distinct Neighborhood Councils. With a better understanding of whom the different Councils represent, and of how each operates, we hoped to identify methods that work particularly well to engage community members as well as areas for the City to improve its handling of the program.



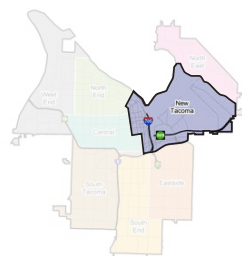
West End

- Population: 31,000
- Median Income: \$59,000
- Pay/Work Schedule: Salary/Business Hours
- Primary Languages (non-English): Spanish and Russian



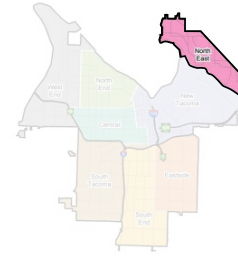
North End

- Population: 27,000
- Median Income: \$74,000
- Pay/Work Schedule: Salary/Business Hours
- Primary Languages (non-English): Spanish



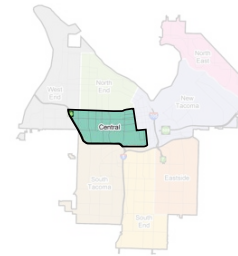
New Tacoma

- Population: 14,000
- Median Income: \$29,000
- Pay/Work Schedule: Hourly/Fluctuating Hours
- Primary Languages (non-English): Spanish



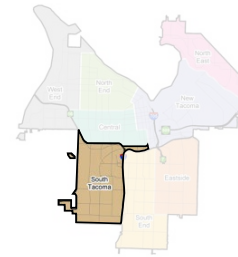
Northeast

- Population: 17,000
- Median Income: \$87,000
- Pay/Work Schedule: Salary/Business Hours
- Primary Languages (non-English): Spanish and maybe Russian (close to threshold)



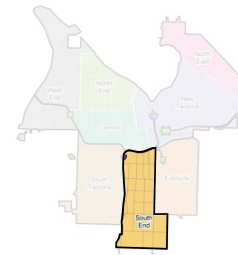
Central

- Population: 20,000
- Median Income: \$45,000
- Pay/Work Schedule: Hourly/Fluctuating Hours
- Primary Languages (non-English): Spanish



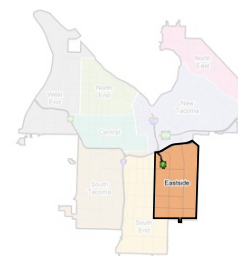
South Tacoma

- Population: 27,000
- Median Income: \$44,000
- Pay/Work Schedule: Hourly/Fluctuating Hours
- Primary Languages (non-English): Spanish and maybe Vietnamese/Cambodian (both close to threshold)



South End

- Population: 41,000
- Median Income: \$51,000
- Pay/Work Schedule: Hourly/Fluctuating Hours
- Primary Languages (non-English): Spanish, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Korean



Eastside

- Population: 31,000
- Median Income: \$46,000
- Pay/Work Schedule: Pay and Schedule Range equally between salary and hourly
- Primary Languages (non-English): Spanish, Vietnamese, and Cambodian

DIFFERENCES IN POPULATION SIZE, SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, AND OTHER DEMOGRAPHICS

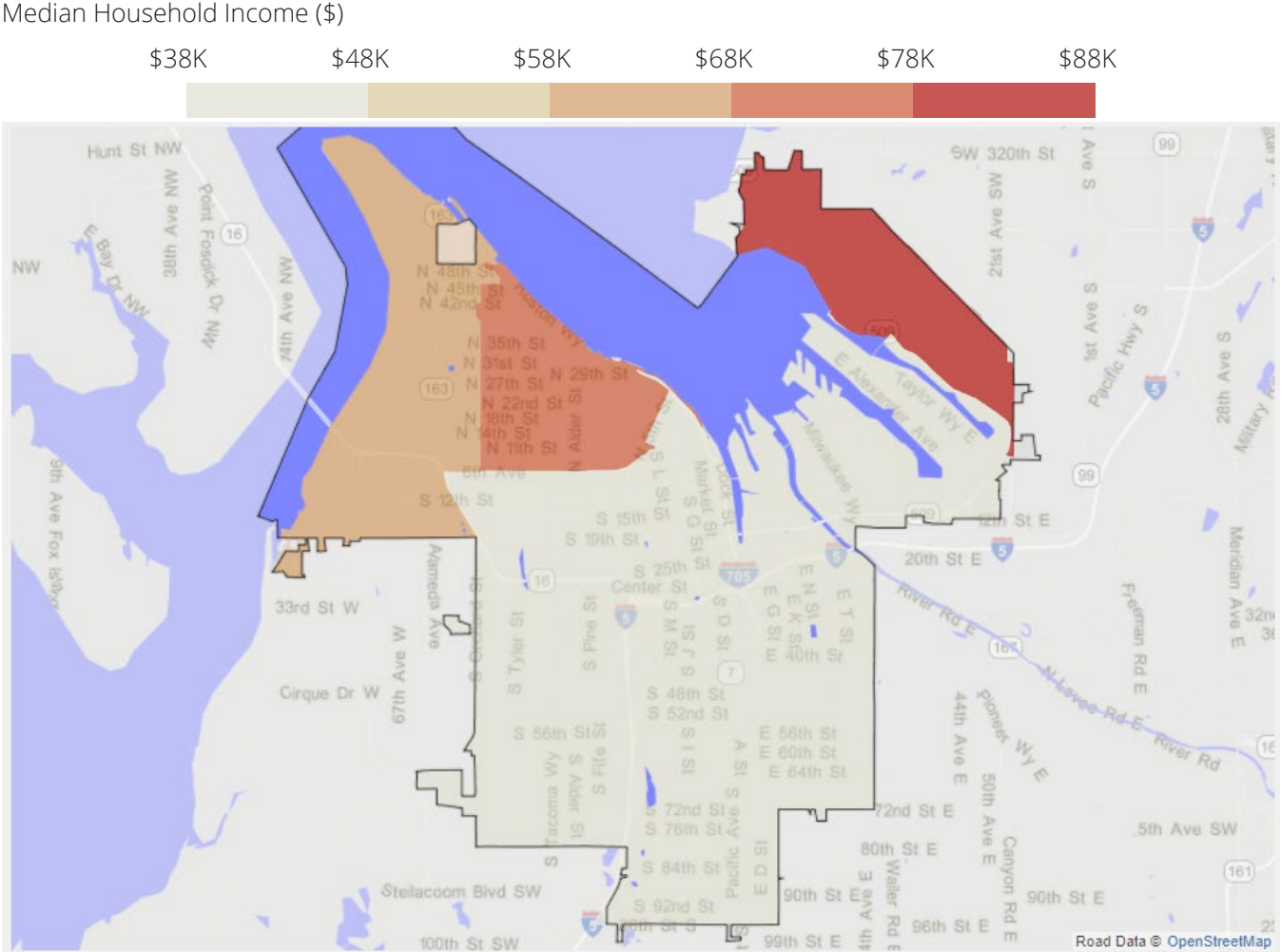
In our preliminary review of the Neighborhood Councils, we noticed clear differences in population size, socioeconomic status, and other demographics of each of the eight neighborhoods. We find these observations to be of great significance because although population size, average income, and demographics vary considerably, the City allocates the same lump sum of \$4,000 to each Neighborhood Council every year. The table presented below captures key differences between two Neighborhood Councils, New Tacoma and the North End:

Neighborhood Council	New Tacoma Neighborhood Council	North End Neighborhood Council
Total Population	14,000	27,000
Average Annual Income Level	\$29,000	\$74,000
Amount of Funding Received from City of Tacoma	\$4,000	\$4,000

