

## **Budget comments compiled from Aug. 16 through Aug. 24, 2005**

The following is a compilation of the budget comments that have been submitted through the Online Newsroom and through Take5 over the period of Aug. 16 through Aug. 24. The compilation is in reverse chronological order, and the comments are not edited. From Aug. 16 through Aug. 24 we have had 22 additional comments through the newsroom and 32 additional comments through Take5. The total number of comments since the survey began is 52 from the Online Newsroom and 52 from Take5.

### **Comments from the Online Newsroom**

#### **1. To the City Manager and City Council;**

I read the presentation slideshow and several articles regarding the proposed changes to taxes in Tacoma. There are several points that I take issue with.

Taxes that support the Tacoma school district are the major portion of my tax bill. To decrease the city tax, you have proposed spreading the tax over everyone, including the Tacoma school district. What that represents is taking a tax that is currently in place and replacing it with a bond that requires 60% to pass. Since school bonds have only narrowly passed in Tacoma, this probably means that school services to children (such as teaching staff, support services, funds for materials and supplies, etc. will have to be cut back. As a public school teacher, I have seen this happen more often than I would care to think about. Meanwhile, the savings are passed on to people whose tax burden has been decreased by ??? (how much?) This shifts taxes again to the people least able to pay it from the people more able to pay it.

The whole idea of pay for service is incredibly offensive. No doubt you have heard from library patrons. People who have money don't need the library, they buy their own books. The library is there to support education--to improve the public discourse--to support the democracy. An ignorant public votes ignorantly. Many of the current library patrons will not be able to pay a fee. And what happens to renters?

Sorry. I realize that there is possibly a problem. The policies of the Bush administration have cut deeply at the state and local level. For some reason, the population has been convinced that it is wrong to pay taxes. Instead of supporting our government, we seem to be out for everything we can wrest from the government. The rich are better at this than are the poor. I don't have a problem paying taxes. I expect this from a democracy. What do you think about trying to educate the citizens? I don't mean the "sky is falling" approach the Bush administration is leveling at Social Security (echoed in the presentation slideshow); I mean the part where you say you'll explain where the money goes on the tax bill. Do that part. Over 60% of Tacoma voters still agree to support the public schools, maybe you'll see people agree to support the city government. Be sure to include the money paid out to the top employees.

Thanks for the opportunity to respond. I truly hope someone reads this.

Linda McCone

**2.** Eliminate the City's total quality office, as well as the Training Office.

Have SAP (from BIS) go to TPU. Have IT (from BIS) remain in General Government, under General Services.

Don't have the Government Relations Office in the City Manager's Office. Have it be a division within another department....Legal?

Have Fire and Police become one department.

Have Public Works' water division go under TPU.

Have Public Works' refuse division go under TPU.

Eliminate all Assistant Directors.

**3.** If user fees are established for police, fire, and library, what happens to the concept of "for the public good"? I have known individuals, now contributing adults, whose families would have had difficulty paying user fees. However, in the cities in which they lived, they could access services. Part of the reason many of them became contributing adults who hold responsible jobs (i.e., principal of a school, coach of youth teams, instructor at a community college) and care about their communities is because they had opportunities provided by their communities to pursue their dreams through such activities as reading every book in one town's library for free, attending youth camps at greatly reduced rates, or swimming in the city's pools with passes given to their families. Their parents could not have paid a "user fee". I believe in the importance of a quality community where community members recognize this critical aspect of the greater social good. I don't see this concept in the proposed solutions for 2006 and beyond. I do see need for fiscal discipline and the need to provide for neighborhood and start-up businesses. Let's add the community good to the concepts under discussion. Thank you. Jean Jacobson

**4.** Should we look at the way we do inter-departmental charges? Isn't the current method of billing departments so that the charging department increases their revenue have an inflationary effect on the budget? ie.

**5.** The city needs to adequately fund the libraries so they are open when scheduled? Every time I go to my local library, Mottet, they are closed due to staffing shortages. Does this only happen on the east side of Tacoma?

