



June 8, 2026

Community Questions: Beyond the Bell and Club B

The Park District has received questions from Park Board Commissioners, Parks Tacoma Advisory Committees, and the general public about the proposed budget reductions involving Beyond the Bell and other after-school programs. Although some of these questions have been answered in other documents, we merged many of those answers here for convenience.

Partial budget amendment - Can we make the cuts that we are certain of by the end of May (i.e. excluding the youth activities), and then take advantage of the extra time in June before the school year ends to urgently search for alternatives for Beyond the Bell?

To some degree, yes. Rather than implement all cuts at the end of May as originally envisioned, we shifted to enable all school-based programs to complete the school year, which ends in mid-June, or in some cases to complete certain summer programming going beyond that timeline, however, creates significant financial risk.

Maintaining our fund balance within Board policy is necessary to protect the District's overall financial stability. If we delay implementing reductions, we significantly increase the likelihood that the fund balance will fall below the 5 percent threshold. Falling below this level not only weakens our financial position but also creates a situation in which the District would fail to present a balanced budget for the rest of the year.

In addition, any deterioration in our fund balance or inability to show a balanced financial plan would directly affect our ability to market and issue the voter-approved 2026 UTGO bond beginning later this summer. Bond rating agencies closely scrutinize our reserves and fiscal management practices. Entering the market with a diminished fund balance or an unbalanced budget would increase borrowing costs, reduce investor confidence, and could ultimately delay the issuance.

For these reasons, we recommend doing these things simultaneously:

- Continue working with community partners to identify and evaluate after-school programming possibilities for the fall and beyond.
- Implement spending reductions at a level that ensures compliance with fiscal policy and enables the District to preserve critical system assets by proceeding with the 2026 UTGO bond issuance as planned.

Has an option that continues Beyond the Bell and Club B, even at a reduced capacity, for at least one more year been considered?

Yes, we developed eight different scenarios to change the model for BtB, including updated fee structures, different staffing models, and reducing the number of sites. The proposal shared with TPS in early May would have leveraged the TPS-managed \$1 million in MacKenzie Scott Foundation funding with \$500,000 from a combination of increased fee revenue and Parks Tacoma property tax revenue to operate an estimated 10-12 sites. However, the Park District and TPS have been unable to reach agreement. TPS is concerned that it would only serve one-third of the schools and that many families can't afford to pay for the service. It should be noted that the Park District made this offer at a time when we understood our budget reduction target was around \$7 million. As the internal analysis of the problem continued, the reduction target increased to more than \$9 million, so a \$500,000 contribution this year would be very challenging.

The recommendation to eliminate or significantly reduce Parks Tacoma's contribution to Beyond the Bell programming was acknowledged as one of the most difficult decisions in this process. Key facts:

- Program partners received pandemic relief funds at the start, and those expired and were not renewed.
- BtB and Club B operate under an unusual partnership arrangement. Tacoma Public Schools controls access and fees, while the Park District has incurred most of the operating expense, which is approximately \$6 million a year.
- Parks Tacoma only receives about \$130,000 in parent fees per year; registration and payment run through Tacoma Public Schools' system, not Parks Tacoma's.
- The MacKenzie Scott Foundation grant (\$1 million) passes through the nonprofit Tacoma Education Dream Fund and the nonprofit Tacoma Parks Foundation before program providers are reimbursed. Parks Tacoma receives approximately \$500,000.
- Even if all other programs were cut to their most severe options (such as closing all pools and one community center), Beyond the Bell could not be preserved without leaving a structural deficit of more than \$1 million.

Parks Tacoma is participating in community discussions about how to maintain the after-school programs. The Park Board Commissioners have indicated they support those talks and hope, once the Park District's budget is stabilized, to participate again in the future.

Can more engagement about program reductions be conducted to explore potential community partnerships to fill gaps?

Senior Parks Tacoma staff continue to have conversations with community partners to seek alternative solutions. In the meantime, we have no choice but to proceed with the amendment to balance the budget and restore reserves. Any delay would likely mean even deeper cuts to levels of service, programs and staffing. Failure to balance the budget and comply with the fiscal reserves policy also could delay or even cancel the voter-approved bond program, which is designed to address aging and deteriorating assets throughout the system. Another budget amendment could be considered at any time if funding models are developed that are financially sustainable for the Park District.

This is all happening very quickly, and I am concerned it could cost even more money to restart the after-school programs in a few years. Can we take another look at fundraising and partnership alternatives, including with the Tacoma Parks Foundation and Tacoma Public Schools? Any semblance of keeping this alive, in any form, would be welcome by the community and the commissioners.

Beyond the Bell and Club B have been a top priority for Tacoma Parks Foundation (TPF) fundraising for several years, and we are confident that TPF has done everything in its power to seek funding for these programs. Nevertheless, TPF has shared that it is difficult to secure fundraising for after-school programs and recreation activities.

TPF has noted that the fundraising landscape is changing as a result of federal budget cuts, with donors increasingly focused on essential needs like housing, food security, and mental health. As a result, the program was largely subsidized by the Park District's General Fund (fund balance), which cannot be sustained any further. The Park District and TPF want to have further conversations about how to assess priorities and opportunities for a successful partnership.