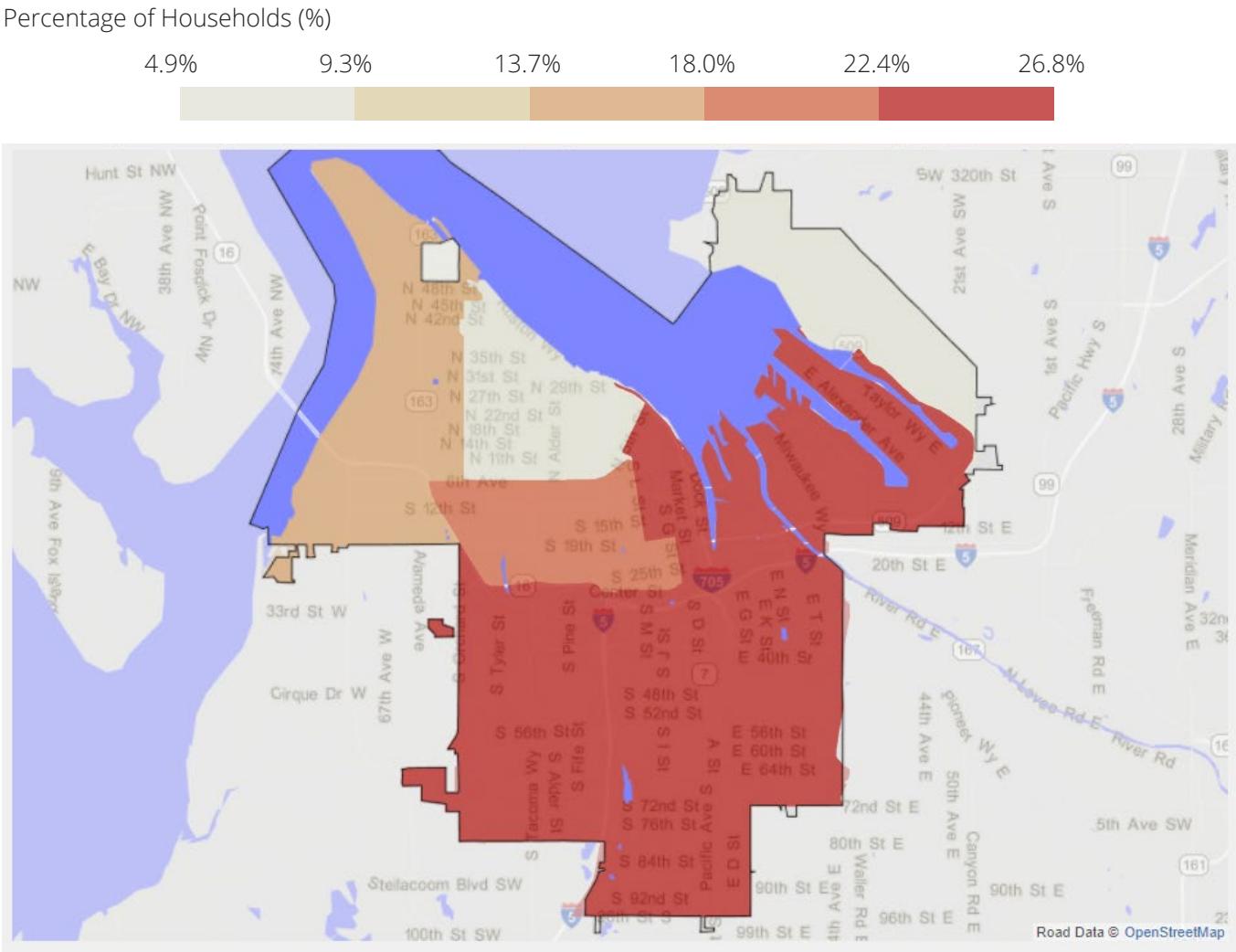
The New Tacoma Neighborhood Council currently represents 14,000 residents with an average annual income of \$29,000. Most employed residents of this neighborhood work for an hourly wage and, thus, are less-likely to qualify for state-mandated employee benefits. The North End Neighborhood Council currently represents 27,000 residents (nearly twice as many people as live within the bounds of New Tacoma). One might assess that the New Tacoma residents benefit more from the funds taken in from the City each year because the neighborhood is home to fewer residents. However, when one considers that residents of New Tacoma bring in annual incomes significantly lower than the average annual income of residents of the North End, it is less clear whether the New Tacoma neighborhood is made to benefit significantly from having a greater per capita allowance of city funding.

Although population size, average income, and other demographics vary considerably, the City allocates the same sum of \$4,000 to each Neighborhood Council every year.

Median Household Income by Neighborhood



Food Stamps by Neighborhood



Tacoma's diverse neighborhoods face different challenges and this impacts the priorities taken up by their Neighborhood Councils. This map demonstrates where in the city residents struggle to access food for their households. STATISTICAL ATLAS

Beyond these and other observations made by students, the 2009 Dierwechter and Coffey case study revealed that the discrepancies in per capita funding made available to residents of high-income neighborhoods, like the North End and Northeast Tacoma, and to residents of low-income neighborhoods, like the Eastside and South Tacoma, come from a longstanding, predictable, historic pattern. Dierwechter and Coffey found that the Northeast Neighborhood Council, which historically and currently serves the wealthiest population of Tacoma, dedicated \$13.41 to each of its residents, while the Eastside Neighborhood Council and the South Tacoma Neighborhood Council spent just \$7.65 and \$8.64 per resident respectively (Dierwechter 2010, 480).

Observable Disparity

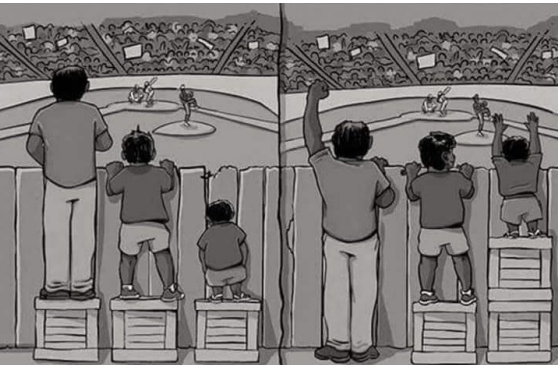


An ornate, impeccably-maintained Victorian house in the North End of Tacoma. Observable disparities in the overall wealth of residents of different neighborhoods of Tacoma link to historic patterns of inequity. JOE MABEL

Students noted disparities amongst the Neighborhood Councils themselves, in terms of the number of residents served in relationship to the amount of funding received from the City of Tacoma. From interviews with Neighborhood Council Treasurers, students found that the North End has \$17,481 in their treasury while New Tacoma only has \$1,298 in their treasury. At the time of the interview, the North End Neighborhood Council could allocate 65 cents to each of its residents, while New Tacoma could allocate only nine cents to each of its residents. In other words, the North End Neighborhood Council has about seven times more money to spend, per capita, than the New Tacoma Neighborhood Council. At the same time, its residents make, on average, about two and a half times more in annual income.

Equality vs. Equity

Where unequal treatment and distribution of resources has long been the norm, a shift toward allocating equal funding does not result in equity. Yet, this is the approach the City of Tacoma takes to fund its eight Neighborhood Councils. The observed disparities, in terms of the amount of money available for each Neighborhood Council to spend on its residents, are inextricably linked to historic, unequal city investments. The patterns of the past cannot be overcome by the provision of equal funding today. Although the City of Tacoma gives each Neighborhood Council an equal share of funding, low-income neighborhoods bear the burden of past decades of urban renewal's disinvestment and neglect. Therefore, one can easily argue that offering an equal amount of funding to all neighborhoods does little to bring about equitable outcomes. Wealthier neighborhoods have historically received more funding. Equal funding distribution maintains the status quo discrepancies that have existed in Tacoma for many decades.



- EQUALITY**
- EQUITY**
- 1. Equality: is giving people the same thing/s.
- 2. Equity: is fairness in every situation.

Equal treatment today cannot overcome historic inequalities. An equity approach to developing programs for diverse populations considers this. LEIGH BLACKALL

PARTICIPATION COSTS

Students analyzed what it costs the average community member to participate in their Neighborhood Council, whether that person simply attend a meeting or volunteer more of their time as a board member. Students considered costs like transportation and child-care. They also contemplated “opportunity costs,” which refers to “the loss of potential gain from other alternatives when one alternative is chosen” (Rulleau 2012).

Historic disparities between low-income and higher income neighborhoods could widen because of inequitable access the program.

The cost to attend a meeting, for some individuals, may amount to little more than the expense of gas to drive from home or work to the meeting. Yet, for others, who may lack access to cars, or whose work schedules conflict, or who cannot afford to hire babysitters to watch their children, the cost to attend even a single, monthly meeting becomes prohibitively high. In low-income neighborhoods, the cost to participate poses a significant barrier and prevents residents from accessing and participating in their Neighborhood Councils. In effect, these residents do not benefit from the idealized, two-way communication supported by the Neighborhood Council Program. Their ideas and concerns do not reach the City without their inclusion in the program. Simultaneously, wealthier residents are more likely to utilize their local Neighborhood Councils to draw attention from the City to their neighborhood’s need for items such as improved sidewalks, bus stop covers, or wayfinding signs. In effect, historic disparities between low-income and higher income neighborhoods could widen because of inequitable access the program.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation represents another barrier to access that disproportionately impacts low-income community members. Not only is there a financial cost associated with utilizing public transportation, there is also the added time it takes to use these modes. Beyond the bus



Lack of convenient public transportation options poses a significant barrier to many low-income residents of Tacoma who do not own their own cars.
LIZA HIGBEE-ROBINSON

With most meetings adjourning after 8 pm, individuals without their own cars may lack transportation to return home from Neighborhood Council meetings safely.



Low-income residents are less likely to routinely attend their Neighborhood Council meetings due to having less flexibility and control over their work schedules. PIXABAY

ride itself, which may follow an indirect route and/or require transfers, people who rely on public transportation often find themselves walking up to nearly half a mile from their home to the nearest bus stop and may have to walk a similar distance from where the bus drops them off to the actual meeting location. This requires them to dedicate considerably more time simply to getting to and from a meeting than a resident who owns a vehicle. Beyond these costs, few bus routes run at night. With most meetings adjourning after 8 pm, individuals without their own cars may lack transportation to return home from Neighborhood Council meetings safely.