**6.** In order for city employees to retire they need to have medical coverage provided.

**7.** The latest ideas from the city manager on balancing the budget for the next three years sound fiscally responsible and just like what Tacoma needs. However I hear that the Library Director has advised the Library Board that they do not need to participate in this

process. It is thinking like that they will keep the city from balancing the budget. Maybe it is time for a new Library Director.

**8.** I am a general fund city employee that is eligible for retirement and would like nothing better than to retire. The only incentive that would make it possible for me to retire at this time would be if the city would continue medical premiums until age 65. Thank you very much for the opportunity to submit comments on the budget.

**9.** Suggestion: If the City of Tacoma determines that property taxes are not the correct way to fund general government services; as a result, The entire property tax assesment should be completely eliminated and all city cost for services, levies, bonds, assesmments, special assesments, and funding to the Port of Tacoma should be billed to all owners of private and public land or real property located within the City of Tacoma, because the City of Tacoma provides services to all private and public occupants of property within the City of Tacoma.

**10.** Washington State has one of the most regressive tax structures in the country. This plan would seem to add significant additional tax burden onto those who can least bear it. Social service nonprofit organizations, already stretched to capacity to deal with decreased government assistance, are in no position to absorb tax liability! What we need--what is fair and reasonable--is income tax.

Kristine Stroad Moore

**11.** I don't think it matters if you have a tax or a fee because the citizens of Tacoma are not going to allow an open ended fee system. There will have to be a cap. As far as "Median Wages", Mr. Anderson should lead by example and cut his own wages about \$65,000 per year to show he is serious!!! That would bring him in line with the average wage for like cities.

**12.** It makes sense to me. That is the way families have to budget to get by. When people pay for services, they are less likely to make the costs go up, because they become a financial part of those services.

**13.** Regarding proposed budget concepts, since property taxes are totally deductible on Federal Income tax, if some of the property taxes are changed to fees(for services that should be free to taxpayers),will they be tax deductible on your Federal Income taxes? I don't think so. That will just be the beginning of fees. I'm sure that these fees will continue to rise, as do utilities making it increasingly harder for low and middle income citizens to be able to afford this! How about an efficiency audit of city government instead. I understand it cost the city 2 million dollars to fix a new computer system and how about the "disability pension" to the former assistant chief of police and to Corpuz. Perhaps money can be spent more wisely-oh yes, the spire for the convention center. Priorities, Ladies and Gentleman!

**14.** Consider taking Management Analysts out of BISD and return them to the respective departments they represent like Power and Public works. Both of these departments are revenue earners and could share the cost of these resources reducing the budget required by BISD, and eliminating the need for so many managers in BISD thus reducing overall cost to the city.

**15.** The trend is for employees to pay a share of their health care premiums. Federal employees pay 28% with the government paying 72% of the premium for active and retired employees. State employees also pay a percentage of their premiums. Many private sector employees also pay a pro rata share of their premiums. Reducing the city's cost of health care premiums would help to reduce the size of the city budget.

Natalie Leath

**16.** I applaud Mr. Anderson's suggested elimination of property taxes. He has had the courage that has been lacking in the state legislature to address the serious need for tax reform in Washington state. Property taxes punish folks for improving their homes and neighborhoods. These taxes also adversely effect those whose incomes have flattened due to retirement or personal injury since they dramatically increase the land value, continually raising taxes every year. The present reduced tax program doesn't benefit middle income people who traditionally pay most taxes anyway. Finally, property taxes discourage private home ownership since those who live in multiple residential units, like apartments, pay significantly less per family since they share the property tax burden with other residents of the building complex.

**17. Sir:**

This is in response to your request for additional opportunities to reduce cost within the City of Tacoma.

Currently in the City there are 20 currently identified locations that are managing stocks. These range from 4 different locations for fleet services to graphic services and telecommunications. Currently most of the storage locations are managed under the operating department which they provide specific support. They purchase materials to support their department based upon the standards and requirements of their department with very little to no looking at a City wide requirements. While most of the materials that the location stock appear to be unique to the requirements of their organization there is a lot that is common between several or all of them. This type of material includes common electrical wire, safety supplies, common fasteners such as screws and bolts, office supplies and others. For the most part these items are carried as different materials in SAP and are purchased at different cost from different suppliers by the various organizations.

