



BUSINESS & GOVERNMENT

T.C. Broadnax: Tacoma Years

As Austin prepares for T.C. Broadnax's start as the new city manager, it will be helpful for political and community leaders to understand his leadership style and track record.

Recently we examined his tenure as city manager in Dallas. Now it is time to look over his accomplishments in the City of Tacoma, including what we can learn about how he works with others in a team setting.

Because Tacoma was his first stop as a top city executive, his track record there provides crucial insights into how he may navigate Austin's unique challenges.

From his job navigating [budget shortfalls](#) when he came on board in 2012 to [preparing the city](#) for his departure to Dallas in 2017, we will look at some of the most notable moments from his time in the Northwest.

Leadership Style and Perception of Performance

Broadnax emphasized a data-driven approach to management, with the city's [Open Data Portal](#) helping to make data transparent and accessible so decisions were based on data and facts, not merely intuition or tradition.

During his time in Tacoma he was seen as notably inclusive, engaging various stakeholders through community [visioning processes](#) and strategic frameworks, ensuring that diverse voices were heard and considered in city planning and development.

This approach helped him to align the city's long-term plans with immediate actions, particularly in areas like economic development, infrastructure improvement, and community engagement.

His go-to approaches for managing a large organization included robust performance management systems to evaluate and enhance city services and ensure accountability within various city departments. Also, a strict fiscal management framework was crucial in stabilizing

Tacoma's finances, navigating budget constraints, and [turning potential deficits](#) into balanced budgets without sacrificing essential services.

Colleagues often described Broadnax as a focused and effective leader who was deeply committed to public service.

His ability to make tough decisions while being mindful of their impacts on employees and citizens earned him respect within the city's administration. His commitment to [employee empowerment](#) allowed for innovative ideas and solutions to emerge from different levels of the organization.

The public generally viewed Broadnax positively, especially in how he handled Tacoma's financial recovery and [infrastructure projects](#) and his straightforward communication style helped in maintaining a positive public image as a problem solver.

Despite the positive views, some critics pointed to his [low visibility](#) in the community. While he was effective behind the scenes, some community members felt he could have had a more prominent public presence, engaging directly with residents more frequently.

Financial Management and Budget Planning

The City of Tacoma was facing significant financial difficulties due to the post-recession economic climate. One of Broadnax's initial challenges was a [\\$63 million hole](#) in the general fund, which demanded stringent fiscal measures.

Broadnax had to navigate increasing demands for city services while managing limited financial resources. He was also challenged with curtailing spending, as evident from a memo he sent out directing department heads to prepare for 2 to 4 percent cuts.

Despite the budgetary constraints, there was a pressing need to maintain and even enhance essential services like public safety, which added to the complexity of the budget planning process.

Solutions:

1. **Structural Balance in Budgeting:** Broadnax successfully presented a budget that, for the first time in years, matched ongoing revenues with ongoing expenditures, achieving a structurally balanced budget. This approach was crucial in ensuring long-term financial sustainability for the city.
2. **Strategic Use of One-time Funds:** Under Broadnax's management, the city strategically used one-time general fund spending to cover [nearly \\$20 million](#) in expenses without compromising on essential services. This use of funds was based on savings and higher-than-anticipated revenues from previous years, along with positive trends in real estate excise tax collections.

3. Investment in Infrastructure and Services: Despite the need for budget cuts, Broadnax's financial strategy included significant investments in city infrastructure and services. This included adding police officers and firefighters, making improvements to the [Tacoma Dome](#), and supporting the construction of the East Side Community Center.
4. Avoidance of Service Reductions: Notably, Broadnax's budgeting approach allowed the city to avoid the closure of library branches and other potential service reductions, which was a significant achievement given the budget constraints.
5. Increased Revenue through New Fees: The 2017-18 budget proposed by Broadnax included [increased fees](#) for animal and business licensing, expected to generate approximately \$4 million over two years, demonstrating his proactive approach to enhancing the city's revenue streams.

Community Visioning and Strategic Planning

One of the key challenges Broadnax faced was ensuring that the community visioning and strategic planning processes were inclusive, engaging a diverse population with varying interests and needs.

Balancing ambitious community visions with the practical constraints of city budgets presented a significant challenge.

Broadnax had to align long-term strategic plans with fiscal realities, ensuring that visioning processes did not just create ideal scenarios but were actionable within available resources. It was also important to coordinate effective coordination across various city departments, each with its own priorities and agendas, to work in tandem.