WORK SCHEDULES

Since Neighborhood Council meetings are held at a fixed day and time each month, individuals with work schedule conflicts experience much higher participation costs since they must take time off from work. This disproportionately impacts low-income individuals, just like the cost of transportation does. Thus, we begin to observe a reliable trend, that overall the cost to participate impacts low-income individuals more than others. In fact, demographic data suggests that the residents of Central, New Tacoma, the South End, and South Tacoma neighborhoods are more likely, when gainfully-employed, to earn their wages based on an hourly pay rate and to encounter variable scheduling which may decrease the likelihood that they could attend meetings on a routine basis. Residents of Tacoma’s West End, North End, and Northeast neighborhoods are typically salaried employees, with more flexibility and control over their schedules which enables them to establish other routine, non-work-related commitments. [pull quote: previous sentence.] Despite the reality that work schedule conflicts may prevent some people from ever attending meetings, all community members deserve access to the Neighborhood Councils that represent them.

Residents of Tacoma’s West End, North End, and Northeast neighborhoods are typically salaried employees, with more flexibility and control over their schedules which enables them to establish other routine, non-work-related commitments.

LANGUAGE

According to demographic data acquired from the City of Tacoma, in three neighborhoods, at least 3% of the population self-report that their level of English language comprehension is either, “a little,” or “none at all.” More than 2% of every neighborhood’s total population identifies as speaking a language other than English in the home. In half of Tacoma’s recognized neighborhoods, two additional ethnic groups, each comprising 2% of their neighborhood’s total population, report speaking a native language other than English or Spanish. Language barriers prevent certain ethnic groups from participating in their Neighborhood Councils. Following the trend from the previously listed impediments (participation cost, transportation, and work schedules), language barriers appear positively correlated with lower income levels (Kretsedemas 2005).

Language barriers prevent certain ethnic groups from participating in their Neighborhood Councils.

Percentage of Non-English Languages Spoken in the Home

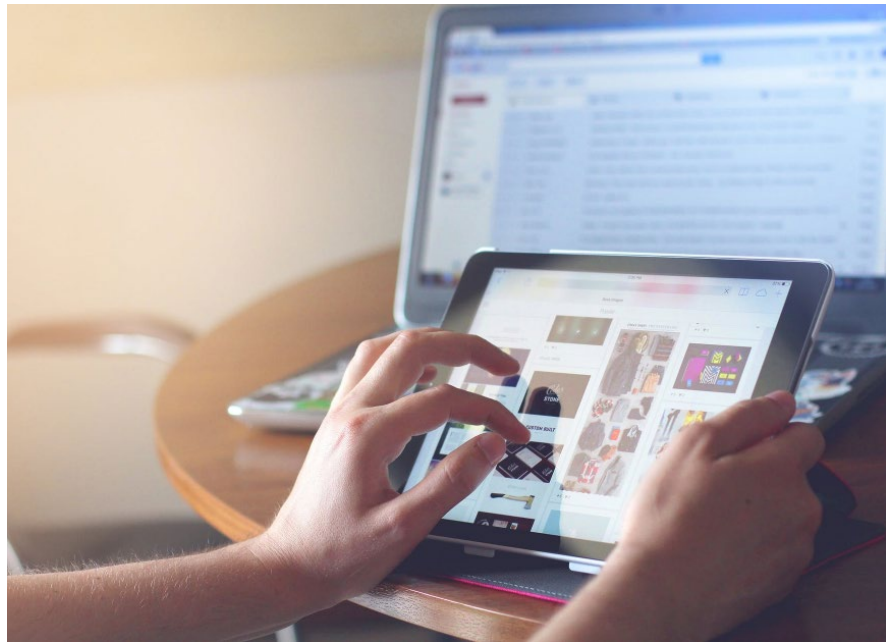
	West End	North End	Northeast	New Tacoma	Central	South End	South Tacoma	Eastside
Spanish	2.7	2.7	4.6	4.9	5.3	8.4	10	14.2
Vietnamese	1.4	0.4	1.1	0.9	1.4	3.0	1.7	5
Cambodian	0	0	0.3	1.4	0.9	3.2	1.5	2.9
Korean	0.7	0.2	2.9	1.5	0.3	2.2	1.1	1.2
Russian	3.2	0.8	1.7	0	0.5	0.7	1.4	0.9

Language barriers particularly disenfranchise diverse populations of the South End, South Tacoma, and the Eastside.

TECHNOLOGY

Many Tacoma Neighborhood Council meetings are broadcast live over various internet channels such as Facebook Live and GoToMeeting. While data obtained by the students involved in this project indicates that, at most, a given meeting only hosts one or two virtual attendees, the inclusion of these platforms is relatively new and expected to reach larger segments of the population over time. Virtual attendees may observe the meeting and ask questions or contribute comments through a live-chat interface. Unfortunately, the use of such technology requires

not only the proper equipment and an internet connection but also the experience and know-how to operate technological devices and computer software programs. Many individuals take for granted their technological knowledge and skills. Meanwhile, elderly and low-income people may lack experience or access to computers which prohibits their use of this type of technology to gain access to meetings remotely.



Although technological resources can enable some people to participate in Neighborhood Council meetings remotely, this is less likely to serve low-income and older individuals who may lack access to technology or essential skills. PIXABAY

Low-income individuals may perceive that the value of their time is higher since they typically have much less leisure time than middle- and upper-income people.

TIME

Time spent attending a Neighborhood Council meeting cuts into the time that each of us has to spend with our families, maintain our homes, practice sports, keep up with hobbies, or relax. For low-income people, the sacrifice that comes with attending a meeting may feel more significant and prevent them from even considering attending a meeting. Indeed, research indicates that the value of time is different for people of different socio-economic levels. Low-income individuals typically experience a higher cost associated with the use of their ‘free time’ because they earn less money per hour spent working. They must dedicate significantly more time to working to stay above the poverty line (Burchardt 2010). Thus, low-income individuals may perceive that the value of their time is higher since they typically have much less leisure time than middle- and upper-income people.



To attend a meeting, one must sacrifice other experiences, like spending time at home with family after long hours working. For many low-income people, the cost of donating such time is too high. STEPHEN BAACK

LACK OF YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

As stated in Tacoma Municipal Ordinance 1.45, the intention of the Neighborhood Council Program is to engage neighborhoods “as broadly as possible in the issues and concerns that directly affect [residents].” When targeting equitable engagement, it is important to identify marginalized segments of society— in Tacoma, this includes youth and young adult populations. Without their inclusion in the Neighborhood Council Program, equitable engagement is not achieved. One way to include high school students and young adult populations is to extend direct invitations to them to participate in local government affairs, including, but not limited to, their Neighborhood Councils.

Without the inclusion of youth and young adult populations in the Neighborhood Council Program, equitable engagement is not achieved.



Students of Lincoln High School, located within the boundaries of the South End neighborhood.
JOE MABEL

The Importance of Youth and Young Adult Civic Engagement



Cities and communities that invest in youth leadership programs can engender a sense of civic responsibility that carries over into adulthood. KATELYN SHEARER

Findings from a study produced by three psychologists, Wing Yi Chan, Suh Ruu Ou, and Arthur Reynolds, in 2015, demonstrate that when youth and young adult people participate in local government affairs, they are more likely to remain politically active later in life. According to their report, high school students involved in civic activities display “much higher levels of civic knowledge and civic efficacy,” than those students who do engage with local government (Chan et al., 2015, 2). The findings from this study are significant, especially when one considers more generalized observations of young people as politically disengaged with scant awareness of civic processes and without a deep understanding of the principals of citizenship and American democracy (Policy 2011).

Current Young Adult Representation

Currently, no high school students are actively involved with any of Tacoma’s Neighborhood Councils in any formal or informal capacity. This is an issue that can be addressed by seeking to engage young adults, especially from historically disadvantaged populations. Specifically, high school and college-aged people should be targeted for inclusion in the councils. Although our class acknowledges that political participation takes on many forms that do not necessarily equate to representation on boards, it is important to note that no board member, from any of the Neighborhood Councils included in our investigation, falls into the 16-24 age group.

SYSTEMIC DISCONNECTS

During the interview process, our team identified a multitude of systemic disconnects which impact the efficacy of Tacoma’s Neighborhood Council Program. Specifically, we noted disconnects between the City of Tacoma and the Neighborhood Council Program, between residents and their Neighborhood Councils, and between residents and the City. The disconnect between the Neighborhood Council Program and the City emerges from underlying confusion about the role of the councils as advisory bodies, meant to communicate messages from residents of Tacoma to the City of Tacoma.



Systemic disconnects result in a lack of trust felt by residents toward local government officials, agencies, and programs. KNKX

One board member specified that the City has neither a way for the councils to operate in an advisory role nor “the time or resources” to address complaints.

City of Tacoma and the Neighborhood Council Program

Many Neighborhood Council board members we interviewed reflected on the initial excitement they felt about the opportunity to serve their communities. Then, they shared their frustrations about the lack of clarity surrounding the way in which the Neighborhood Councils should fulfill the role of ‘advisory body’ to the City. One board member elucidated, in detail, his difficulties understanding the City’s basic intention for the Neighborhood Council Program; he specified that the City has neither a way for the councils to operate in an advisory role, nor “the time or resources to address Neighborhood Council complaints.” [pull quote, shortened from previous sentence: One board member specified that the City has neither a way for the councils to operate in an advisory role nor “the time or resources” to address complaints.] A Tacoma City staff member, who works directly with the Neighborhood Council boards,

conceded that the purpose of the Neighborhood Council Program is for each council to be “advisory in nature”. However, this person went on to state that the Neighborhood Councils hold unrealistic expectations about the power and clout they derive from their role. [pull quote, shortened from previous sentence- contrasts with pull quote above: A City staff member stated that the Neighborhood Councils hold unrealistic expectations about the power and clout they derive from their advisory role.] According to this staff person, the Neighborhood Council Program is more accurately characterized as a mechanism for neighborhoods to transmit their feedback to the City than as one that positions each Neighborhood Council as an advisory body.