At the same time there is no standard policy and procedures for the management of the City's stocks which currently are valued at \$10.6 million.

I believe the centralized management of the city's inventory with common standards and procedures would lead to a decrease of the total stock carried within the City and lower

the total cost of inventory. This concept could be accomplished using a hub and spoke arrangement in which common stock for more than one location would be procured and stock by a single location and distributed to other locations with quantities large enough to ensure they can continue to support the operating departments while less than what they are forced to buy currently. Different locations would be the primary stocking point for different material groups while material that is specific to the need of only one department would continue to be procured and stock only by that location.

Procedures should be developed in which dead or excess inventory should be identified and sold or scrapped. If even 10% of the City's current inventory balance is obsolete or excess stock that would come to around \$1,000,000 in value and an average cost of carrying inventory of 10% per year would save after write off \$100,000 per year.

R. Travis de Grouchy  
Business Information System Department  
WMS Materials and Wrehousing

**18.** I like the idea of shifting toward to a system where we know what we are paying for and everyone living in Tacoma pays for the services the City provides. I appreciate services here and would be happy to see a cost/fee for these services on my utility bill. Perhaps to keep the libraries, we could contract out operation to private business or look for non-profits to take them over. Consolidating, working with university and school libraries may also help lesson the cost of providing residents with library access. I would like to see the initiative of developing a direct fee for services fully explored and implemented if it makes sense for the City.

**19.** dear mr. anderson, i have several questions and 1 comment on your service fee plan.

will the fees be obligatory?

will services be withheld if fees are not paid?

will we be able to seek competitive services such as county services?

what input will users have regarding future service cost increases? will fees be increased thru a public process?

will this make the service providers more cost effective?

will a family of 4 living in a house assessed at \$1,000,000 pay 10 times more fees than a family of 4 living in a house assessed at \$100,000?

will a family living in a high crime area pay more than a family living in a low crime area?

our taxes are currently collected by the county and large portions of that tax are going to entities other than the city. how will this be reconciled?

how will schools who can hardly make it now, be able to afford the new fees?

my comment is that unless you are entirely fair and equitable in your fee structure, it is entirely possible that your new "fees" will simply result in disproportionate new taxes for the folks who can least afford it just like president bush's tax cuts for the corporations and wealthy. i'm not convinced that reducing taxes for businesses and wealthy people will somehow magically result in significant revenue increases for the city. it usually means a shift in the tax burdens to the middle class in the form of increased taxes from other entities or increased fees for services that used to be covered by taxes.

you have a long way to go to convince us otherwise. bruce and kaylee dean

**20.** It's about time. This will force the city to look at costs and allow taxpayers to know where their tax dollars are going. As far as renters are concerned, responsible landowners will lower rents, others will not. It is supply and demand.

**21.** As a city employee who is eligible for retirement there is only one incentive that would make it possible for me to retire. The city could offer to pay medical premiums until I turn 65 and am eligible for medicare. Anything short of this and financially it would be an impossibility for me.

**22.** If the city wants to encourage employees to retire they should offer to pay their medical premiums until they are 65.

### **Employee comments submitted through Take5:**

**1. REDESIGN** - I would like to see a retirement incentive package offered to TPU employees also. Though the City's budget is of prime concern, the TPU force is certainly ripe for downsizing/consolidation at several levels, thus reducing manpower cost to our customers.

NOTE: As with past such reductions, failure to hold fast to the actual position reductions (not filling vacated slots) has meant no real downsizing took place. Positions vacated should be left vacant.

**2.** I am a general fund city employee that is eligible for retirement and would like nothing better than to retire. The only incentive that would make it possible for me to retire at this time would be if the city would continue medical premiums until age 65. Thank you very much for the opportunity to submit comments on the budget.

