

COMMISSION AGENDA

Item No: 10A

Meeting: 2/21/23

DATE: February 21, 2023
TO: Port Commission
FROM: Eric Johnson, Executive Director
Alisa Praskovich, Chief of Strategic Projects & Commission Relations
SUBJECT: Homelessness Resolution – Alternatives

A. INTRODUCTION

Following adoption of the Homelessness Resolution 2022-19-PT the staff identified and shared potential high-level alternatives with the Commission for consideration in November 2022. The purpose of this briefing is to review the proposed alternatives and seek Commission guidance on whether there is a preference for one or more of the alternatives. This will allow staff to develop a more detailed proposal for future Commission consideration and action.

B. BACKGROUND

In adopting Resolution 2022-19-PT the Commission directed the staff to propose alternatives to assist local governments in responding to the growing number of individuals in Tacoma and Pierce County experiencing homelessness. The staff identified and shared a preliminary set of potential alternatives with the Commission in November of 2022. This briefing is intended to explore these preliminary alternatives in more detail with the goal of having the Commissioners identify what alternative(s) to support further exploration. These three alternatives are summarized below:

HOMELESSNESS RESOLUTION – PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES

Alternative #1: In Kind Contribution

The Port of Tacoma could make a one time “in-kind” financial [cash] contribution to a government entity that can be used to support ongoing or new efforts to address homelessness. This in-kind contribution would be directed toward a specific account in lieu of the city and/or county’s general fund. Recognizing that local government agencies do not have adequate funding to address the growing number of unsanctioned encampments, an in-kind donation could help provide immediate support to the most pressing needs that pose the most immediate threat to the Port’s safe and efficient movement of cargo. The Government Affairs team can lead the efforts in collaborating with government agency representatives to identify clear pathways on how the in-kind donation would be used. For example, the city of Fife recently established a sanctioned sheltered area, placing small homes at cost of approximately \$1,400 per shelter unit, while also building perimeter fencing. The Port of Tacoma’s in-kind contribution could be used to purchase supplies and materials to support this type of encampment project. The Commissioners would need to consider what an appropriate budget cap would be for this in-kind contribution, while also being mindful of what future expectations this may create for the Port to provide future and recurring contributions (e.g. precedent).

Alternative #2: Purchase Off Premise Land & Lease Back

Leveraging the Port’s real estate expertise, coordinate with applicable city and county officials in the identification and acquisition of suitable off-premises sanctioned property for establishment of permanent or temporary housing. This property can then be leased to the applicable agency at a very affordable rate as negotiated. The Port of Seattle has taken this approach for one area, and the staff can provide more information on the history and current status. The emphasis in this alternative is for the city and/or county agency representatives to take the lead on site selection, as they are best suited to ensure the property is suitable and located near appropriate services and accounts for public safety. The Port can leverage the Environmental Department’s expertise to help complete the environmental assessments of the property for an environmental impact assessment. As has been noted, residential uses of industrial lands are incompatible with applicable land zoning rules, laws, codes and policy. Port-owned industrial lands present a risk to the health and safety of encampment residents and are not located near the necessary sanitation services to adequately support encampments. The Commission should consider the budget cap for this alternative given the high cost of land in and around the city and throughout Pierce County.

Alternative #3: Homelessness Policy & Program Advocacy

The Port could take a more forward leaning and targeted approach to policy and/or program advocacy at various government agency levels with the primary goal of securing more resources to address the most pressing needs that present the highest risk to human health and public safety. Led by the Government Affairs Department and supported by a designated representative of the Port’s Security Department, this team can lead these advocacy efforts. With the expected continued growth of unsanctioned encampments in and around the Tacoma Tidelands area and given our limited statutory authority as a special purpose district, a clearly defined policy and/or program advocacy strategy done in collaboration with our agency partners demonstrates the Port of Tacoma’s commitment to supporting affordable housing in our community, while also ensuring economic vitality. The Commission should consider the potential implications of both the public and government agencies requesting that the Port of Tacoma also explore more advanced policy advocacy in other social issues that are well outside of the nexus to our statutory obligation to protect the cargo supply chain and promote economic vitality in the region.

C. ATTACHMENTS TO THIS REQUEST

- Resolution 2022-19-PT
- Presentation

D. NEXT STEPS

Based on Commission feedback, staff will develop a more detailed action plan that would advance the preferred alternative to bring back for Commission action.