A City staff member stated that the Neighborhood Councils hold unrealistic expectations about the power and clout they derive from their advisory role.



Councilmember Joe Lonergan reads a proclamation about the opening of a trail in South Tacoma, named in honor of Skip Vaghn, a long-time resident and advocate of open space corridors. The City once planned to prevent the community’s access to the site, which had long been used informally as a recreation space. The South Tacoma Neighborhood Council represented the neighborhood’s desire to preserve access to the space and the City listened. CHRISTINA LORELLA

Failure to Inform Neighborhood Council Board Members of this Project

Our observations confirmed that there is no formalized process, outside of interacting with City liaisons at the Neighborhood Council meetings, for Neighborhood Councils to offer advice to the City. Moreover, we found evidence of the historically-contentious relationship between the City and residents of Tacoma in the way that the City failed to inform the Neighborhood Councils about this project. We encountered astonishment and outrage from board members when we made our requests for interviews and information about their work. They wanted to know more about the project and how their input would be used. When we relayed their concerns back to the City, staff members told us not to worry about their remarks and to go ahead and finish the project. As far as we know, no subsequent follow up from the City to the Neighborhood Councils regarding their concerns about the purpose of the project occurred.

Residents’ Confidence in the City of Tacoma

Pertaining to the disconnect between the City and residents of Tacoma, it is important to note data taken from Tacoma’s Community Survey (TCS) in 2018. TCS is a phone survey meant to measure community satisfaction. In 2018, the survey reached 752 residents, represented



Many Neighborhood Council board members expressed their astonishment and outrage that the City of Tacoma failed to reach out to them and inform them of this project. PUBLIC DOMAIN

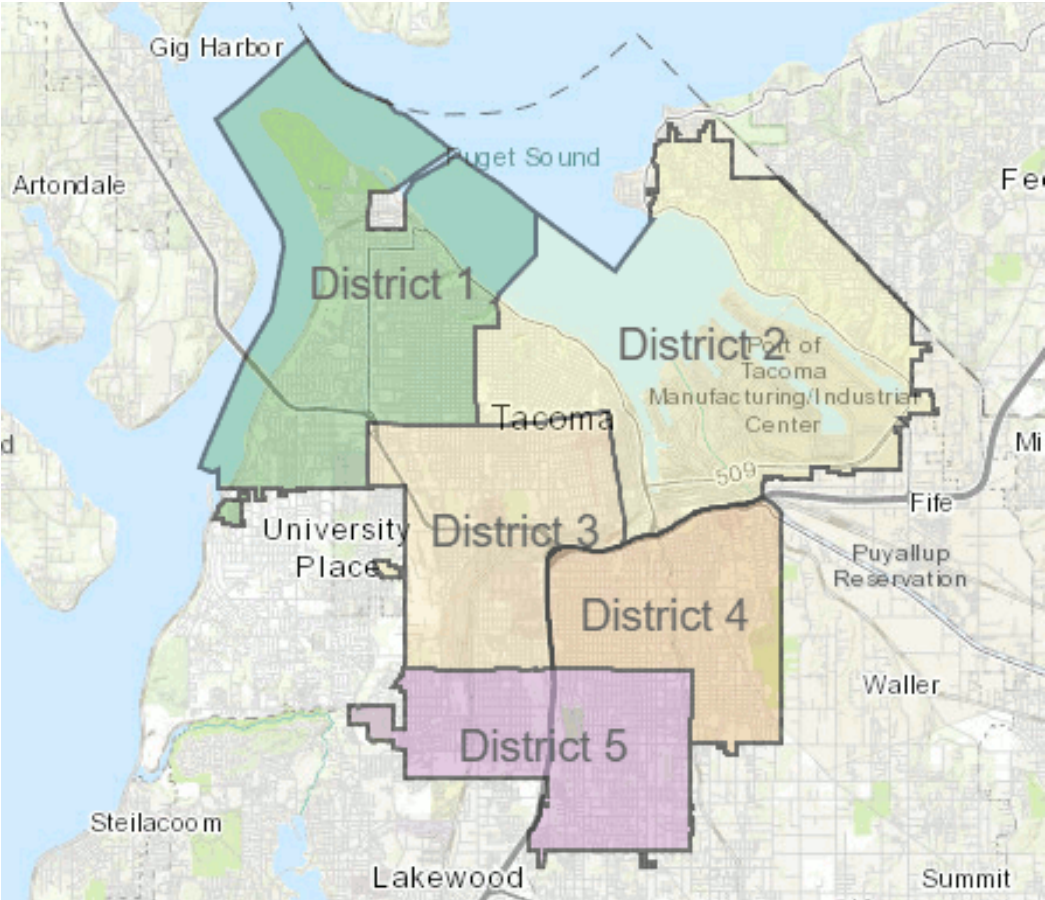
Criticism of Tacoma’s Neighborhood Council Program

City staff member 1: *“I only attend meetings because I have to, nothing has changed since I’ve been going to these meetings.”*

Neighborhood Council Board Member 1: *“Neighborhood Councils are a joke and need to be re-built, but even if we did rebuild them, the City doesn’t care anyways.”*

City Staff Member 2: *“The majority of these Neighborhood Councils are dumpster fires and need to be burnt down.”*

Neighborhood Council Board Member 2: *“The City of Tacoma hasn’t cared about us in a long time. We don’t even have serious representation for our district right now.”*



City of Tacoma Councilmanic Districts. CITY OF TACOMA

Although overall confidence in the City has improved, the rate of improvement is not spread evenly across all neighborhoods, ethnic groups, and races.

evenly over Tacoma’s five councilmanic districts. The data taken from the survey suggests that confidence in Tacoma’s municipal government has increased since 2014. Today, the City boasts an overall confidence score of 54% (TCS 2018). Although this is a 22% increase from data collected in 2014, survey examiners encourage the City to keep an important fact in mind: although overall confidence has improved, the rate of improvement is not spread evenly across all neighborhoods, ethnic groups, and races (TCS 2014). The survey results indicate that “confidence in the municipal government is poorest among black residents (34%) and people that self-identify with two or more races (36%), compared to white and Hispanic residents (60% and 68%, respectively).” When compared to the data collected during the Vision 2025 project, it appears that black residents’ confidence only increased by 2% and the confidence of those who identify with more than one race increased by 4%. The confidence levels of white and Hispanic residents rose a great deal more, with a 28% increase among whites and a 36% increase among Hispanics.

The data from the Community Survey indicates that the City can act to improve the way it communicates with and supports each Neighborhood Council, in a concerted effort to build trust and bridge the gap between the City and residents. If residents express low confidence in the City, as a whole, then it is unlikely that they will place their confidence in a program created by the City. Thus, if the City aspires to engage equitably with citizens through the Neighborhood Council Program, then the City must reach out to residents and invest in forming relationships with them, and develop clearer objectives for each Neighborhood Council.



Community members and city staff discuss Tacoma’s needs for affordable housing at a recent community input meeting hosted by the UW Livable City Year program. TERI THOMSON RANDALL

The goal of this project has been to evaluate the City's equitable engagement of community members through the Neighborhood Council Program. This has involved a review of the program's form and function and an investigation of other cities' approaches to equitable engagement. Our investigative process informs the recommendations provided within this section. Our intention is to provide a set of recommendations for the City of Tacoma to use to address the barriers to access previously described. Additional recommendations target increasing youth and young adult participation and resolving systemic disconnects that prevent the Neighborhood Council Program from reaching and involving a balanced spread of Tacoma residents. Our class has formed four overarching recommendations categories, listed below.

1. Increase Public Access to Neighborhood Councils
2. Create a Tacoma Student Ambassadors Program
3. Empower Neighborhood Councils
4. Reach Beyond the Neighborhood Councils

Our recommendations target the barriers to access previously described in addition to increasing young adult participation and resolving systemic disconnects.

1) INCREASE PUBLIC ACCESS TO NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS

Our research on demographics, case study analysis, and qualitative interviews illuminate barriers to access that prevent equitable engagement of community members through the City of Tacoma's Neighborhood Council Program. Equitable engagement cannot be achieved by providing equal opportunities or through equal distribution of funding; it can be achieved by ensuring equitable circumstances. This requires careful consideration of the historical injustices and inequalities that have left lasting impacts on some segments of society. In this section, we offer suggestions of ways the City can confront the barriers to access that prevent low-income community members, in particular, from participating in the Neighborhood Council Program.

