



Whitney Stevens Urbanist Questionnaire 2025

Tacoma Mayor

What are your top three priorities to achieve in your term?

First, in recent years, the City of Tacoma has paid out over \$35 million in lawsuits related to law enforcement conduct. We cannot build a thriving city without trust between our community and those sworn to protect it. As your mayor, I will acknowledge the pain felt by so many in our city, the frustrations felt by those wearing the badge, and begin the process of rebuilding trust. Through community-led meetings and open dialogue, we will create a shared vision of effective and just public safety. Second, families are being crushed by unaffordable childcare. Kids deserve a safe place to be themselves, learn, and grow —regardless of their age or their family's circumstances. As mayor, I will expand city-supported summer programming to ensure more families have access to reliable, enriching childcare. Finally, Project 2025 is being implemented at an alarming pace, threatening the core of our democratic values and civil liberties. I am alarmed at the effects on our community. The Mayor of Tacoma must be a bulwark against these forces. I will stand firm to protect our LGBTQIA+ community, defend reproductive rights, ensure accountability at the Northwest Detention Center, and safeguard Tacoma's international trade relationships.

How will you boost housing options, particularly for families of all incomes to live near where they work or study? How will you expand shelter, emergency housing, permanent supportive housing? How do you weigh community objections with housing goals for your jurisdiction, while encouraging engagement from neighbors?



The housing crisis is the result of decades of disinvestment, policy failures, and a lack of political courage. Wages have not kept up with the cost of living, our healthcare system is broken, mental health and addiction services are decentralized and underfunded, and housing has become a commodity rather than a human right.

We need bold, systemic solutions like building more deeply affordable units, exploring social housing, implementing rent stabilization, and expanding shelter and transitional housing options that treat people with dignity. Tacoma has carried the weight of the unhoused for the entirety of Pierce County. Using my deep relationships with current elected leaders, I will champion current efforts to rebalance this.

Conflict about housing projects is something I have personal experience with. An old church building across the street from me is slated to be redeveloped and some neighbors have fought it. We must always keep in mind that most pushback is out of fear, and that is valid. We must do what we can to address these fears. Sometimes issues like parking, traffic, or noise are real, and we need to find solutions without alienating. The best outcomes happen when all voices are heard and feel valued.

Do you support adding progressive revenue sources? Which ones would you support to fund your priorities? Or what cuts would you make to balance budgets facing increasing strain under Trump?

As we all know, Washington's tax system remains one of the most regressive in the nation, placing disproportionate burdens on lower and middle-income families while limiting funding for essential services. As Mayor, I would advocate for



comprehensive reform including exploring capital gains taxes and putting income tax on the table through initiative.

As Mayor, I would ensure Tacoma is on the front of this critical conversation, fighting for a funding system that creates a more equitable tax structure for all Washington residents. I would use my platform to educate voters about the harm our current system perpetuates.

As for cuts, I think that Speaker Jenkins described it well during a town hall meeting last session. We need to cut without destroying the programs so we can bring things back quickly. I'm an advocate for participatory budgeting. Not just "here's a chunk of money to decide where it goes" but real, radical transparency about the budget decisions. In particular, young people deserve a voice in decisions that affect their future. I support creating structured opportunities for students to participate in allocating portions of city budgets, teaching civic engagement while bringing fresh perspectives to our resource allocation.

What do you think is the most important strategy your jurisdiction can pursue to limit cost increases and make the region affordable to live in? How would you go about implementing that strategy?

I studied urban planning at the University of Washington Tacoma and have a deep-rooted belief in public transportation, density, and equity.

Home in Tacoma passed last year and accomplished many zoning changes to address the "missing middle" of housing. I'm excited to see how it works upon



implementation, and make adjustments as needed. We need to explore bold solutions such as social housing or community land trusts, potentially merging sustainable housing with long-term affordability covenants and green building standards. Tackling these issues through public policy is exciting, not intimidating, to me.

We must also continue protecting tenants from being priced out. We've had exciting changes such as rent stabilization and the tenant's bill of rights in the past two years. I'm excited to see the impact these policies can have and continue advocating for these types of legal changes.

Affordability is not only about housing costs, but also wages and transportation. As Mayor, I will work to connect affordable housing development to workforce hubs and invest in public transit that connects residents to opportunity. I support unionization and wage increases so people can afford to stay housed, and I believe in taxing the wealthy to fund the services we need.

Traffic deaths are rising across Washington state, with pedestrians composing an increasing share statewide. What is your approach to making our streets safer for all users?

Our Tacoma must be a place where every kid can safely walk down the street. My family walks and bikes regularly; Tacoma's infrastructure needs to ensure these pedestrian options are available to all Tacomans.