Regarding other government partnerships, TPS and Parks Tacoma have had conversations with the City in recent months about the potential for funding from the Tacoma Creates program, which has not resulted in additional support. Those conversations will continue, including one to be hosted by the Mayor in late June.

Could we scale back the programs for 2026-27 to the highest poverty and most popular sites, and implement a pilot with required sliding scale fees based on verified income?

The "pay what you can" option is a major barrier to financial sustainability. Simply put, most parents choose the \$0 option. Changes to the payment system for Beyond the Bell and Club B would require the support of the Tacoma Public Schools, which

operates both the registration and payment platforms. However, even if a required, income-verified payment system were implemented, the programs would still need to be heavily subsidized for two reasons:

1. The projected need for financial assistance among TPS families is high, with approximately 57 percent of elementary and middle students qualifying for Free or Reduced Price Lunch.
2. Families utilizing Beyond the Bell five days a week would pay more than the cost of after-school care offered by the licensed childcare programs at these schools. This price differential might reduce the attractiveness of Beyond the Bell both for families who would qualify for financial assistance and those who would not.

Currently, all 36 elementary schools in the Tacoma School District are served by licensed childcare providers at 24 elementary school sites (12 schools transport students to other nearby sites). Each provider offers morning care beginning at 7:15 AM and afternoon care ending at 6:00 PM. Care is also provided for an additional fee on half days and certain non-school days.

Childcare fees for the 2025-26 school year are:

- \$575/month for before and after school care
- \$350/month for before school care only
- \$375/month for after school care only

Licensed childcare sites also accept the DCYF childcare subsidy and offer financial aid.

The true cost of Beyond the Bell is currently \$320 per student per 2-day a week program per session. There are four 8-week sessions per school year, with a one-to-two-week break between sessions. Beyond the Bell does not operate on half days or non-school days.

Programs are offered either Monday/Wednesday, Tuesday/Thursday, or Friday only, until 5:45 PM. Families utilizing Beyond the Bell as childcare five days a week would therefore register for three programs per session to cover Monday through Friday, with the following true cost breakdown:

- One M/W program: \$320 per 8-week session
- One T/Th program: \$320 per 8-week session
- One F program: \$160 per 8-week session (Estimated. This is half of \$320, but actual costs might be higher because the administrative load is likely the same as it is for a 2-day a week program.)
- Total cost for 8 weeks of M-F Beyond the Bell: \$800

As noted above, Parks Tacoma is engaged in community conversations in the hopes of assisting in identifying alternative solutions.

Intergenerational / volunteer deployment - there was a genuine desire from community to help save BtB, including going beyond giving money to giving of their time. I know this would be a giant change, but have we asked the parks staff who have been thinking about intergenerational programming for Beyond the Bell/senior hubs to see if this is an opportunity for innovation born out of necessity?

Yes, we can review that as part of the alternatives assessment. Volunteers are an important component of the work that is accomplished each year at Parks Tacoma. In 2025, volunteers provided over 63,000 hours of volunteer support to our systems in a variety of our spaces, predominantly at PDZA, NW Trek and in the maintenance of parks and places with Parks and Recreation.

Supporting a program like BtB and Club B across more than 45 sites requires a great deal of coordination and commitment from all parties working/volunteering to provide consistent care and support for the children and families in the program. We must ensure that all staff and volunteers meet the background and skills requirement to perform the work. It would be an extraordinary commitment for the number of volunteers needed to consistently staff the program across all the sites. Innovation is necessary in all times, but especially times like these and we will consider all options to support future programs. Full-time staff would be needed to coordinate and monitor these efforts and we simply don't have the budget at this time to keep these programs running at their current levels or with the increased requirements needed if using volunteers.

Can we reduce employment costs by employing more teens for Beyond the Bell and Club B?

Parks Tacoma has partnered for several years with Jobs253 to give teens paid opportunities in BTB and Club B. Parks Tacoma contracts with Elements of Education to coordinate and supervise these teen interns. While these positions provide additional capacity to deliver programs after school, they do not directly reduce costs because we still need to provide a minimal level of staffing to maintain safe environments and an appropriate youth-to-adult ratio, as well as training and ongoing mentoring of these youths.

Could we reduce costs by aligning payment rates for contracted providers and Parks Tacoma staff providing Beyond the Bell and Club B programming?

Programming provided by internal part-time staff is currently more cost effective than programs run by contracted providers because service delivery is more streamlined for us. However, the intent of the Out of School Time programs has always been a community-wide collaboration to support the Whole Child, and our contractual agreements with our partners reflect this intention.

Community partnership is core to the mission of Beyond the Bell and Club B, and community providers also offer arts, STEM, and cultural programming that is outside the scope of Parks Tacoma's recreation offerings. There is no competition between Parks Tacoma and contracted providers for programming slots, as this shared effort to provide enrichment opportunities is central to the Whole Child model.

Tacoma Public Schools used to offer after-school activities without the involvement of Parks Tacoma. Is there a chance they will revive their own after-school programs without Parks Tacoma's significant financial support?

TPS is [actively working to recruit](#) community partners to maintain Beyond the Bell and Club B. Parks Tacoma continues to be involved in community conversations.