Offer Participation-by-Correspondence Option in Multiple Languages

We recommend that the City add participation by correspondence options to increase communication opportunities and expand access to the Neighborhood Council Program. Residents may opt to receive monthly notices from their Neighborhood Councils, which could include that month's agenda items, minutes from the previous meeting, and



Tacoma's Lincoln District is a hub for the city's Vietnamese population. Many of the elders of this community speak very little or no English. TACOMA NEWS TRIBUNE

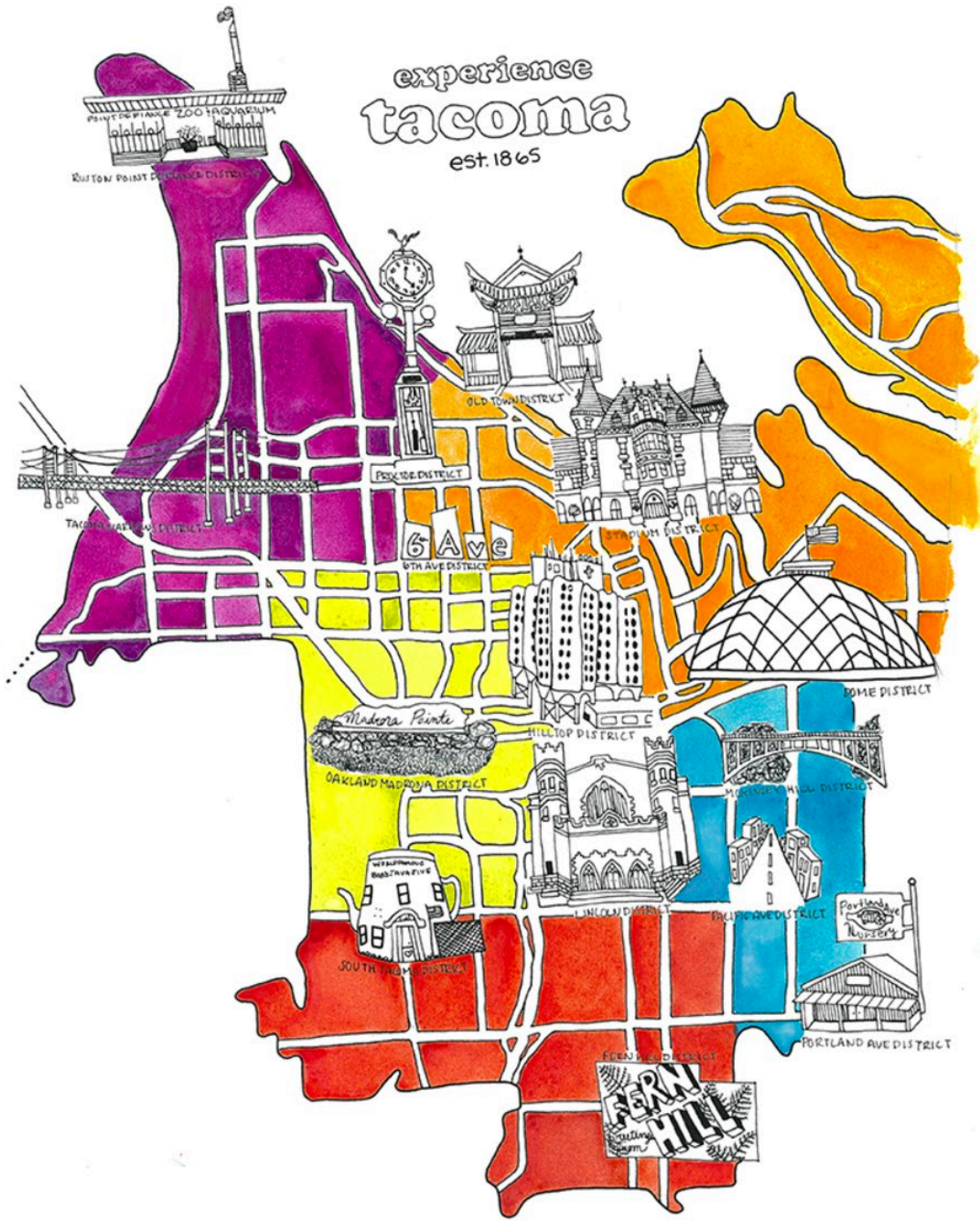
Equitable engagement cannot be achieved by providing equal opportunities or through equal distribution of funding.

a brief questionnaire for residents to fill out to convey their views and concerns regarding agenda topics. These notices and questionnaires could be made available to residents online to reduce postage and printing costs to the Neighborhood Councils and City. Monthly notices could be provided in English and Spanish as well as other primary languages spoken within a given neighborhood, to include all languages spoken by a minimum of 2% of the neighborhood's total population. This would address overall participation costs and existing language barriers that prevent a more diverse array of community members from participating in their Neighborhood Councils.

Generate Awareness of the Neighborhood Council Program

We recommend that the City improve its commitment to public outreach and resident engagement. Through this work, the City can generate greater awareness of the Neighborhood Council Program and increase access and equity measures. Two avenues the City can pursue follow.

- 1. Post notices at public institutions, like community centers, parks, and libraries; and send home notices with school children. This outreach method targets a diversity of families throughout all neighborhoods of Tacoma.
- 2. Advertise the Neighborhood Council Program and create new, alternative means of participation. An example of this is to include the information about the councils in the packets received when an individual or family move into a new residence. These packets already exist and include information about public resources; therefore, including a notice about the Neighborhood Councils will not incur additional postage costs to the City. These may be made available to new residents at multi-unit housing complexes in addition to residents of single family homes.



The neighborhood districts depicted in this map may more accurately represent how residents identify with neighborhood boundaries. Tacoma's Neighborhood Council boundaries contain within them multiple districts and in some instances the boundaries even divide districts into two parts. The City could work with community members to increase the number of Neighborhood Councils. EXPERIENCE TACOMA

Revise Neighborhood Boundaries

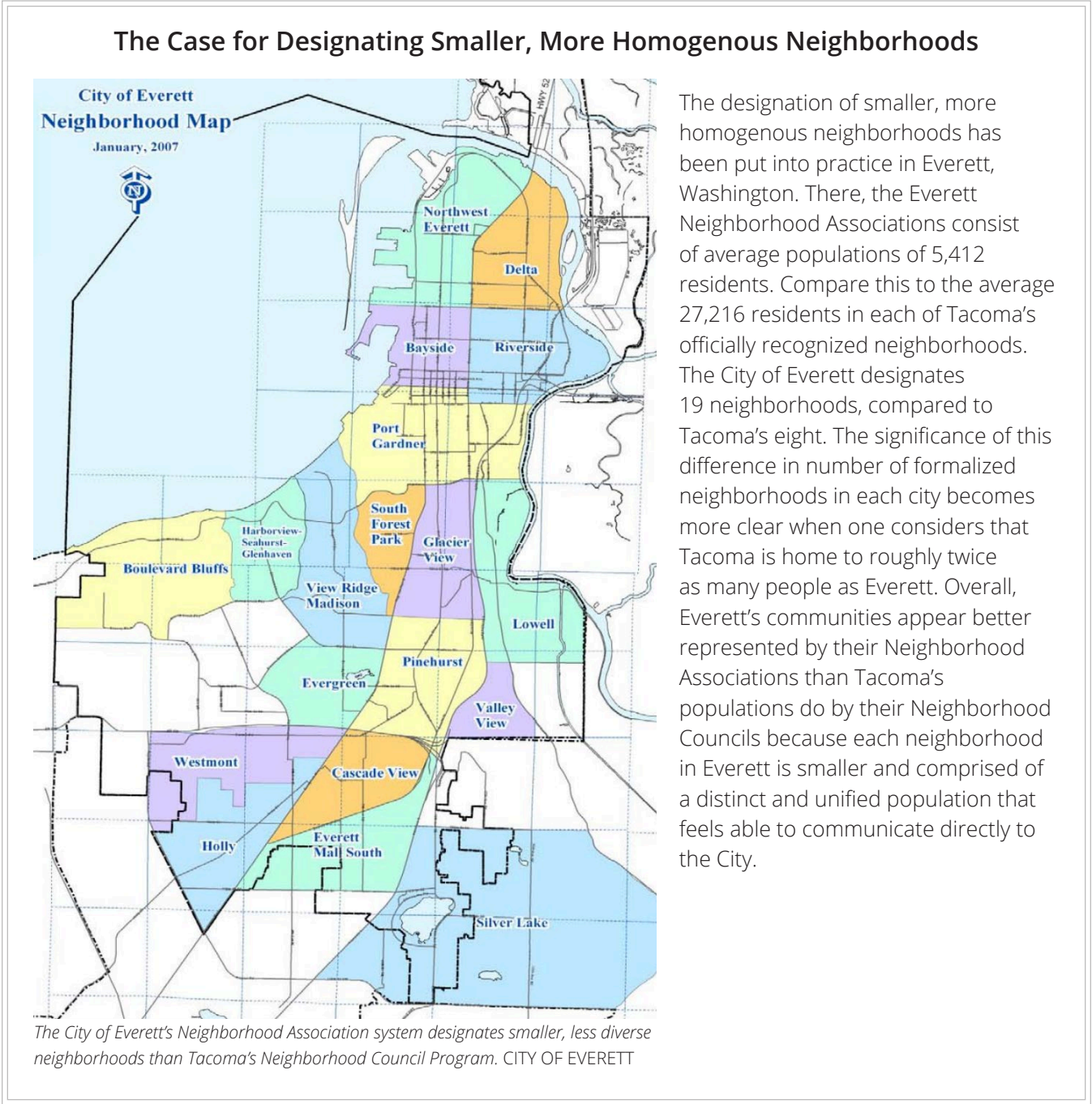
We recommend that the City increase the number of designated neighborhoods to help create more homogeneous neighborhood populations, where the people of a given neighborhood feel unified rather than marginalized, fragmented, or at odds with each other. We make this recommendation based on reports that higher rates of social cohesion tend to produce higher rates of civic participation (Costa 2003, 106). In addition, by subdividing current neighborhoods into smaller districts, people would need to commute significantly shorter distances from their homes to meeting locations. This would help reduce time and transportation costs associated with attending meetings. Part of revising neighborhood boundaries could involve surveying residents of Tacoma to ask them to trace the boundaries they feel represent their actual neighborhood. This could direct the City to establish new boundaries that represent communities more accurately.

