

OBSERVER REPORT FORM

Tacoma City Council Economic Development Committee

Date: April 27, 2021

Name of Observer: Jan Furey

Meeting called to order at (time): 10:04 AM

Councilmembers Present:

Robert Thom
Conor McCarthy
Keith Blocker

Others present:

Brian Haynes, President of Rainier Connect
Jeff Robinson, Director, Tacoma City Community and Economic Development
Kate Larsen, Library Director for Tacoma Public Library
Ernest Goody, Director, Infrastructure/Cloud Service, Tacoma Public Schools
Ed Grassia, Chief Information Officer, Tacoma Public Schools
Jennifer Kammerzell, Principal Engineer, Tacoma City Public Works
Jana Magoon, Planning Manager, Tacoma Planning and Development Services

Briefing Items

1. 21-0403 **Broadband – How it is Working for Tacoma’s Residents, Business and Schools**

- Brian Haynes updated the Council members on the broadband company’s management of the Tacoma City Click Network system. He said that Rainier had expanded the broadband system to a two-way streaming network for its customers and had beefed up its funding for capital expenditures. Rainier is also upgrading speed packages for families who pay for the services at \$10 per month. Broadband services in Tacoma had been expanded to deliver access to families with low incomes and Rainier is working with Tacoma Public Schools to expand services to its students. Brian admitted, when probed by Robert Thoms, that there is still a digital divide between those families who are unable to access the broadband service because they lack the devices or access capability. Robert Thoms asked if the City could do more to get federal resources to improve internet access for low-income kids. Brian said that all of the federal resources available to Tacoma have been spent. Most additional federal money is now being directed to rural communities.
- Kate Larsen said the issue of internet access is still a “socio-economic” issue that involves larger economic and legal issues such as language barriers and immigration status.
- Ernest Goody updated the Council on Tacoma Public School internet access capabilities. He said that the School District does not have data on how or where the students

actually connect to the Schools website. Conor McCarthy asked what the City could do to leverage the City resources to help Rainier Connect and Tacoma Public Schools to improve access for all kids to the internet and close the “digital divide”.

- Ed Grassia said that Tacoma Schools have provided the computers to all of its students, but the key is still connecting these computers to the Schools website. Tacoma Schools has moved to a cloud-based learning system and students need to connect from home. Tacoma Schools will need assistance to make sure this happens after this year.
- Brian Haynes said that Rainier Connect will continue to work with the City and Tacoma Public Schools to improve services for all Tacoma families in its service area.
- Keith Blocker said that the City and Rainier Connect need to do more to identify the data regarding demographics and neighborhoods to understand how to close the digital divide.

2. 21-0404 Outdoor Business Options

- Jana Magoon gave an update of the City’s Temporary Curbside dining program. The curbside dining permit options for restaurants include temporary and permanent sidewalk permits. The program will be extended through Labor Day.
- Jennifer Kammerzell said that the City has learned from its experience with this program. Some of the things learned are that the City needs more staff to monitor progress and compliance with the program. She also said that historic neighborhoods with narrow sidewalks and hilly environments are more difficult areas to set up outdoor dining. The City also needs more road-side load zones for access and use by different demographic groups such as the handicapped and bikers.
- Conor McCarthy said that he was impressed with the Puyallup outside diner program. He said that Puyallup had constructed platforms for its restaurants to use for outdoor dining. Robert Thom said that Tacoma does not have the cost capacity to construct outdoor platforms similar to size and quantity done in Puyallup.
- Robert Thom asked if the City would make the curbside dining program a permanent option for restaurants after the pandemic ends. Jennifer said that Public Works and Planning are looking at how to sustain the current program over the long term.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public or written comments presented.

ADJOURNMENT: Motion to adjourn the meeting was approved at 11:34 am