



TO: Hyun Kim, City Manager
FROM: Peter Huffman, Planning and Development Services *PH*
COPY: Infrastructure, Planning and Sustainability Committee; Ramiro A. Chavez, P.E., PgMP; Anna Le; Marvin Griffin
PRESENTER: Reuben McKnight, Planning and Development Services
SUBJECT: Landmarks Commission recommendation to designate the North Union Avenue Greenway to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places
DATE: May 13, 2026

PRESENTATION TYPE:
Request for Resolution

SUMMARY:

On May 13, 2026, Planning and Development Services staff will present the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) Findings and Recommendations to add the North Union Avenue Greenway to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places and seek concurrence from the Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee (IPS).

BACKGROUND:

On March 11, 2026, the LPC voted to recommend to the City Council that the median along Union Avenue, between North 9th to North 30th Streets, approximately 18 blocks in length, be added to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places. This property is within the public right-of-way and includes the center median strips located along North Union Avenue, collectively referred to in the nomination document as the North Union Avenue Greenway. The nomination includes the median layouts and park-like character and use but excludes the trees themselves and adjacent road surfaces and parking strips. The nomination was prepared by Marshall McClintock on behalf of Historic Tacoma.

On January 28, 2026, the LPC found that the property appeared to meet the threshold criteria for designation in the ordinance and voted to schedule the nomination for a hearing. On February 25, 2026, the Commission held a public hearing to receive comment. Fifty-nine public comments were received, as well as an endorsement from the North End Neighborhood Council. Nearly all public comments received were in support of the proposed historic designation.

Following the hearing, the Commission reviewed the public testimony, including operational and maintenance concerns expressed by the Public Works and Environmental Services Departments, and found that the median meets the criteria in the Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) 13.07.040, and should be included on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places as a unique element in Tacoma's streetscape that reflects the developmental history of Tacoma's North End and the University of Puget Sound campus.

In consideration of the operational and maintenance needs expressed by City staff, the Commission also made specific recommendations regarding the design controls over the median strips as follows:



1. The Commission recommended that the following elements be included in the historic designation and require historic design review if alterations are proposed per TMC 13.05.40.D:
 - a. Changes to plan or landscaping configuration, including enlarging or decreasing the footprint of the medians; for example, reducing the footprint to incorporate a new travel/turn lane.
2. The Commission recommended exempting the following actions from historic oversight:
 - a. Management of existing landscaping, including tree maintenance and management.
 - b. Any work in the roadbed that is over the existing border between the curb back or edge of paved area.
 - c. Additions of accessibility and pedestrian improvements, such as ADA compliant ramps, tactile warning surfaces, and crossings.
 - d. Subgrade utility work or installations where the existing surface is to be restored.
 - e. Installation of traffic signaling devices, including poles where necessary.
 - f. Installation or alterations to lighting and other site safety features.

ISSUE:

Because this property is within the public right-of-way, which represents unique factors that differ from conventional real estate parcels, this presentation is an opportunity to familiarize IPS with the recommendation and requirements prior to the full City Council consideration.

ALTERNATIVES:

Alternative courses of action include:

Not adding the North Union Avenue Greenway to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places.

This would reject the LPC's recommendation, and result in the property not being recognized as being historically significant or protected by design review requirements.

Adding the North Union Avenue Greenway to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places, but amending the historic protections recommended by the LPC.

The current recommendation exempts many activities involving the medians from LPC oversight to address some of the operational concerns expressed by City departments. The Council resolution for each nomination includes a section titled "Controls" that identifies the portions of a historic property that require LPC approval if altered. The Council could add or remove from the Controls section in its designating resolution if it disagrees with the LPC recommendation. Depending on the changes to the designating resolution, this alternative if adopted would result in the property being added to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places, but with a lower or higher level of historic oversight.



FISCAL IMPACT:

There are no specific fiscal impacts resulting from this action. If the LPC recommendation is adopted, it is likely that large scale infrastructure projects would require design review, which could result in increased costs in terms of public process and engagement that is sometimes characteristic of high-profile public projects.

The activities of the Historic Preservation Program are budgeted, and this is within the scope of already budgeted activities and would not result in a specific fiscal impact to the program.