Create a Civic Education Program

We suggest that the City provide non-partisan information and resources necessary to compel Tacoma residents to engage politically and to understand how civic processes work. Information provided on a nonpartisan basis should revolve around topics like: voter registration, the purpose and responsibilities of elected officials, and current initiatives and other pending legislation. Civic education programs could be organized in conjunction with the Neighborhood Council Program. To include non-English speaking residents, we recommend providing interpretive services to community members who sign up to attend the program.

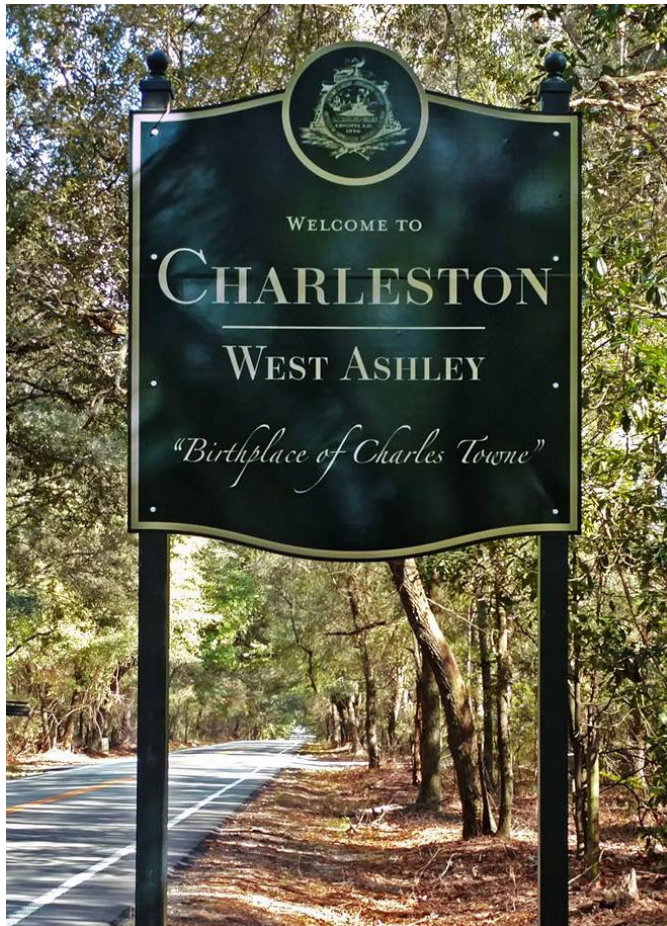
Foster Community Connections

This recommendation focuses on the systemic disconnects perceived by students between the Neighborhood Councils and the residents of Tacoma. Students suggest that the City do more to encourage each Neighborhood Council to connect with residents through canvassing and connecting on a face-to-face basis. To increase equity and inclusion measures, it is essential that each council invite all its residents to attend meetings, weigh in on agenda items, and participate in outcomes. Combined with the earlier recommendation of participation by correspondence and civic education, this recommendation takes aim at inspiring broader public engagement and at engendering trust and confidence among residents in the Neighborhood Council Program.



To increase equity and inclusion measures, it is essential that each council invite all its residents to attend meetings, weigh in on agenda items, and participate in outcomes.

Canvassing Campaign in Charleston, South Carolina



Welcome sign to the West Ashley neighborhood in Charleston, South Carolina. TODD BARWICK

Charleston, South Carolina, a city with a similar population and demographic composition to Tacoma, faced a similar struggle to motivate people to turn out at public meetings and engage in civic processes. The City developed a canvassing campaign for its West Ashley Neighborhood. This campaign invited residents to get to know one another during a neighborhood potluck. At the potluck, Neighborhood Council board members issued pamphlets to inform residents of initiatives and projects happening in their district. Many residents expressed that they previously lacked awareness of their Neighborhood Council. The canvassing campaign spurred increased resident participation in the West Ashley Neighborhood Councils. Overtime, previously uninformed and politically-disengaged residents organized a grassroots movement to remove their current City representative and elect the youngest representative in Charleston history. This case demonstrates the real power of a mobilized, civically-engaged community.

2) CREATE A TACOMA NEIGHBORHOOD STUDENT AMBASSADORS PROGRAM

One of the noted barriers to access that we observed during our fieldwork concerned the lack of opportunities for young adult and youth populations to engage with their Neighborhood Councils. We observed that these populations are not represented within the Neighborhood Councils across the city. No mechanism currently provides youth with an easy and formalized pathway to communicate their concerns or requests to their Neighborhood Councils, let alone to the City of Tacoma. Therefore, we recommend that the City create a ‘Tacoma Neighborhood Student Ambassadors Program,’ with the intention to empower youth to express their political concerns and to weigh in on decision-making processes and project developments.

No mechanism provides youth an easy and formalized pathway to communicate their concerns or requests to their Neighborhood Councils, let alone to the City.

We suggest that the City of Tacoma add to its Neighborhood Council Program an official ‘Tacoma Neighborhood Student Ambassadors’ section with full capacity and autonomy. The Tacoma Neighborhood Student Ambassadors Program could be composed of diverse students from all parts of the city and could represent high school and college-aged groups (and possibly middle school-aged groups in the future). These students would be responsible for attending their Neighborhood Council’s monthly meeting in addition to monthly or bi-monthly ‘Student Ambassadors Council’ meetings. Student ambassadors could act as advisors to their Neighborhood Councils and promote the general welfare of the younger population while also playing a crucial role in bringing a new perspective to the City of Tacoma to consider when implementing policies and allocating funding to projects and programs. The City of Tacoma is in desperate need of a program such as this, one that bridges the gap between youth and older generations and brings diverse age groups together to engage in civic discourse and develop common goals for a shared future.

Boston’s “Mayor’s Youth Council”

The City of Tacoma could create a ‘Neighborhood Student Ambassadors Program’ similar to Boston’s “Mayor’s Youth Council.” Currently, 96 teenagers, all of them appointed by the Mayor of Boston, comprise the Mayor’s Youth Council. They act as an advising body to the City, expressing their ideas and concerns, helping with the development of projects, and voting on projects to be funded by the City. Indeed, each year the City of Boston allocates \$1 million to its youth population (ages 12-24), who then participate in the democratic process to determine what the money will fund.



Boston Mayor's Council stands as a bold model for empowering youth to make political decisions that impact their community. CITY OF BOSTON

The following recommendations pertain more specifically to attributes of a Tacoma Neighborhood Student Ambassadors Program.

Advisory Role

Students from local high schools and colleges (and possibly middle schools in the future) perform an advisory role within their “home” Neighborhood Council. For high school-aged students, “home,” may be designated by the neighborhood boundaries within which the student’s high school and/or home falls. Each local college in Tacoma can send an ambassador to each Neighborhood Council in Tacoma.

Recruitment Process

Each high school or college is responsible for sharing information about the program and for helping recruit ambassadors. All interested high school students will be eligible to sign-up, with no maximum limit of the number of ambassadors that a school or Neighborhood Council may have. Colleges may either choose to use a simple sign-up method or hold an election. In the event of there being no candidates, students may be nominated by other students or by faculty.

The City of Tacoma is in need of a program that bridges the gap between youth and older generations, bringing together diverse age groups to develop common goals for a shared future.

Student Platform During Council Meetings

Student ambassadors act as liaisons or advisors to their Neighborhood Councils. Just as other liaisons are allocated time to speak in front of the entire Neighborhood Council about political issues pertinent to them, so too does each student ambassador.

Student Forums

Student ambassadors from every high school and college meet on a specified day, either monthly or bi-monthly, in an open forum where they deliberate on political issues. In these forums, the perspectives of students from different neighborhoods and schools come together and students talk through their issues toward establishing common priorities and agenda items to bring back to their Neighborhood Councils. To ensure equity and inclusion within this format, no single person would hold a leadership role during these forums; rather, one or two individuals would act as facilitators. These forums could be called ‘Student Ambassador Council’ meetings.

Official Recognition

Tacoma Neighborhood Student Ambassador’s Program should be recognized by the City of Tacoma and by Tacoma Public Schools and higher education institutions as an official entity with absolute autonomy and capacity.

