



TO: Elizabeth A. Pauli, 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 designating the Cushman and Adams Street Substations as City Landmarks
and placing said properties on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places – June 6, 2017
DATE: May 10, 2017

SUMMARY:

On June 6, 2017 staff will present a request for a Council Resolution to place the following property on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places:

- Cushman and Adams Street Substations (3713 North 19th Street & 1920 North Adams Street)

This request follows the recommendation from the Infrastructure, Planning and Sustainability Committee as well as the Landmarks Preservation Commission to include within the scope of the designation the following elements of the property:

- The Cushman Substation exterior and interior of the condenser room, as well as the surrounding site, at 3713 North 19th Street, and
- The Adams Street Substation exterior, as well as the surrounding site and a single electrical transmission tower on the site, located at 1920 North Adams Street

STRATEGIC POLICY PRIORITY:

This action is best aligned with the following strategic policy priorities:

- Foster a vibrant and diverse economy with good jobs for all Tacoma residents.
- Assure outstanding stewardship of the natural and built environment.

BACKGROUND:

The Cushman and Adams Street Substations were nominated to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places by a private citizen. As originally submitted, the nomination included the substation buildings, including the interior of the Cushman Substation condenser room, the site surrounding both buildings, and the lattice transmission towers located in the center of North 21st Street that run from the substations to North Highland Street (approximately 1.5 miles to the west). The Cushman Substation property and the transmission line were previously added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2016.

The Cushman and Adams Street Substations are of primary historical significance to Tacoma. The complex is significant for its association with the region's growth as a result of hydroelectric power production and as an excellent example of monumental, neoclassical revival style architecture. The Cushman Substation is a visual statement as to the importance of the city's municipal hydroelectric system.

The Commission first reviewed the nomination on December 14, 2016, at which time, it voted to exclude the transmission towers within North 21st Street from further consideration. The Commission held a public hearing on the nomination of the remaining elements, which included one remaining lattice transmission tower located adjacent to the Adams Street Substation, on February 8, 2017.



The nomination received 34 individual written and oral comments during its review. All comments received were in support of the designation of the exteriors of both buildings. Of those comments, ten individuals opposed designation of the Adams Street lattice tower. Five of the comments specifically supported the designation of the interior of the Cushman Substation condenser room.

On February 22, 2017, the Commission voted unanimously to recommend designation of the Cushman and Adams Street Substations, including the surrounding sites, the lattice tower on the Adams Street Substation property, and the interior of the main condenser room. The staff recommendation excluded the interior of the condenser room.

On April 17, 2017, the Landmarks Preservation Commission was presented to the Infrastructure, Planning and Sustainability Committee. The Committee voted to forward the recommendation of the commission to the full Council.

ISSUE:

By designating the Cushman and Adams Street Substations as City Landmarks, the buildings will be protected for future generations, as alterations will require the approval of the Landmarks Preservation Commission. In addition, because the properties are located in an R-2 zoning designation, the Historic Conditional Use Permit could provide land use flexibility for future adaptive re-use of the facilities.

In addition, it may become eligible for other historic preservation incentives, including Special Tax Valuation, low-interest loans and Transfer of Development Rights.

However, the Landmarks Commission recommendation differs from the staff recommendation regarding the interior condenser room, which staff recommends excluding from the designating resolution based on a code interpretation and convention. Tacoma Public Utilities has also indicated that it does not support including the interior in the designation.

ALTERNATIVES:

The recommended nominations of the Cushman and Adams Street Substations could be rejected for listing on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places by Council under TMC 13.07.050 D, which would leave these properties unprotected from inappropriate future alterations or even demolition.

The Council could also accept the recommendation to designate but in Council's designating resolution under TMC 13.07.050 D.2.c remove any individual element from the nomination, including the condenser room, the surrounding site, or the lattice tower. This action would limit the Landmarks Commission's oversight over the property to only those elements specified in the resolution.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Infrastructure, Planning and Sustainability Committee and the Landmarks Preservation Commission recommend the designation of the Cushman and Adams Street Substations, including:

1. The exteriors of both substation buildings
2. The interior of the "condenser room" of the Cushman Street Substation
3. The sites surrounding both buildings (not including the non-historic electrical switchyard equipment)
4. The solitary transmission tower adjacent to the Adams Substation (which would serve as a remnant of the original transmission line, and could be relocated to elsewhere on the site if needed)



Staff concurs with the above recommendation, with the exception of the interior condenser room in the Cushman Substation, which is recommended to be removed from the designating resolution.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no direct fiscal impact that results from designation to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places. Design review can potentially increase the cost of future alterations. A property's status as a City Landmark can increase the potential for adaptive reuse due to the special Historic Conditional Use Permit process.