### **3. EXPAND THE EARLY RETIREMENT OPTION TO OTHER THAN GENERAL FUND EMPLOYEES**

**4. Duplication.** Electrical groups at TPU, GG, Fire, Streetlights, Environmental Services. Seems like there ought to be some savings there.

Phone Groups - one at TPU and one at TMB. Seems silly that those groups aren't combined.

Networking groups - Enterprise group in BIS, Citynet, Power T&D SCADA groups.

These always come up but nothing is ever done, but I think that you're the guy who can finally make it happen. If you would like any more detail from someone who's been part of this for 30+ years, feel free to contact me. I was kind of planning on requesting an exit interview with you anyway. Bob Burton, BIS/IT Infrastructure

**5.** When you're done stabilizing this city gov't how bout moving on to the state level as Governor??

**6.** Mr. Anderson my name is Dale Sanborn. I work at the Sewer Plant on Portland Ave. I have a Question about the budget. What is going on with the contract talks with Local 120 AFSCME. We have gone 1-1/2 or 2 years without a contract. The City wants to take away the cost of Living from our contract. Can you answer this and why. Thanks Dale Sanborn

**7.** Sir, I believe you are on the right track. Being fiscally conservative and responsible will be a breath of fresh air to this City's government, which hasn't been seen for some time. Sincerely, Kevin Caillier

**8.** There may be positions occupied by employees who are within the retirement window based on portability with other jurisdictions--will there be an opportunity to take advantage of an incentive package if offered for those that may or may not one of the original 125 positions identified?

**9.** I used to work at Weyerhaeuser when they made a SIGNIFICANT commitment (\$300mil+) to Wall Street regarding cutting the cost of operations and to that end they left no stone unturned. They looked at EVERY ASPECT of doing business and how they could do it more effectively, efficiently, and at less cost. One of the more "mundane," yet surprising changes involved janitorial... changes were made that included office garbage removal every other day and recycling materials were taken to a central location (on each floor) by the employee and presorted into a regular blue bin or a locked "confidential" bin so they would only have to incur the cost of shredding sensitive documents. This may not seem like a big savings at first, but it sure does add up over time. I call it the "latte factor," whereby if someone quit (or reduced) their daily latte intake they could save and extra \$1000-\$3000/year into their retirement account. I'm just suggesting to look at all aspects of the cost!

of doing business, not just the big ticket items. Thank you for listening, Shari Hart

**10.** It would seem more fair and infinitely more fiscally responsible to offer an early-retirement or retirement incentive package across the board. Is that option going to be on the table?

**11.** There's been some discussion, but nothing I've heard from your office to confirm about having City Employees with dependants pay more. Why do employees that have 5 in their family for example, pay the same for medical coverage as just one employee that is single? Those that burden the Medical system should pay more, such as more dependants or a bad life style (smoking, etc.). Both situations are addressed with higher premiums in the real world, why not the City of Tacoma?

**12.** Look into the possibility to allow the officers to take their cars to local lube and oil, brake and tire repair stations, rather than paying the inflated costs that city fleet management charges the department.

Allow the PD to obtain their own vehicles without having to pay exorbitant lease payments to city fleet.

Evaluate the types of calls for service the PD currently responds to, and see if there can be reductions made, allowing a better use of manpower with the low staffing levels.

**13.** We have a budget shortfall and yet we're going to spend \$1million +/- on a "Chinese reconciliation Park." Isn't this taking political correctness a bit too far? Enough is enough.

**14.** I believe that the budget should take care of essential items first, i.e. public safety and education. Then take care of anything else you deem necessary.

