Bill Baarsma was born and raised in Tacoma. He is a product of the Tacoma School system and a graduate of the University of Puget Sound with a degree in political science awarded in 1964. He finished masters and doctoral degrees in public administration at the George Washington University and in 1968 began a 33-year career teaching courses in business and public administration at the University of Puget Sound. While at UPS he served two terms as a part-time Tacoma City Council Member from 1992-99. In 2001, he was elected as Tacoma's 37th Mayor. During his tenure as mayor, Baarsma prioritized historic preservation, environmental sustainability and education. He led efforts to save the Murray Morgan Bridge, cleanup the Foss Waterway and Commencement Bay and expand UW-Tacoma to an undergraduate, four-year institution. Upon retiring as mayor, Bill joined the board of the Tacoma Historical Society where he became board president. During his time as President, Baarsma focused on finding a permanent location for a Tacoma History Museum and hiring professional staff for the Society. He lives in Tacoma with his spouse Carol. Bill's son, Bill Jr., lives in Chicago and his daughter, Katya, lives in upstate New York.