RECOMMENDATION:

In the Conclusions and Recommendations section of its Findings Report, the LPC states the following:

Conclusions:

1. North Union Avenue Greenway should be added to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places, appearing to meet Criteria A and G as outlined in the TMC 13.07.040.
2. The character defining elements in regard to this nomination includes the overall plan and landscaping configuration of the medians, including footprint, width and length. These elements should be included in the Controls section of the designating Council resolution, if so approved.
3. The LPC places weight on the input of the Public Works and Environmental Services Departments. Nothing in the historic designation shall prevent the City from meeting applicable city, state or federal regulations relating to right-of-way standards.

Recommendations:

1. The following elements are recommended to be included in the historic designation and require historic design review if alterations are proposed per TMC 13.05.040.D:
 - a. Changes to plan or landscaping configuration, including enlarging or decreasing the footprint of the medians; for example, reducing the footprint to incorporate a new travel/turn lane.
2. The following actions are recommended to be exempt from historic oversight:
 - a. Management of existing landscaping, including tree maintenance and management.
 - b. Any work in the roadbed that is over the existing border between the curb back or edge of paved area.
 - c. Additions of accessibility and pedestrian improvements, such as ADA compliant ramps, tactile warning surfaces, and crossings.
 - d. Subgrade utility work or installations where the existing surface is to be restored.
 - e. Installation of traffic signaling devices, including poles where necessary.
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ATTACHMENTS:

LPC Findings – North Union Greenway
Public Works Department Memo – North Union Greenway

Landmarks Preservation Commission

Planning & Development Services Department



North Union Avenue Greenway Nomination

Findings and Recommendations Report March 11, 2026

Background

1. The North Union Avenue Greenway nomination includes approximately 18 blocks of median running along North Union Avenue, from North 9th Street to North 30th Streets. The nomination includes only the median itself, and not furniture, trees or other elements, and is contained entirely within Public Right of Way. The nomination specifically refers to its scope as being the “physical medians, their layout and park-like character and use.”
2. The final draft of the nomination was submitted by Marshall McClintock on behalf of Historic Tacoma, a historic preservation advocacy organization, on November 12, 2025.
3. The draft nomination was forwarded for review and comment to the City of Tacoma Real Property Services Division of Public Works on July 7, 2025 and the final draft was provided on November 18, 2025.

Process

4. Nominations to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places are administered according to Tacoma Municipal Code 13.07.050, and are reviewed by the Landmarks Preservation Commission at a minimum of two separate meetings. At the first meeting, the Commission is tasked with making a threshold determination of significance and scheduling the nomination for public comment at an upcoming Public Hearing. Following the Hearing, the Commission may deliberate for up to 45 days before making a recommendation to City Council or denying the nomination.
5. The Commission first reviewed the North Union Avenue Greenway nomination at its meeting of January 28, 2026 and voted to forward the nomination for Public Hearing on February 25, 2026.
6. Subsequent to the Landmarks Commission action on January 28, public notice was sent to occupants and taxpayers of record within 400’ of the Union Avenue corridor and the Commission general hearing list, as well as published online at www.tacoma.gov/LPC-agenda and published in the Tacoma News Tribune on February 12, 2026.

Findings

7. Criteria assessment. Nominated properties must meet one of eight criteria listed at Tacoma Municipal Code 13.07.040. The following includes the criteria addressed in the nomination document:
 - a. **Criterion A: Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.**

The nomination states that the Greenway meets this criterion for its association with events that made a substantial contribution to Tacoma’s history.

According to the Statement of Significance, the medians are enduring physical expressions of these events, originating in the late 1880s with Allen C. Mason’s residential development of the North End and F. C. Ross’ Tacoma & Lake City Railroad (T&LCRR). The remaining broad layout preserves the footprint of the T&LCRR, and their tree-lined form embodies City Beautiful era ideals. The southern section reflects the establishment and expansion of the University of Puget Sound campus. Per the nomination, as a vernacular landscape, the

Greenway uniquely integrates history and form, making it one of Tacoma's most distinctive historic landscapes.

The Union Avenue medians are a physical result of many individual actions taken over the course of their history, including plats and transportation history, and they are unique to Tacoma's residential streets.

b. Criterion F¹: Abuts a property that is already listed on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places and was constructed within the period of significance of the adjacent structure.

Union Avenue abuts Nellie Hoyt Elementary School at 2708 N Union Avenue, which was added to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places. Hoyt was constructed in 1957, falling within the proposed period of significance for the greenway.