Solutions:

1. Development of a [10-Year Strategic Plan](#): Broadnax successfully facilitated a community visioning process that resulted in a comprehensive 10-year strategic plan that served as a roadmap for the city's development, focusing on sustainable growth and quality of life improvements.
2. Enhancing Civic Engagement: Broadnax implemented and improved mechanisms for public input, ensuring the community had a voice in the city's development plans. This was crucial for creating a sense of ownership and responsibility among residents.
3. Focusing on Economic Development: A new [five-year Economic Development Strategic Framework](#) was created to leverage Tacoma's regional position to improve the tax base and stimulate economic growth. This framework included identifying key areas for economic investment and strategies to attract new businesses and industries.

4. Integration of Sustainability into Planning: Much like Austin, Tacoma's strategic planning included a strong focus on [sustainability](#). This was evident in initiatives such as updating infrastructure, promoting green technologies, and ensuring that new developments were environmentally responsible.
5. Revitalization of Underutilized Areas: Broadnax directed strategic efforts to revitalize underutilized areas of Tacoma, improving their economic viability and livability. This included the development of public spaces, enhancement of transportation networks, and support for local businesses.
6. Promotion of Cultural and Recreational Opportunities: Part of the strategic planning under Broadnax included promoting Tacoma as a cultural and recreational hub. This involved supporting arts and culture initiatives, developing public parks, and enhancing recreational facilities to improve residents' quality of life and attract tourists.
7. Strategic Infrastructure Investments: Broadnax's strategic planning also emphasized critical [infrastructure investments](#), which were planned to support both current and future needs. This included upgrades to essential services and facilities, such as transportation systems and public utilities, to support a growing population.

Performance Management and Open Data

In Tacoma, Broadnax faced the challenge of establishing clear, measurable metrics that accurately reflected the city's priorities.

That goal intermixed with his push encouraging departments to adopt open data practices to ensure data integrity and consistency across different city departments.

Implementing new systems for performance management and open data required extensive training and support. Getting all employees on board and proficient in using new tools and approaches was a substantial logistical and educational endeavor.

Solutions:

1. Implementation of a Robust Performance Management System: Broadnax successfully implemented a [performance management system](#) designed to track and evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of various city services. This system allowed for more strategic resource allocation and helped identify areas for improvement.
2. Launch of the Open Data Portal: Under Broadnax's leadership, Tacoma launched an open data portal, which was a significant step toward increasing transparency and accountability. This portal made a wide range of data accessible to the public, empowering citizens and enhancing civic engagement.

3. Improving Service Delivery: The performance management initiatives led to [improved service](#) delivery across city departments. By closely monitoring performance metrics, the city was able to make informed decisions that enhanced the quality of services provided to residents.

Economic Development

Broadnax saw that Tacoma needed to diversify its economy to make it less dependent on traditional industries.

This involved attracting new businesses, which required innovative strategies and incentives including leveraging underutilized and remediating economically stagnant areas.

Downtown Tacoma was an especially significant challenge, and Broadnax needed to implement initiatives that would stimulate economic activity and redevelopment in these areas.

He also wanted to ensure economic development did not come at the expense of community welfare, or lead to gentrification.

This required managing the varying interests of local businesses, residents, and political groups and required careful negotiation and diplomacy to generate essential broad support.

Solutions:

1. Strategic Economic Development Framework: Broadnax oversaw the development of a five-year Economic Development Strategic Framework aimed at leveraging Tacoma's regional position to improve the tax base. This framework identified key growth sectors and laid out strategies for economic diversification and investment.
2. Infrastructure Improvements: Significant investments were made in [infrastructure](#) under Broadnax's leadership, which are crucial for supporting economic development. Upgrades to the Tacoma Dome and other public facilities improved the city's attractiveness for business and tourism.
3. Enhanced Public-Private Partnerships: Broadnax facilitated the creation of strong public-private [partnerships](#) that led to several key developments. These partnerships helped to leverage private investment for public goals, reducing the financial burden on the city while promoting economic growth.
4. Job Creation and Business Support: Initiatives under Broadnax helped in [creating jobs](#) and supporting local businesses. His tenure saw the implementation of policies that made it easier for businesses to establish and expand, including streamlined permitting processes and business tax incentives.

5. Community Engagement in Economic Planning: Broadnax prioritized community involvement in economic development plans, ensuring that projects met the [real needs](#) of the community. This approach helped garner public support and made economic initiatives more effective and inclusive.
6. Focus on Sustainable Development: Recognizing the importance of sustainability, Broadnax integrated [green practices](#) and standards into economic development projects. This not only helped in reducing environmental impact but also positioned Tacoma as a forward-thinking, sustainable city.