



TO: Hyun Kim, Interim City Manager
FROM: Reuben McKnight, Historic Preservation Officer, Planning and Development Services
Peter Huffman, Director, Planning and Development Services
COPY: City Council and City Clerk
SUBJECT: Resolution – Set Public Hearing Date for Historic Preservation Code Amendments –
September 16, 2025
DATE: August 27, 2025

SUMMARY AND PURPOSE:

A resolution setting Tuesday, October 7, 2025, as the date for a public hearing before the City Council on proposed amendments to the Tacoma Municipal Code relating to Historic Preservation, including titles 13.05, 13.07 and 13.12.

BACKGROUND:

This department's recommendation is based on recommendations from the Planning Commission and Landmarks Preservation Commission following its review of the chapters of the Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) relating to the Historic Preservation Program and its activities, and includes:

- 13.05, Land Use Permits and Procedures, including Area Wide Rezones, specifically regarding the Planning Commission review process and requirements for establishing Historic Overlay Zones (commonly known as Local Historic Districts), and Historic Preservation Land Use Decisions (known more commonly as Certificates of Approval), specifically regarding clarity and requirements for design review of historic properties in Tacoma.
- 13.07, Landmarks and Historic Districts, which outlines the Landmarks Preservation Commission's nomination process for individual City Landmarks and local Historic Overlay Zones, as well as the descriptions of the districts themselves.
- 13.12.570, Cultural Resources, which includes demolition review and cultural resources review for planning subareas.

The proposed code revisions are intended to support the revised goals, policies, and objectives of the Historic Preservation chapter that were included in the recently updated One Tacoma Comprehensive Plan, while also responding to specific priorities identified by stakeholders, including citizen commissions and staff. Top priorities in undertaking the revisions include:

- Updating the Historic District nomination processes, which is currently under a moratorium pending updates to the code to reflect issues identified during recent historic district reviews, including accessibility, equity and process improvements;
- Revising the demolition review process, including incorporating a recent Director's rule requiring consideration of public benefit, feasibility and the potential for mitigation when reviewing demolition permits; and
- Incorporating changes based on recent Washington State legislation.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/ CUSTOMER RESEARCH:

These amendments will have a citywide effect, particularly the changes to historic district creation and nominations to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places, as well as amendments to demolition review requirements. More precisely, changes to review requirements within local historic districts intended to increase accessibility by reducing financial burdens resulting from design review will primarily affect current and future residents of local historic districts.

During the course of the Comprehensive Plan amendment process and historic code updates, City staff have conducted extensive engagement citywide. Outreach has targeted residents, businesses, and partner agencies, with a focus on accessibility, transparency, and community relevance.

Between early 2024 and spring 2025, the City participated in a range of public events and forums to share information, gather feedback, and answer questions about the Comprehensive Planning process, including:

- Nine One Tacoma Visioning Workshops (May–June 2024) and four One Tacoma Workshops (February–March 2025).
- Community Informational Meetings, including a virtual session July 24, 2025, and an in-person meeting at the Mottet Branch Library on July 26, 2025: Focused public meetings providing an overview of the Historic Preservation code update and ways to provide feedback on the draft code.
- The Landmarks Preservation Commission conducted briefing and scoping meetings over 2024-2025 to discuss both Comprehensive Plan policy and code updates.
- The Planning Commission conducted a public hearing on these proposed amendments on August 6, 2025, and considered comments received in its recommendation to the City Council.

2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Equity and Accessibility:

The code amendments are intended to increase access to the Historic Preservation Program in part by introducing new inclusive tools and criteria in the historic nomination process, including the creation of a new Community Heritage Register. In addition, amended language to reduce burdens resulting from design review requirements, coupled with expanded access to historic property tax incentives is intended to reduce barriers to participation.

Economy/Workforce: *Equity Index Score:* High Opportunity

Increase positive public perception related to the Tacoma economy.

Decrease the number of vacant properties downtown and in the neighborhood business districts.

Education: *Equity Index Score:* High Opportunity

Increase the number of quality out of school time learning opportunities distributed equitably across the city.

Increase the number of college students that find employment and remain in Tacoma after post-secondary completion.



Civic Engagement: *Equity Index Score:* High Opportunity

Increase the percentage of residents who believe they are able to have a positive impact on the community and express trust in the public institutions in Tacoma.

Increase the number of residents who participate civically through volunteering and voting.

Livability: *Equity Index Score:* High Opportunity

Improve access and proximity by residents to diverse income levels and race/ethnicity to community facilities, services, infrastructure, and employment.

Increase positive public perception of safety and overall quality of life.

Explain how your legislation will affect the selected indicator(s).

This is an action to set a public hearing date, and the proposed legislation is citywide in scope across areas with a high degree of variability in Equity Index Scores. However, at present time the majority of historic districts and designated City Landmarks are located in downtown and in residential areas north of downtown. In general, the historic preservation amendments are intended to increase access to historic preservation tools, including public participation in the development review process through design review, as well as reduce the cost of residing in historic buildings or historic districts, and to increase the relevancy of the historic preservation program by offering additional non-regulatory tools and broader inclusive historic designation criteria. Overall, historic preservation seeks to improve the quality of life within Tacoma by highlighting the meaning of place, preserving unique areas of the City, encouraging thoughtful human scale design citywide, and highlighting and celebrating the many diverse narratives that make Tacoma unique.

ALTERNATIVES:

| Alternative(s) | Positive Impact(s) | Negative Impact(s) |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Decline to set a public hearing date | The historic preservation code would remain as it currently is. | Issues identified with the present code, including those that lead to the moratorium on local historic districts, would remain following the expiration date of the moratorium. The City would be out of compliance with recent State legislation affecting historic designations. |
| 2. Postpone the hearing date | There would be additional time for further discussion and community engagement on potential code amendments. | The City would not meet the deadline to revise the historic preservation codes before the current moratorium on local historic district expires, unless the moratorium were to be renewed. |



City of Tacoma

City Council Action Memorandum

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW UP:

This is a resolution to set a public hearing. The testimony received will inform the City Council on their review of the recommended code amendments in subsequent meetings.

STAFF/SPONSOR RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends setting the public hearing date to receive public comment on the proposed amendments, in order to bring the code package forward to the City Council for formal consideration in late October 2025 for a potential effective date prior to the November 5, 2025, expiration of the moratorium on local historic districts.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact related to setting the public hearing.