However, it is important to assess whether this is a significant association, such as sharing a development history, or design/style intent. In this particular case, the association between Hoyt Elementary and the Union Avenue median is not particularly strong or noteworthy.

c. Criterion G¹: Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristics, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood or City.

According to the nomination, North Union Avenue Greenway is significant under Criterion G as a 135-year-old, established, familiar and unique feature of the city, with exceptionally wide medians (8 are 20 ft. wide and 10 are 40 ft. wide) with approximately 205 mostly large, mature trees, most of which date to 1912 in the northern section and the 1960s in the southern section. The statement of significance notes that the greenway has become a familiar civic feature and site of community use, including a Tacoma Wheelmen's bicycle path in 1900, the North End Neighborhood Council's Mason-Union Loop in 1997, and neighborhood efforts to preserve the trees in the 1960s, city residents consistently invested the medians with meaning.

A significant number of public comments received noted this history and the role it has played over the years as a valued public space that has been used and enjoyed by generations, which appears to meet this criterion.

8. The period of significance stated in the nomination begins in 1886, with the naming of Union Avenue north of Puget Gulch and the subsequent development of the Tacoma and Lake City Railroad, completed in 1890, which ran from North 26th along Union Avenue to North 9th Street, where it curved to join North Proctor Street, and ends in 1964 when the southern section of Union was paved.
9. Character defining features.
 - a. There are no buildings, structures or furnishings in the medians. Although the nomination notes that part of the "uniqueness" of the medians is the "size, number and variety" of tree plantings, the trees themselves are not included in the proposed nomination.
 - b. The nomination notes that it also includes its "park-like character and use." The current use of the medians is Public Right of Way, although it is a popular walking area for residents. "Park-like" suggests landscaped green space. The use of a property is not something that is managed or governed by the Tacoma Register of Historic Places.

¹ Please note: the 2025 Historic Preservation Code update included a new significance criterion and renumbered the criteria; the nomination form has not yet been updated to reflect these changes and uses Criteria E and G on the form, which are now respectively F and H.

- c. The other character defining element noted in the nomination is the overall plan and configuration of the medians.

Conclusions:

1. North Union Avenue Greenway should be added to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places, appearing to meet Criteria A and G as outlined in the Tacoma Municipal Code 13.07.040.
2. The character defining elements in regard to this nomination includes the overall plan and landscaping configuration of the medians, including footprint, width and length. These elements should be included in the controls section of the designating Council resolution, if so approved.
3. The Commission places weight on the input of the Public Works and Environmental Services Departments. Nothing in the historic designation shall prevent the City from meeting applicable city, state or federal regulations relating to Right of Way standards.

Recommendations:

1. The following elements are recommended to be included in the historic designation and require historic design review if alterations are proposed per TMC 13.05.40.D:
 - a. Changes to plan or landscaping configuration, including enlarging or decreasing the footprint of the medians; for example, reducing the footprint to incorporate a new travel/turn lane.
2. The following actions are recommended to be exempt from historic oversight:
 - a. Management of existing landscaping, including tree maintenance and management.
 - b. Any work in the roadbed that is over the existing border between the curb back or edge of paved area.
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City of Tacoma

Public Works Department | Environmental Services Department

MEMORANDUM

To: Reuben McKnight, Historic Preservation Officer/Principal Planner
From: Mike Carey, Urban Forest Program Manager, Environmental Services Department;
Jennifer Kammerzell, Transportation Division Manager, Public Works Department
CC: Kurtis D. Kingsolver, Ramiro A. Chavez, Susie Rogers, Darius Thompson, and Brian Wang
Date: May 5, 2026
Subject: North Union Greenway Historic Nomination

Summary: The Public Works and Environmental Services Departments reviewed the nomination request to designate North Union Ave Greenway for historic preservation and met with the applicants to discuss the proposal. Staff recognize that the medians along Union Ave from N 9th St to N 30th St are a community asset with a complex history that provide distinguishing character to this north Tacoma neighborhood. The Departments support the preservation of the function of these medians, while also seeking to ensure a balance of existing and future needs for the use of the right-of-way (ROW) to support public safety, utility services, and multimodal transportation uses.