**15.** I think the Council needs to look at the MANDATED services and begin cutting those that are not required by law or ordinance. The City throws all kinds of money at Marketing schemes, Police and Fire; yet the infrastructure is falling apart. I've been in PW for 20yrs and the GF budget for PW has taken a hit (mostly) or held the line for all of the budget cycles during that time. PW is so thin you can see through it. We have sections that operate with 5 personnel that comparable cities have up to 10 personnel. DON'T REMODEL/RE-BUILD the parking garages. SELL THEM! And put them back on the tax roll. Francis Gamotis

**16.** Thanks for injecting some fresh ideas into the debate over property taxes. I think you need to take a similarly bold approach to city organizational structure. I was pleased to read that this issue is on your radar screen, but I don't think it can be over-emphasized. It's time we addressed the waste and duplication created by the false division between TPU and GG, and even within the two organizations themselves. I work in IS, where in the private sector we used to strive to leverage technology and our investment in infrastructure through consolidation and economies of scale. Here, I'm saddened to see

that concept thrown by the wayside, at great expense, to spare political and organizational sacred cows. Think of BIS, Click, GG Telecom, TPU Telecom, Citynet, TFD fiber optics & IS, etc. And that's just the IS/Telecom function. We are an IS/Telecom vendor's dream - they know they can sell us six of everything once they sell us one. We need to turn this situation around and make e-technology work for us. I think this could be done, eventually. We would start by streamlining our organization and maximize the efficiency of our infrastructure and other resources. This would undoubtedly result in fewer staff positions over time, but the main goal would be a more efficient organization and lower operating costs. Staff reductions could probably be handled through gradual attrition. A short term investment in technology may also be required. But the main obstacle will be the organizational culture and resistance to change. How much longer can we put off our inevitable confrontation with this issue?

**17.** The city needs a company store. Instead of paying someone to take equipment no longer used by the city we could sell it. The city of San Diego has one. Example, old computers, we cannot donate them to the schools or charitable organizations so we have to pay to get rid of them.

**18.** 1 - Stop the practice of hiring back retired employees as contractors. 2 - This is on the revenue side: Bring down the T-Dome and replace with a quality town shopping center similar to the University Village area of Seattle. The T-Dome vs. New Convention Center is an example of the Duplication of services that could be consolidated.

**19.** Mr. Anderson, when the City purchases new cars why do they have to be mid size cars. Why can't the City use a small car? I purchased a Toyota Scion in December and it is very Roomy and comfortable. This would save on gas and the cost of the car is only 14,000.00. Thanks Dale Sanborn

**20.** I think your ideas are great!

**21.** ??? How can you justify allocating 1M to a park???

**22.** Generally, I like the idea of fee for service - as long as people have a say in what they are getting - it needs to be tied to specific outcomes and measurements, or be tied to something people can choose to buy directly (like permits/licenses).

One issue I see with fee for service is lack of flexibility in spending. With the G/F now - we have ability to prioritize. If a fee was imposed for libraries, and for some reason they built up a surplus, or another area had an emergency to deal with - the flexibility and re-prioritization ability would technically be lost, because people did not approve the funds be used other than for one purpose. We need to think about this, because now, with the projects paid for by the hotel tax, some people get upset that we cannot spread that funding out.

On the other hand - it does promote accountability - and better management of funds. If managers know - this is all I'm getting, they would be sure it is used wisely - especially if tied to performance expectations.

Would the manager be able to roll over their savings as an incentive to budget wisely, or would money saved go back to the g/f each biennium?

One last thing, say people voted for police fees - lower crime rates and so forth. A lot of things go into lower crime rates besides police. Well paying jobs, well lit streets, and activities for youth, good schools, livable neighborhoods, social services, and so forth. Just funding police could be like sticking a bandage on a compound fracture. You really have to look at causes for crime - not just fund the immediate remedy. How would the fee for service address the whole picture? One way is see, would be to tie the different parts of each program the city does that supports reduced crime, to the fee. This might be very complex, but I think you have to look at the outcome you want, review ALL the things that contribute to that - and tie them all up in the voter package. (kind of like cross departmental/jurisdictional program budgeting).

**23.** As user charges apply to Utilities, the user pays according to the amount of service he or she uses (ie: power by the KWH, water by the ccf, wastewater by the ccf and/or according to the pollutants in the wastewater, surface water by the size of the parcel and amount of impervious surface, etc.)

On what basis will "user charges" be applied to Police, Fire and Library? For instance, will everyone have to get a Library card? Will citizens get a bill from the Fire Department when they come to the house and put out a fire? Will only the lawbreakers receive a bill from the Police?