My husband serves as Co-Chair of the Transportation Commission and is a passionate advocate for Vision Zero. To bring Vision Zero to fruition we need to be serious about implementing it. As it stands, certain staff, programs, and divisions are focused on this, but broadly it is not a priority. The City Council and the Mayor need to set the goals for the City and hold the City Manager accountable to them. This is the only way to get Vision Zero, or any other initiative, to be implemented.

But all of this is meaningless without funds. Tacoma voters failed to pass our streets initiative, and failed a fire levy. That tells me one thing clearly - voters do not trust the City to spend tax dollars wisely. Tacoma voters have proven over and over they are willing to pay for things they feel are important but, in the years since COVID, the City has had serious missteps that have contributed to a growing lack of public trust.

What is your approach to improving public safety over the next five years? How will you actualize it?

What I've heard in Tacoma is that many residents do not feel safe contacting the police for help and actively avoid involving them whenever possible. Our police feel increasingly alienated from our residents, straining this relationship further.

In my first year, I will lead a series of meetings to acknowledge that the pain felt in our community is a true and endemic issue, and start healing our divides. Collectively, we must build a vision of effective community safety. We cannot realize public safety goals until we are all working together. I will present Tacomans with a plan based on this work that moves us toward this vision. This plan must include



evidence based practices, community values, and measurable goals. Every person in our City deserves to feel safe in their daily life.

I support meaningful oversight of policing and the ability for complaints about police misconduct to be investigated independently. There cannot be trust without a meaningful system of accountability and transparency. As a Certified Public Records Officer, I've navigated thorny questions of records retention, release, and redaction for records with tremendous legal weight. The access and transparency of our government records is central to WA State law.

In what ways could your city's comprehensive plan go further, and what would you push for to improve it during your tenure?

I would push for us to think of our comprehensive plan beyond the simple land use zoning designation. Two projects in the port area - the Northwest Detention Center and the LNG plant - have cost the City a tremendous amount of time and money over the past decade. These projects are areas of extreme community concern, and continue to drain precious resources from our already stretched budgets. If we can view our comprehensive plan more fully - envision what we would like, or not like, to see in the future in our City, we might be able to avoid some of these conflicts in the future.

This strategy can also work to build community buy-in up front for non-traditional housing options, streamline development approval in the future, and achieve climate change goals. Every person I have spoken to on the campaign trail wants to see solutions to our shared problems, but bringing them into the process is the tricky



part. Sometimes it is as simple as changing the time or location of a meeting, using plain english, translating materials, or providing food.

What is your approach to finding common ground between slow growth advocates opposing change in their neighborhoods and pro-housing advocates pressing to meet broader community needs?

We must always keep in mind that most pushback is out of fear, and that is valid. We have to be willing to have hard conversations and push to the root of the problem without alienating. Issues like parking, traffic, or noise have real impacts on current residents, and we need to find solutions. Building dense housing without parking may be the right choice for long term, but in the short term, residents are living without the services and transit needed to stop having a car. This pushes parking onto the street and creates real impacts and a strong anti-density feeling. We must create a solution for these immediate problems without compromising our long term goals.

I truly believe the best outcomes happen when all voices are heard and feel valued. Years ago, I served as the youngest President of the Downtown Merchants Group. While in this position we implemented parking meters in downtown Tacoma. This incredibly complex, controversial project required bringing multiple stakeholders together, maintaining cohesive focus as the project moved forward, and being able to adapt the project after implementation. Not everyone was happy, but everyone was heard and their input made the end solution better.



Planned upcoming expansions to Sound Transit services will reshape the transportation and connectivity of the region. How would you, as mayor, support this regional effort to expand multi-modal transit? How will you foster a positive relationship between Sound Transit, local businesses, and residents?

As a strong transit advocate, I see my role as Mayor of Tacoma to advocate for the growth, coordination, and use of transit. Tacoma is part of the Sound Transit and Pierce Transit service area and we have seen strong ridership growth. It is vital that our community leadership be engaged in the oversight and planning of regional transit so our needs are met. Pierce Transit is expanding BRT, we just completed the Hilltop Extension of Link Light Rail, and we have a thriving Amtrak/Sounder train station. All of these are contributing to the growing vitality of Tacoma.

In my capacity as President of the Downtown Merchants Group, I served on a variety of Sound Transit advisory boards related to the Point Defiance bypass, Link Light Rail extension, and small business impacts. I have a deep-rooted belief in public transportation, density, and equity. In my travels I've seen how greater transit use can contribute to connected communities and better health outcomes. My family regularly avoids cars by walking and biking, and I support a non-car centered approach to our cities. I will work at all levels - Tacoma, Sound Transit, PSRC, JMAC - to ensure that transit is valued and prioritized.