To the extent that a designation for historic preservation in the Tacoma Register of Historic Places would restrict the timely operation and maintenance of City facilities and services in the ROW, the Public Works and Environmental Services Departments are providing the below concerns and recommendations to address through the nomination process. Should the Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee (IPS) vote to move this application forward for City Council Consideration, staff recommends IPS include exceptions to allow for the City's ability to conduct work or alterations on or within the median and abutting roadway to address any public health, safety or welfare issues, to comply with any local, state, or federal code, rules, or regulations, and to implement the City's adopted transportation network and safety improvement plans.

Background: In June 2025, the North End Neighborhood Council (NENC) applied to the Tacoma Landmarks Preservation Commission (Commission) to nominate the public roadway median located within Union Ave from N 9th St to N 30th St as property to be listed under the Tacoma Register of Historic Places (Register). As the property in question is not parceled property, but rather public right-of-way, Public Works and Environmental Services Departments have been asked by the Planning & Development Services Department to



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review the application and comment on potential impacts such a designation may have on street and utility operations and maintenance.

The following comments have been gathered from Real Property Services, Transportation, and Street Design Divisions, on behalf of the Public Works Department, and the Science and Engineering Division and Director's Office, on behalf of the Environmental Services Department, concerning potential impacts to operations and maintenance, should the public roadway median be placed on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places.

Comments:

1. The City wants to preserve the ability to achieve the goals of Union Ave as a transportation corridor, in compliance with adopted planning documents, including the Transportation and Mobility Plan, the One Tacoma Comprehensive Plan, and as required per our Right of Way Design Manual.
2. The medians and abutting roadways contain utility infrastructure. Environmental Services and other utility service providers are required to maintain, operate, and alter these facilities to align with City goals, public safety, and welfare. Any considered designation on the Register cannot limit the ability for Utilities to provide safe, reliable service.
3. Environmental Services needs to address the limited availability of land suitable for stormwater treatment and flow control facilities as the Department of Ecology increases requirements for stormwater management. The City would like to keep options available for future use of these medians for new stormwater treatment and flow control facilities in addition to utilizing the existing trees as stormwater infrastructure. This will support future adherence to state and federal environmental requirements for stormwater management.
4. To ensure pedestrians are able to cross the road safely at intersections, accessibility improvements may be necessary. The City would like to ensure designation on the Register will not limit the ability for the City to make future safety and accessibility improvements.
5. South of N 19th St has a curb and gutter to define the medians and amenity/sidewalk zones. However, north of N 19th St has less definition and lacks consistent curb and gutter, undefined and variable widths, and some trees are planted close to the roadway edge, which may create issues with future roadway maintenance or improvements. The City would like to ensure the ability to address deficiencies and construct permanent roadway sections as may be necessary to provide safe,



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accessible access. This may require changes in roadway width, or establishment of a new roadway width where it is currently underdefined.

6. The City is required to properly operate and maintain existing signal and signage infrastructure within the medians, and would like to reserve the ability to make future signal and signage improvements as necessary.
7. Illumination needs for the wide right-of-way have not been identified. Currently, there is a mix of pedestrian scale and overhead streetlights on both sides of the street. Future improvements or neighborhood safety concerns may require lighting in the median. The City would like to ensure the installation of future lighting for illumination needs in the medians is exempt from review.
8. The process for Heritage Tree nomination is governed by the TMC 9.20, and outside of the authority of the North Union Greenway Historic Nomination. The City understands the intent of this nomination is to preserve the pattern, size, and species of trees that are currently planted. There are concerns, however, with the current Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*), due to their invasive characteristics. We would recommend using an alternative species of similar mature form and size for any replacement trees that may be necessary in the future.

Conclusion: The City of Tacoma Public Works and Environmental Services Departments support the preservation of the Union Avenue medians for their unique quality that defines the character of the neighborhood. The Departments also recognize the need to maintain authority and flexibility to conduct work within the public ROW for public safety, utility services, and transportation options to continue to provide a safe, connected Tacoma for all to enjoy. To support this effort, the Public Works and the Environmental Services Departments recommend any designation of Union Avenue on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places include review exceptions, as noted above, for all necessary work within or adjacent to the medians that may be required to address public health, safety or welfare, to comply with any local, state, or federal code, rules, or regulations, and to implement the City Council adopted transportation improvements as necessary.