

League of Women Voters of Tacoma-Pierce County Observer Corps

Name of Agency: City of Tacoma: State of the City Address

Date: March 6, 2019

Observer Reporting: C Rikerd

Length of Meeting: 1 hour 39 minutes

Members Present/Absent: address delivered by Mayor Victoria Woodards

Others present (i.e. media, public): address given at the UPS Fieldhouse, attended by City Council members, staff; open public meeting

Content (what is being discussed):

The video of the speech is viewable at:

<https://www.cityoftacoma.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=169&pageId=6538>

The city government will cultivate community partner collaboration, seeking partners to take active roles in shaping the city. 2018 saw the following improvements to the city.

The Public Works Department accomplished in 2018: 659 city block streets repaired, 1500 ADA ramps built, 4 miles of bike lanes established, and 3600 potholes permanently repaired. The City has \$52.3 million dollars in funding and another \$3.9 million from partner organizations for environmental work.

The Tacoma Dome was refreshed and new seating installed. In 2019 the sound and lighting system and exterior finish will be upgraded.

The city is expanding the urban forest initiative and other environmental improvements with a budgeted \$250 million and a \$170 million grant to move toward the 30% canopy goal.

Tacoma Public Utilities participated in the budgeting talks, held joint Council sessions (discussing Click! and the city internet service), and held talks at Neighborhood Councils.

Tacoma Public Library has restored hours of operation. A feasibility study is underway to explore restoring libraries to the Hilltop and Eastside. Mayor Woodards announced the Tacoma Reads book selection for 2019.

In transportation, the Link extension projects are moving forward and Pierce Transit is studying rapid bus service from downtown to Parkland and Spanaway. The possibility of fast ferry service is being explored. Transit support is being examined as a means to develop housing closer to the places people work.

The City is collaborating with partners in law enforcement, regional county governments and health agencies to address the opioid addiction crisis. Mayor Woodards attended the National League of Cities Mayors' Institute on Opioids. Tacoma has \$400,000 from the state for the Tacoma Fire Department to fund education in using Naloxone in opioid overdose cases, and to help with the costs of opioid crisis response.

The city has collaborated with the Puyallup Tribe on many fronts, including holding joint government meetings, and the Tideflats Subarea Planning. The Tribal flag now hangs in the Council chambers. The rebuilt Puyallup River bridge will be renamed the Fishing Wars Memorial Bridge and Crossing in recognition of the history of the conflict over fishing rights.

The city has successfully collaborated with Metro parks in the construction of the new Eastside Community Center. Further collaboration is ongoing to address the aging infrastructure on the waterfront, making it more accessible and planning for sea level rise.

Mayor Woodards was also one of 40 mayors to attend the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Institute, which provided resources for a local innovation team on perceptions of safety in the community. Partners in this team are Tacoma Police, the Puyallup Tribe, Tacoma Ministerial Alliance, and other community groups.

The city is working with the state on a plan to add charging stations that use hydro-power for electric cars. The Mayor also wants to work on infrastructure to support more bike and pedestrian traffic.

Mayor Woodards spoke of the importance of Joint Base Lewis-McChord to Tacoma and Pierce County, as the number one employer. The economic impact of the base in our area is estimated by a study done at UW Tacoma to be over \$8 billion.

The City partnered with Federal Congressmen to seek legislation for regulations for humane treatment of immigrants detained here. The council also established and funded a legal defense fund for immigrants detained in the private prison here. A Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs was formed and will host a meeting Seattle and King County to support immigrants and refugees. A city staff position has been created for multilingual outreach to immigrants.

The Mayor addressed the increasing number of homeless residents due to the conversion of low income housing to market rate units. In response to the high eviction rates the city office of Equity and Human Rights crafted the Tenant Rights legislation which was passed by the Council in 2018. As of February 1 landlords must give 120 day notice of eviction and relocation assistance if a property is being renovated or torn down for conversion to market rate units. No cause evictions must have a 60 day notice, and rent increases must also have 60 day notices.

In 2018 the Business Advisory Council studied how city policy, series and communication impact businesses.

The Mayor praised the code enforcement officers for clearing over 1,000 cases. The current response time for code enforcement actions is only 14 days.

The city also formed a Youth Task Force to involve young residents in civic causes. The original plan was for 16 middle or high schoolers to participate. Applicants for the program reached 126, with 83 currently engaged in civic projects one Saturday a month.

The Mayor is scheduling Coffee With the Mayor events over the next months in each area of the city to meet and talk with residents about their concerns. The schedule is here: <https://www.cityoftacoma.org/cms/one.aspx?portalId=169&pageId=170522>

The greatest challenges the city faces are the opioid epidemic, increasing homelessness, decreasing livability, and environmental challenges.

Tacoma needs more living wage jobs. The 2 fastest growing Pierce County industries have seasonal employee fluctuations that are responsible for increases in unemployment and financial instability.

Too many young workers are in ‘gig’ economy work situations that starve the city of needed stability to develop future civic leaders. Tacoma received a \$200k EPA grant for environmental work force development that will train 54 students and place 39 graduates in environmental jobs in the city.

The city is working to reduce barriers to businesses through the Economic Development Plan. The Plan stipulates that green jobs should be a Tacoma priority. The Business Advisory council is working to simplify permitting for new development in residential and commercial building. The city would also like to focus on retaining small businesses that employ 5 – 50 people.

Affordable housing is a rising problem in Tacoma. The rent on apartments increased 17% between 2016 – 2018, and the price of a house increased over 33%. Based on a computation of fair market value (by UW Tacoma) workers in the median salary range in 10 of the 16 most common Pierce County occupations cannot afford market rate apartment rental without being ‘cost-burdened’ (over 30% of monthly income), not even a studio apartment. Over 50% of all Tacoma residents are cost-burdened with housing prices. Even with an annual income of \$50 – 75,000, 38% of home owners and 21% of renters are cost-burdened.

The Affordable Housing Action Strategy (AHAS) was approved with 4 key approaches: create new housing, keep existing housing affordable and in good repair, help residents stay in current housing, and reducing barriers to finding housing. The city would like to create a \$1.2 million housing trust fund, and expand the AHAS plan to other towns in Pierce County.

The city will be re-examining the use of the current tax exemption plan for new housing developments to create more affordable housing.

Public Meetings of interest to League – i.e., were there any public meetings announced that you think League members may be interested in attending and/or becoming involved with the issue?

Coffee With the Mayor Events

<https://www.cityoftacoma.org/cms/one.aspx?portalId=169&pageId=170522>

Process & Protocol (Observations about participants, conduct, and procedures of the meeting, and appropriate accommodations for disabled in sight hearing and physical):

The Mayor praised each council member for their work on special projects and committees. The address was very well received by those attending.

Does anything relate to League priorities or positions? If so, do you recommend local League action?

The statement about re-examining the use of tax exemption rules for new apartment development is good news. At least 3 very large new developments received exemptions in 2018 for units that are far above the means of anyone earning an average wage. Tax exemptions should only be granted to developers building low rent units, especially in the \$300 - \$600 range. The League may want to engage in serious lobby effort for this.

Labeling rents of \$1,000 per month and up as affordable is simply untenable.