

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY OBSERVER REPORT

By Lydia Zepeda

City of Tacoma City Council Telephone meeting

April 24, 2020

Called to order at 2:03 PM

Council members present: Beale, Blocker, Hines, Hunter, McCarthy, Ushka, Walker, Woodards, Thoms absent, joins meeting a few minutes before the end.

No video, audio only via telephone.

Briefing Items

1. Letter to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement regarding the health of the detainees at the Northwest ICE Processing Center. Requests immediate release of Washington State residents who do not pose a public safety risk or are being held for non-criminal reasons. Requests consulting with the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department on COVID-19 precautions and ensure that any positive test results are reported as soon as possible. States that an outbreak at the Northwest ICE Processing Center would tax City emergency response resources and have implications for the health care system in our community. Passed unanimously.
2. Support for letter drafted by Port of Tacoma and Northwest Seaport Alliance regarding the importance of the trade relationship with Alaska and showing support and solidarity during the time of COVID-19. Our ports account for 80% of container volume for the Port of Alaska in Anchorage. Passed unanimously.
3. Update on the status and impact of COVID-19 and the City's response including:

Jackie Bauer states that given anticipated economic impact, they have been conducting analyses for public utilities and cost reductions: implement a hold on hiring, reduction in spending, e.g hold on projects that are not critical.

Chris Robinson of Tacoma Power discussed how the virus will impact Tacoma power. TP is the lowest cost provider in the region. During Stay at Home 7% sales reduction: looks like usage during the holidays because people are at home. They expect reduced activity when quarantine is over. Examining the last 4 recessions, they expect 3.5- 12% decrease in sales over next 4 years, this will affect liquidity. They are rethinking their capital plan to improve liquidity to avoid large rate increases. They are putting a hiring freeze and reducing expenses by \$18 million this year and \$30 million next year. There will be some difficult decisions.

Scott, Superintendent of Tacoma Water on impact of COVID 19. Tacoma water supply is safe. Treatment systems can remove virus. Overall water demand is stable: there has been a 10% increase in residential use and 40% drop in commercial use. They are planning for the quarantine until end of the second quarter. They are watching trends. There was a delay in

billing in March. Indicated that the Governor's call to restart construction will stress the system. There may be delays in service requests. Data on the prior recession predicts overall reduction in development. Will need to prioritize expenditures and capital projects through 2021 -22.

Dale of Tacoma Rail: Last year was our best revenue year. We have a cash reserve at twice the level required. We do not need to adjust our workforce. We have prioritized our projects and have approved budgets. Our customer base is sound. Some projects may be delayed but largest project (by US Oil) continues. Open Network Express, will bring another string of trains in mid May. BNFS will increase its train lengths, a 20% increase in train size and business.

Jackie: Click migration occurred April 1-15. The city is working on how to get low income students who do not have access free internet. City staff working with Rainier Connect and Tacoma Public Schools to support kids with low access. At this point they are trying to identify households with low connectivity and get them free internet during COVID-19 crisis.

Questions:

Ushka and Walker thank folks for updates.

Beals: constituents called worried they are getting bills from Click! and afraid they will lose cable with Rainier Connect. It was suggested that they may be receiving the final bill from Click! since migration went until April 15.

Linda Stewart, Director of Neighborhood Services, discussed rental assistance and senior meals.

As of April 23, there were 473 senior meals picked up at Beacon and 824 at Lighthouse 824. Pick-up replaces meals at Senior activity centers which are were closed. Next week they will start delivery of senior meals to those who can't pick up meals.

City is increasing money to food banks by double or triple the amount they usually give. (Amount not stated).

The city rental assistance program was launched this week. This is a one time award of a maximum of \$1000; there is \$1.2 million in housing trust funds, ie enough 1200 people. The city will not be tracking or providing information about immigration status of applicants. The application period is from April 22 to May 6, and funds will be chosen by lottery. There is a target to allot of 45% to people of color. A portion of the funds will be allocated to nonprofits to give out directly. As of this morning there were 266 applicants received by LASA (Living Access Support Alliance). 2 applicants requested language assistance; this revealed a glitch in the application system. LASA can get them language translations. 93 people who requested funds were not residents of Tacoma and were directed to county resources. There will be weekly updates. If more funds are provided they will continue.

Ushka and Hunter thank presenter.

No questions by any council member.

Thoms finally joined.

Meeting adjourned at 2:45 pm.

Closed session followed.