



**TO:** Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager  
**FROM:** Melanie Harding, Chief Policy Analyst to the Mayor, City Manager's Office  
**COPY:** City Council and City Clerk  
**SUBJECT:** Ordinance – Amendment to Declaration of Public Health Emergency related to homeless encampments  
**DATE:** April 15, 2021

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### **SUMMARY AND PURPOSE:**

An ordinance which would:

- Declare the Mayor and City Council's support of Pierce County and the Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness in their commitment to protect public health and safety by providing everyone experiencing homelessness a safe and secure space to sleep with resources to address their health and sanitation needs by November 2021, allowing sidewalks, parks, and right of ways to be available for those purposes they were designed to serve.
- Direct the City Manager or her designee to ensure appropriate city staff participation in Pierce County's Ad Hoc Committee, established to develop a countywide, Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness over the next six months.
- Amend the declaration of public health emergency and the emergency authority originally granted pursuant to Ordinance 28430 – and as subsequently amended by Ordinance No. 28457, Ordinance No. 28477, Ordinance No. 28565, and Ordinance No. 28637 – to add City Council review of the progress toward meeting the condition to end the declaration of emergency on an annual basis.

### **COUNCIL SPONSORS:**

Mayor Victoria Woodards, Deputy Mayor Keith Blocker, Councilmember John Hines

### **BACKGROUND:**

The Mayor and City Council have increasingly been concerned around the number of people residing in makeshift shelters or vehicles in parks, streets, and other rights of way as well as the need to address the health, safety, and wellbeing of those vulnerable residents. These concerns have been mirrored by an increased number of constituent questions and concerns being expressed on this issue, which is reflected in number of TacomaFIRST 311 requests related to homelessness since the declaration of emergency was enacted in 2017.

To address these needs, the Neighborhood and Community Services (NCS) Department worked with community partners to bring 230 temporary shelter beds online over the winter and established new shelter space for up to 125 residents at 2 Temporary Emergency Micro Shelter sites administered by the Low Income Housing Institute. At the same time, shelter capacities have been reduced due to the need to provide additional space in order to safely shelter each guest. To address litter and sanitation issues at or near encampments, Environmental Services launched the Purple Bag Pilot for waste pick up on City-owned open space property and NCS activated a pilot program for temporary hygiene stations. NCS also activated three vendor contracts to pick up hazardous waste and debris at or around encampments. The City has performed three encampment removals since March 2020 (these activities are significantly restricted by CDC guidance related COVID-19) and 194 litter/trash/debris cleanups in and around encampments.



The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened awareness and increased the level of concern with neighbors experiencing homelessness having access to resources to address their health and hygiene needs. Additionally, while there is currently rental assistance funding and potential state legislative action under development to address the issue, the eventual end of State and Federal eviction and foreclosure moratoria enacted in response to COVID-19 have the potential to compound existing issues related to housing and homelessness in unforeseen ways.

On Tuesday, March 23, 2021, the Pierce County adopted Resolution No. R2021-30s, establishing the “Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness Ad Hoc Committee” of ten members to facilitate further planning to end homelessness. In accordance with Pierce County Resolution No. R2021-30s, the City of Tacoma has been invited to identify a representative to participate in the Ad Hoc Committee established to develop a countywide “Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness” in no more than six months following passage of the County resolution. This work is moving quickly: The Pierce County Human Services Department is proceeding to establish an Ad Hoc Committee now to assist in developing an Action Plan to present to the Council on or before Friday, April 23.

Simultaneously, while the City has been operating under the declaration of emergency outlined below, the City’s Neighborhood and Community Services Department is currently developing a formal 5-year, Tacoma-specific strategy to address homelessness, to be substantially complete by September 2021. The effort will include outreach to key community stakeholders and the County, the Continuum of Care and the Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness. Key components of this plan include:

- Addressing racial disparities and systemic causes of homelessness;
- Amplifying regional collaborations, community partnerships, and the continuum of care;
- Aligning efforts with Affordable Housing Action Strategy; and
- Identifying trauma-informed interventions to meet needs of specific populations.