Program Review

As part of ensuring the program’s viability and tracking outcomes, every four years the City of Tacoma, partnering with Tacoma Public Schools, will conduct a review of Tacoma Neighborhood Student Ambassador’s Program. Reviewers will not be given the authority to cut or discredit the program but to monitor and ensure that it operates in accordance with program guidelines.



The students recommend that the City create a Student Ambassador Council that empowers youth and young adults to steer decision-making processes that impact their communities. PIXABAY

3) EMPOWER NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS

Although there is much work that can be done within the City to address the various systemic disconnects and other barriers to access students have identified in their review of the Neighborhood Council Program, in this section we offer recommendations meant to support the City in reaching beyond merely addressing underlying issues, toward providing new options to empower the Neighborhood Councils to achieve their own goals.

Neighborhood Council Grant Program

The \$4,000 granted by the City to each Neighborhood Council every year is not adequate to serve the residents that live within the boundaries of each neighborhood. In order to address funding deficiencies, we propose that the City implement a two-pronged approach through a ‘Neighborhood Council Grant Program.’ This program would help each Neighborhood Council to acquire adequate funding. We recommend the provision of two types of grants: a *Neighborhood Outreach Grant* and a *Project/Event Grant*.

This report supports the City in reaching beyond merely addressing underlying issues, toward providing new options to empower Neighborhood Councils to achieve their own goals.

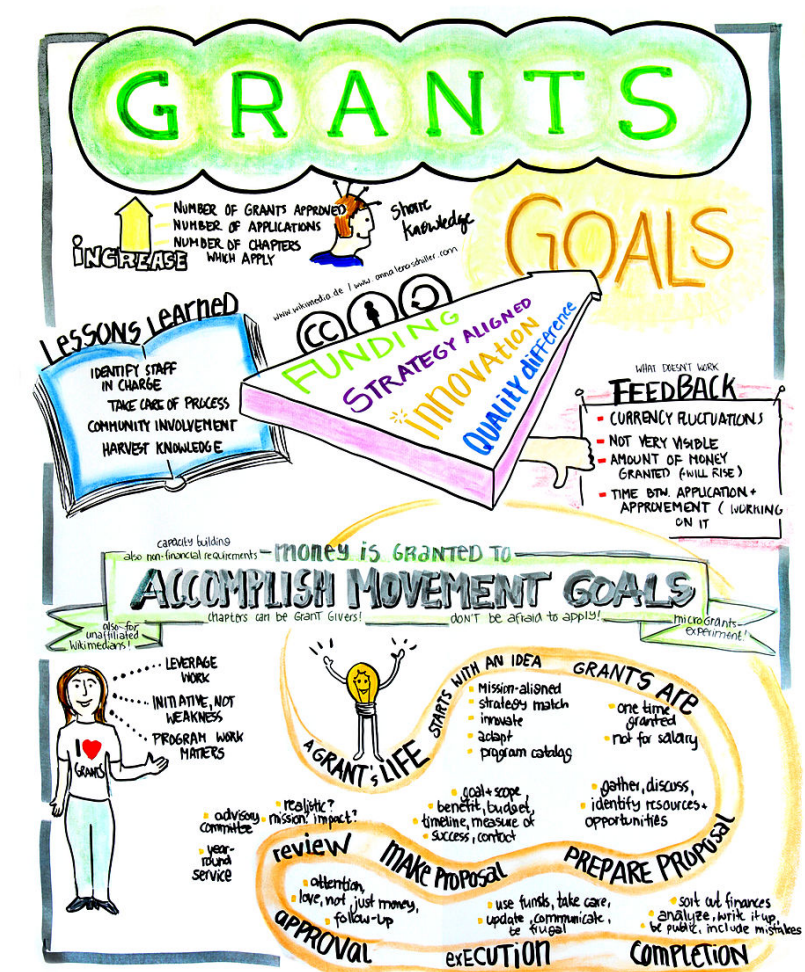
The *Neighborhood Outreach Grant* would provide Neighborhood Council recipients two annual sums of \$750 to alleviate them of the costs associated with creating newsletters, banners, and other messaging and outreach materials. Review of grant applications could occur in January and June of each year. To receive this award, the Neighborhood Councils would provide an updated copy of their bylaws and examples of the newsletters, flyers, and other materials they intend to use grant money to fund.

The *Project/Event Grant* would award recipients up to \$10,000 to use in one year. The Chair of a given Neighborhood Council would be the project/event coordinator and serve as the primary contact person in dialogue with the City about the grant application. When applying for the grant, the Chair would list the projects and/or events that their Neighborhood Council wished to work on or complete in the year. Grant applications could be submitted and reviewed each fall, September thru November. The funding received by a Neighborhood Council through this means could be used for things like neighborhood beautification projects, public safety improvements, community cleanups, neighborhood website design, community garden projects, and specific trainings for Neighborhood Councils and community members.

Project/Event Grant Contents

The application process for the Project/Event Grant entails filling out a packet that addresses when the project(s) and/or event(s) will start and the estimated time of their completion. If the grant is for an event or for multiple events, relevant dates and planning timelines should also be listed. The Neighborhood Council must provide a detailed description of the project(s) and/or event(s), explaining what each entail and where each will take place. Each Neighborhood Council applying for this grant

should describe how the project(s) and/or event(s) are expected to address the needs and desires of community members and demonstrate how the grant funding will go toward making a positive impact for the neighborhood and for the City of Tacoma as a whole. The Neighborhood Council must also explain how it plans to engage residents directly in planning and implementing project(s) and/or event(s). After these questions are answered, there will be a page for the Neighborhood Council to request City assistance. For example, a Council could request a street closure for a certain road, or express the need to rent equipment from the City for an event. To justify the amount of funding requested, each grant applicant must provide a budget sheet that indicates all cost estimates associated with the proposed project(s) and/or event(s).



Grant funding can help Neighborhood Councils collect the necessary financial resources to advance community-driven projects. ANNA LENA SCHILLER

City's Grant Review Process

Once the application window for grants closes, the City could take one month to review and make decisions prior to responding to applicants. Prior to making final decisions, a date and time would be set aside for the Neighborhood Councils to present their proposals to a panel of City staff who would evaluate each based on a rubric and certain criteria, such as the extent of local impact and relationship to the City's broader vision and goals. The City could review for project feasibility, extent of neighborhood participation, and expected project/event outcomes. To ensure community input, community members should be invited to attend these presentations and express their comments and concerns. After the panel of City staff completes evaluations for each proposal, it could also provide feedback to each Neighborhood Council and decide whether it wants to provide full- or partial-funding or to reject proposals. Based on the panel's decisions, a budget will be passed on to the Tacoma City Council for approval.

Responsibilities of Grant Recipient Neighborhood Councils

Neighborhood Councils must submit a final report within one month of the completion of each event or project approved to receive grant funding. They must document proof that City funds were used as



The City of Kirkland raises funds for its Neighborhood Safety Grant through street levies; this has allowed the City to make substantial improvements for its communities. JOE MABEL

proposed in the application and review process. They must write a summary that lists and describes achievements related to the project(s) and/or event(s) and include photos and examples of materials created each. Neighborhood Councils should also be invited to reflect on failures or shortcomings of grant program and offer suggestions on ways the application process could be improved.

Establish a Civic Service Department within the City

Not all support is financial in nature. Often, the support a program requires is less about money and more about finding the right people, equipped with the right technical and professional skillsets to plan and implement projects. We recommend that the City of Tacoma create a “Civic Service Department.” Its primary functions could be to coordinate all City of Tacoma volunteers and interns and to host service learning opportunities in partnership with local universities.

Often, the support a program requires is less about money and more about finding the right people, equipped with the right technical and professional skillsets.

Partner with the University of Washington Tacoma

Grant Writing Class

We recommend that the City work in conjunction with the University of Washington Tacoma’s Grant Writing courses and other related resources to offer grant writing classes to community members through the ‘Civic Service Department.’ These classes could provide training and professional development to the members of each Neighborhood Council to help them access additional resources and funding. The course would provide each Neighborhood Council, as well as students, a real-life opportunity to learn and practice grant writing techniques. The potential for growth of students and community members who share passion for community service is tremendous. The UWT is the perfect partner for the City as it already attends to the values of community and service, the proposed pillars of the ‘Civic Service Department.’

Create a Culture of Service: Celebrate Volunteers

The City can host an annual celebration that focuses on acknowledging the residents who donate their time to their communities and whose efforts help foster a culture of community and service. One of the frequent complaints given by residents, as well as by Neighborhood Council board members, is the lack of knowledge regarding the Neighborhood Council Program. Thus, these annual celebrations could also be part of generating broader awareness of and interest in the Neighborhood Council Program. Aspects to consider in planning for annual celebrations:

- The City promotes the celebration each year and extends an invitation to all its volunteers and interns as well as to all the residents throughout Tacoma who participate in the Neighborhood Council Program. The event provides an opportunity for social networking among individuals, organizations, and agencies.
- The location of each year’s celebration rotates through the designated neighborhoods as part of focusing on the accomplishments of a particular community and highlighting Tacoma’s diversity.
- During each celebration, organizers strive to acknowledge every person involved in their Neighborhood Councils and/or in other volunteer-based efforts and organizations that serve their neighborhoods and the city.



