

**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY
OBSERVER REPORT**

City of Tacoma – Study Session & Council Meeting
November 24, 2020
Observer: Ann Williams

Members Present: Woodards, Blocker, Walker, Thoms, McCarthy, Hines, Beale, Ushka
Members Absent: Hunter

This report is based on the budget deliberation portions of the above meetings.

The main thrust of the Study Session was continued discussion about the Fire Department budget. To summarize, the original budget proposal included a loss of three fire engines in 2021 and two in 2022, from a current total of sixteen. The fire chief then proposed bringing BLS transport service into the Fire Department (which is currently contracted out), which would raise Department revenues. This in addition to an upwardly revised revenue forecast, resulted in two proposed amendments to the original 2021-2022 budget.

The first would result in no loss of a fire engine and postponement of Fire Department BLS transport service until 2022, when three such units would be added. (A total of five is eventually required.) This proposal is about \$3 million more expensive than proposal two, which would reduce the number of engines in service by one and add two BLS transport units by April, 2021 then three additional BLS transport units in November, 2021.

Among council members there was considerable despair about the prospect of reducing engine service, when the last several years have been spent reversing the loss of service that resulted from the Great Recession. On the final vote during the Council Meeting proposal One lost 5-3. Those voting against it were mainly influenced by the additional cost. With this defeat proposal Two passed unanimously.

Mayor Woodards spoke at length about her commitment to scour the budget for the additional funds needed (\$5 million for the biennium) to negate the need to retire one fire engine, which will not happen until April, 2021.

Before the final budget vote Councilwoman Walker spoke about her relief that several important services had been spared or augmented, including continued support for the housing trust fund, expanded behavioral health services, food security and rental assistance, the beginning of the new Community Safety Department, and restored library funding. The final budget passed 6-2.