On May 9, 2017, the City Council enacted Ordinance No. 28430 (the “Emergency Ordinance”) declaring a state of public health emergency related to the conditions of homeless encampments and authorizing such actions are reasonable and necessary to mitigate the conditions giving rise to the public emergency. Upon issuance of the declaration of emergency, the City began implementation of a Temporary Emergency Aid and Shelter Plan, which was formally approved by the City Council on June 9, 2017, with an estimated cost of \$3.4 million through December 2017.

On October 3, 2017, the City Council determined that the conditions giving rise to the public emergency were still present, and adopted Ordinance No. 28457, extending the declaration of emergency through December 31, 2017. On December 12, 2017, Council approved Ordinance No. 28477, extending the declaration of emergency to December 31, 2018, and authorizing additional expenditures of nearly \$7.0 million through the end of 2018. City Council approved Ordinance No. 28565, extending the declaration of emergency through the end of 2019, and providing continued funding for the Temporary Emergency Aid and Shelter Plan. On November 19, 2019, the City Council approved Ordinance No. 28637, adopting additional findings and extending the declaration of emergency to remain in effect until such time as there is shelter availability for 95 percent of unsheltered individuals in Tacoma as noted in the annual Point in Time Count. This Ordinance would require Mayor and Council review of the progress toward to meeting the condition to end the declaration of emergency on an annual basis.



### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/ CUSTOMER RESEARCH:

City staff have engaged those experiencing homelessness and surrounding neighbors and businesses in each effort taken to date. This legislation includes strategic planning efforts which will include community engagement and work with regional government partners, advocates, and those experiencing homelessness. These efforts include collaboration with Pierce County and other cities to develop a comprehensive homeless strategy, and the City's development of a five-year homeless strategy.

### 2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

#### Equity and Accessibility: *(Mandatory)*

Nationally, people of color – and Black people in particular – are disproportionately represented among those experiencing homelessness. A January 2018 report from Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities (SPARC) in Pierce County, noted that “although Black people comprise 13% of the population and 26% of those experiencing poverty, they account for more than 40% of the overall homeless population” nationally. Additionally, the report analyzed Pierce County Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data and found that “Black/African American people represent the HMIS population at a rate of 26.3%, despite only making up 6.6% of the general population in this area.”

#### **Livability:** *Equity Index Score:* Moderate Opportunity

Improve health outcomes and reduce disparities, in alignment with the community health needs assessment and CHIP, for all Tacoma residents

Increase positive public perception of safety and overall quality of life.

#### **Explain how your legislation will affect the selected indicator(s).**

The Emergency Declaration provides the City the ability to more rapidly adapt policy and allocate funding to provide shelter and resources to people living in encampments in Tacoma. Encampments pose safety and health concerns for people living in them and around them as they create concerns about human waste, garbage, exposure to communicable diseases, exposure to violence and other human health concerns. Collaborating with community partners on strategic solutions will allow the City and other stakeholders ensure well informed and effective next steps.

### ALTERNATIVES:

Presumably, your recommendation is not the only potential course of action; please discuss other alternatives or actions that City Council or staff could take. Please use table below.

Alternative(s)	Positive Impact(s)	Negative Impact(s)
1. Take no action/ Do not pass	The City will continue existing investments in addressing homelessness.	We may not be aware of opportunities to achieve greater efficiencies or outcomes through collaboration. The declaration will not have a condition of annual Council review of progress made.



**EVALUATION AND FOLLOW UP:**

Annual review of progress in meeting the conditions to end the declaration of public health emergency will be brought back to Council annually.

**STAFF/SPONSOR RECOMMENDATION:**

The sponsors recommend that the Council pass this ordinance. Due to the County's fast pace on work of the Ad Hoc Committee established to develop a countywide "Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness" and the continuing and urgent needs for quick action on the part of the City, this ordinance is being presented to Council as 'emergency' legislation requiring only one reading and becoming effective upon passage.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact at this time. Participation in County strategic planning efforts is anticipated to be covered through existing staff resources. The resources for City's strategy development are included in the existing Neighborhood and Community Services Budget for the 2021-2022 biennium. Specific strategies identified as part of the 5-year City strategy to address homelessness may result in requests for mid-biennium budget modifications.

**Are there financial costs or other impacts of not implementing the legislation?**

**YES**

There are impacts to public health as well as potential financial impacts to businesses located near encampments.

**Will the legislation have an ongoing/recurring fiscal impact?**

**No**

**Will the legislation change the City's FTE/personnel counts?**

**No**