



MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Park Commissioners

From: Tony Piasecki, Interim Executive Director

Subject: Advisory Council Budget Questions

Date: June 3, 2026

Parks Tacoma manages an Advisory Council program that engages with informed community members about policies and operations. Three of those councils submitted formal comments through the public hearing process. Here are responses to their questions.

Active Living and Community Wellness Advisory Council:

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 is even more challenging than previously assumed.

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.

Arts & Heritage Advisory Council:

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.

Can program pricing be adjusted to save programs such as Beyond the Bell and Club B?

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.

What policies, procedures and processes are being implemented to ensure budgets are balanced, revenues are realizable and programs are sustainably funded to reduce fiscal risk?

The District is implementing tools and standards to increase fiscal control and transparency, which include:

- The implementation of Questica software for budget building and tracking.
- Implementing an internal reorganization to clearly define roles and responsibilities among finance staff.
- Establishing clear and consistent budget management practices with all managers and supervisors.
- Establishing a Park Board Finance Committee to review the projected and actual budget on a more regular schedule.
- Contracting with an internal auditor as an additional oversight measure. That work begins later this month.

Additionally, Parks Tacoma is conducting reviews and updating policies such as the financial assistance policy and the cost recovery policy before the end of the year.

How can Parks Tacoma Advisory Councils be more integrated into decision-making processes?

The Advisory Council policy was significantly updated in 2025, and a key goal was to encourage more engagement and interaction. Since then, several councils have submitted written feedback on various topics that have helped inform staff and the Board, and initiatives have been altered in response to the feedback.

We readily acknowledge the frustration felt by many Advisory Council members regarding our ability to engage with them during this budget crisis. The crisis came up quickly, and the emergency nature of it consumed so much staff and Board time that engaging with four separate advisory bodies was not feasible. We are factoring in Advisory Council engagement as we develop the 2027-28 budget, which will be equally challenging, and we would like to have more discussions about how to improve this process so that it is meaningful for all involved.

Can Parks Tacoma require the executive director to reside in Pierce County as a term of employment?

This would be determined in contract negotiations between the Park Board and the applicant they select for appointment.

How is Parks Tacoma supporting employee mental/emotional needs during this time?

We recognize budget reductions create significant stress on our employees. We also understand the importance of transparency, which is why we have shared documents (including this one) and encouraged employees to attend Park Board meetings. We know it's very difficult to hear information that affects them or their colleagues. We will continue to communicate with employees in a transparent and timely manner about changes and encourage the use of the Employee Assistance Plan, which includes job transition and financial counseling. HR staff are also holding individual meetings with impacted employees when requested.

Business and Responsive Agency Advisory Council:

How will the Park Board address the processes, oversight structures and organizational habits that allowed the deficit to grow undetected?

As noted above, the Park Board has directed staff to implement several changes to improve oversight. The Board is scheduled to review a draft charter for the new Finance Committee during the June 8 Board meeting.

Besides the measures listed above, we anticipate the Board will have further direction as it works with the interim executive director and, when appointed, the new permanent executive director regarding process improvements and oversight structure.

How will Parks Tacoma proactively communicate about the budget reductions and impacts and corrective actions being taken to rebuild community trust?

We are communicating about impacts, timelines, and expectations through Parks Tacoma's communications channels, which include the website, e-newsletters, and social media, as well as cooperating with media inquiries. Our intent is to reduce uncertainty where possible by being transparent and timely with updates while also respecting the ultimate decision-making authority of the Board. We know we have much more work to do to rebuild trust.

Will Parks Tacoma's management structure be reduced at proportional rates to frontline staff reductions?

Yes. The budget amendment last fall was designed to limit the community impact as much as possible, so the reductions at the time were primarily internal, including the elimination of four positions in the Executive Cabinet. A fifth position in the Cabinet was vacated in April and that reduction is scheduled to be codified in the second budget amendment. In addition, the interim director of Business, Administration and Planning is leaving for family reasons at the end of the month, and the District plans to leave that position vacant until a new permanent executive is hired and can make determinations on how to structure the executive and administrative team. The District will continue to review administrative service levels to align with structural models and service delivery.

Can BRAAC have a representative on Parks Tacoma's Bond Team?

We anticipate the new Finance Committee, which seems likely to include BRAAC representation (pending Board approval of the charter), will serve this purpose as this committee will review the Capital Improvement Program on a regular basis.

All capital projects go through a vetting process via the Capital Projects Group (CPG), which consists of staff throughout the agency who meet every Friday to review scope, schedule, and budget. Some larger projects, such as the People's and South End community center feasibility studies, have steering committees that include community members.

We are open to collaborative dialogue with BRAAC in alignment with their charter, roles and responsibilities. An initial thought is to invite a BRAAC member to observe one CPG meeting - which has proven very effective at capital program delivery - for educational purposes.

How will Parks Tacoma ensure the FY2027-2028 biennial budget is correct and balanced?

Parks Tacoma leadership, led by the Finance and Business Operations Division, is committed to projecting expenses and revenues conservatively and accurately, with closer budget

management and stronger collaboration between PRD and BAP supporting better forecasting.

Moving forward, all revenues must be fully documented through signed agreements or reliable data before being added to the budget, and program revenues must be based on actual performance and credible forecasts. This ensures that our budget reflects real, evidence-based revenue rather than assumptions or optimistic projections.

A recent staff reorganization is designed to facilitate consistent application of practices and policies among finance staff.

The new Finance Committee is being established to assist the Board in fulfilling its fiduciary and oversight responsibilities with respect to the District's financial affairs, internal controls, audit functions, and risk management.

We have selected CliftonLarsonAllen LP, a national firm with an office in Tacoma, to provide internal auditing services. The contract is in process, and we anticipate their onboarding will begin June 15.

Will the voter-approved bond program reduce further operating costs?

While bond funding cannot be used for operational expenses, the capital projects that the bond will fund will help offset major maintenance costs as the District is able to address infrastructure projects. We cannot quantify this today, but expect to make adjustments over time as actuals come in.

Will Parks Tacoma fund balance meet the policy requirement by the end of FY2026?

Yes, the proposed FY2026 budget amendment being submitted this week includes a fund balance that complies with Parks Tacoma's fiscal policy.

When will Parks Tacoma have an updated cost recovery and financial assistance policy?

These policies will be updated after the budget amendment. The timing is driven by a practical need - both policies need to be in place to inform the development of the 2027-2028 budget.