In many ways, this LCY project stands as an example of the work that could come from a stronger partnership between the City and the UWT.

Center for Service Learning

One of the unique features of the University of Washington Tacoma is its Center for Service Learning. This resource is dedicated to motivating students to become more civically-minded and more engaged in community-based projects as volunteers. We suggest that the City of Tacoma build a partnership with the Center for Service Learning in an effort to connect students with community services, including the Neighborhood Council Program. Such a relationship would be mutually beneficial to the City, students, and broader communities of Tacoma: Students would work on projects of interest to the City; the City would offer students invaluable, real-world exposure to the inner-workings of their intended fields; and communities of Tacoma would receive more interest from the work of students and City staff. In many ways, this LCY project stands an example of the work that could come of a stronger partnership between the City and the UWT.



The University of Washington Tacoma represents an urban-serving campus, with a physical presence that is “integral to the social, cultural, and economic wellbeing of the community” (UWT Mission Statement). The students recommend that the City partner with the UWT to offer grant writing classes to community members. LIZA HIGBEE-ROBINSON

4) REACH BEYOND NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS

In exploring the negative opinions held by many residents and even some City staff members regarding the Neighborhood Council Program, we determined to include this recommendation, that the City make substantial expansions beyond the Neighborhood Council Program. If the City is to meet residents where they are, then the City must create new pathways and opportunities for residents to gain awareness of local projects and programs and to participate in them in meaningful ways. It is important that the City hold itself accountable to the residents of Tacoma, responding to their needs, concerns, and requests. It is crucial for the City’s community engagement and outreach efforts to be performed in a manner that is culturally sensitive, consistent, and timely. It may not be possible to accomplish this work through a single model, like the Neighborhood Council Program. Rather, distinct programs, which target the needs and priorities of Tacoma’s diverse neighborhoods may be important to create.

Distinct programs, which target the needs and priorities of Tacoma’s diverse neighborhoods may be important to create.

Audit and Redefine Neighborhood Council Program

We recommend that the City perform an audit on the Neighborhood Council Program to clarify issues of accountability and to build a new program with a stronger foundation, based on clear understandings of the program’s purpose. Ideally, following a comprehensive audit of the program, the City would collaborate with each of the eight Neighborhood Councils to assess what the Neighborhood Council Program is and is not capable of doing to meet the City’s public engagement goals. The City, working with each Neighborhood Council, would then delineate the tasks and duties of the Neighborhood Councils themselves and the responsibilities of the City. We suggest that the Neighborhood Council Program’s role as advisor to the Tacoma City Council be officially clarified by the City. This is essential for the City to do to gain trust and confidence from the residents of Tacoma. We further recommend that the City assist its own departments and staff in determining their share of responsibilities to the Neighborhood Councils. This would involve a review of each department’s community engagement and outreach practices.

Los Angeles and the CLAR Project

In seeking to address the lack of trust that underlies the systemic disconnects observed during our research, we examined a case from the City of Los Angeles. LA experienced a similar lack of citizen trust when it chose to adopt a Neighborhood Council Program in 1999. The goal for this program was to help the City develop trust and avoid secession of some of its neighborhoods. LA referred to its approach in forming the program as, “the Collaborative Learning Action Research Project” (CLAR Project). The purpose of the CLAR Project was to examine how “administrative agencies [could] adapt to support and include neighborhood councils in production and delivery of city services” (Cooper 2005). LA divided the project into three parts: planning, learning and design forums, and agreement coordination. The specific objectives of the project were to (1) identify obstacles to achieving excellence in service delivery and producing citizen satisfaction, (2) design new processes to improve service delivery, and (3) create a written agreement to address service delivery using the new processes developed through the learning forums (Cooper 2005).



Los Angeles, California City Hall. Los Angeles adopted its Neighborhood Council Program in 1999 as part of broad efforts to earn the trust of its resident base.
BRION VIBBER

Create an Environment of Active Listening and Co-Production

We propose that the City continue to identify topics of local importance, including all those of concern to underrepresented and minority groups. We recommend that City staff visit neighborhoods and meet with residents and request their guidance to improve the Neighborhood Council Program, in addition to other City programs and services. Open public discussions around key issues may inspire new solutions to problems and increase resident buy-in to final decisions enacted by the City. To ensure that the City’s approach is flexible and responsive, we suggest that the City introduce an option for community members to request ad hoc listening sessions or surveys for emergent issues. Importantly, we recommend that the City prioritize a culture of transparency about how it uses community feedback. Public meetings that occur among City staff, Neighborhood Council board members, and residents of Tacoma may require the assistance of community liaisons and trained facilitators, whose work ensures equitable representation of perspectives.

Washington State University Vancouver’s Initiative for Public Deliberation Model



Washington State University Vancouver created a program for residents to analyze key issues in forums facilitated by students in deliberative formats. LAURA DUTELLE

Washington State University Vancouver established its Foley Institute for Public Policy and Public Service’s Initiative for Public Deliberation (IPD) during the spring of 2015. The initiative focused on ways “to strengthen democratic government by replacing rigid partisanship with listening and conversation.” Today, it serves as an impartial resource for the residents of Vancouver to assist in community-driven problem-solving. Residents analyze issues, help in the design of participatory events for the broader public, host forums facilitated by students, and write reports on key issues while working with a wide variety of local institutions, including local and state government agencies, school districts, and community-based organizations. Deliberation requires safe spaces for people to come together, well-reasoned information to guide their discourse, and skilled facilitators to direct the process.

We recommend that the City encourage residents’ passion for their communities by offering leadership development and other educational opportunities.

Community Engagement Trainings

We recommend that the City encourage residents’ passion for their communities by offering leadership development and other educational opportunities, some of which could be offered through partnerships developed with the UWT. Additionally, the City can contract with facilitators to run workshops around topics like: city government basics, community organizing, outreach and engagement strategies, volunteer recruitment, planning and facilitation of meetings, public speaking, politics of oppression, power analysis, and issue selection.

Enhance the Role of Community Liaisons

The City can recruit community liaisons as paid contractors to alleviate many of the linguistic and cultural barriers that currently prevent many residents from accessing their Neighborhood Councils. For example, community liaisons can co-facilitate or interpret at Neighborhood Council meetings and other events. They can also help translate materials produced only in English and work with Neighborhood Councils to canvas in their communities.

Liaisons, or permanent staff dedicated to outreach in different neighborhoods and communities, may help the City determine service priorities and ensure equitable distribution of resources through all of its neighborhoods. The City can draw upon its recent successes in the Lincoln Neighborhood Revitalization Project, which employed City staff to communicate across cultural and language barriers with local business owners (Driscoll 2015).



Amy Pow from Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department sits down with M.A. Community Planning students and residents of the South End and Eastside to discuss potential plans to redesign portions of the neighborhood to be more walkable and transit oriented. TERI THOMSON RANDALL



Community members, students, and technical experts reimagine a portion of the South End where a bus rapid transit line is planned to be developed. TERI THOMSON RANDALL

Community Resources

We encourage the City to develop an online, information clearinghouse for all community groups and organizations. Some of the people we interviewed described a climate of competition among the Neighborhood Councils, stating that the Neighborhood Councils display reluctance to promote each other’s events. Operating a public engagement hub out of the City can ensure equal promotion of opportunities and simplify information-sharing among disparate groups. We also recommend that the City consider moderating an online “wish board” where community organizations can issue requests for volunteers and in-kind donations or advertise their own resources. This will help organizations and residents understand how and where to become more involved in their communities and how to tap into available resources.

During this project, students conducted an internal alignment review of the City of Tacoma's Neighborhood Council Program by reviewing the operations of the Tacoma Neighborhood Council Program through a review of existing documents and by conducting interviews with residents and Neighborhood Council board members. Students reviewed academic articles and case studies to expand their perspectives on how neighborhood council programs form and operate. They also conducted field observations to deepen their understandings of each of Tacoma's Neighborhood Councils and the nuanced ways in which they interact with City staff. Students compared the Tacoma Neighborhood Council Program with other similar programs located in the Puget Sound region with the intent to consider different approaches to engaging residents. Their comprehensive review aided them in developing a set of recommendations for the City of Tacoma to use to improve equity and inclusion measures of the Neighborhood Council Program.

Students identified significant barriers that impede community members from accessing their Neighborhood Councils, in addition to two essential realms for the City to focus planning and other investment: opportunities for youth engagement and systemic disconnects. More specifically, the students formed a set of recommendations, which fit within a framework of four, focused categories. Their recommendations take aim at each of the key barriers, as well as at the need to create youth opportunities and mend systemic disconnects that prevent more impactful partnerships from developing between each Neighborhood Council and the City. By applying the recommendations presented within this report, the City will be able to further its goals of fostering equitable engagement of residents and aligning the Neighborhood Council Program to the strategic plan and vision, Tacoma 2025.

By applying the recommendations presented within this report, the City will be able to further its goals of fostering equitable engagement of residents and aligning the Neighborhood Council Program to the strategic plan and vision, Tacoma 2025.



To improve the Tacoma Neighborhood Council Program and increase its measures of equity and inclusion, collaboration among City staff, the eight Neighborhood Councils, and residents is required. PREXELS

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