If everyone gets a standard "user charge" for these services, the concept of "user charges" takes on a whole new meaning, and will confuse the public if they get the same Police user charge as their neighbor, but pay a different water user charge than their neighbor, due to different water use rates.

This concept would also appear to place as much "user charge" on a small, inexpensive home (owner) as on a high-value home(owner), thereby placing a larger burden on the lower socioeconomic classes, compared to traditional taxation schemes.

**24.** I like the idea, although there's more questions than answers right now. Gathering the facts and data and comparing the current situation with the proposal needs to happen.

Regarding the short-term budget problem, I suggest the following:

Don't fill the BIS Director position. Have SAP go to Customer Service/TPU and have IT become a division in General Services. (Will save money)

Don't have Government Relations be a department. Have it be a division within a department. (Will save money)

Don't replace the Fire Chief. Make Fire and Police become the "Public Safety Department" with one director and two deputies (one for Fire and the other for Police). (Will save money)

Stop giving free bus passes and free vanpools to City employees. Make them pay a portion of the cost. (Will save money)

Complete an inventory of all employees who take home a City vehicle every night and make their director justify the reason that they need a car 24/7. (Will save money).

Complete an inventory all department City vehicles and make directors justify the need for each vehicle. (Will save money)

**25.** At what fair rate would the taxes be rated? Will the seniors be able to get a discount, how will this effect the people that have their taxes taken out of a mortgage payment because they did or do not want to deal with the taxes every six months, now we are speaking of taking them every month. won't this cause a hardship for some. if we do not have any B&O taxes, what will happen, how will this expense be accounted for.

**26.** The fee Idea sounds great. The port has gotten by with no charge for fire/medical services for too long. Question: How would the port pay their fee? Would it be based on a per container fee, land area or what? Thank you & welcome, Andrew Cylkowski, Fire Boat Pilot "B" Shift

**27.** More money saving ideas.....

**1.** The City should do credit history screening before offering employment. Administering garnishment uses precious City resources that could be spent elsewhere.

**2.** I like the City Manager's 'Users Pay' concept. Under this concept, City employees should pay for extra services, such as duplicate copy request for W-2's, lost/stolen checks or direct deposit pay advices.

**3.** Eliminate OJI (on the job injury) supplemental pay made by City. In most case, employees make more money being on OJI than on normal pay because OJI compensation from Risk Management is tax-free.

**28.** Why can't we do something simple like a flat three or four % cut for everyone. I mean everyone. That coupled with health care costs tied to participant usage would be a good, simple, large, fair, easy start. Thank You, C.Davies

**29.** In theory I agree with the overall concepts but can't make an educated decision until the details of the plan are presented. I do agree that there could be a cost savings by

merging some newly created Departments with already existing ones. For example, since the SAP portion of BIS is a customer service related function, it could be merged into those already existing functions at TPU. And since the IT Department serves in a support related capacity, it could be merged into General Services with the other support related Divisions.

**30.** I'm glad for the fresh perspective that Mr. Anderson has brought to Tacoma. I would want to make sure, though, that a different tax structure does not put even more of a burden on those who can least afford it.

Job salaries should be set at a rate to allow natural supply and demand principles to take effect.

I don't think the early retirement proposal should be limited to general government employees. Vacancies at TPU are often filled by general government employees, which would create even more opportunities for job consolidation and cost cutting in the general fund.

**31.** Mr. Anderson seems innovative and bold. These are qualities that are often attributed to The City of Tacoma. What a great match. Our City civil service is due for a cultural change and Mr. Anderson may be the catalyst we seek. I would love to see our leaders "buy in" to his ideas and see where he takes us. C'mon lets gamble! Mike Walling, Lt. Engine 13, Tacoma Fire Department

**32.** The notion of repealing the City's portion of the property tax and the B & O tax and replace same with a fee for service charge has been well received by those I've spoken to in the community. Seems Washington voters don't mind paying, just want to know where there tax dollars are going. General support was the feedback I've received, i.e.: favor transparent government.