



City of Tacoma
Landmarks Preservation Commission

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

NOMINATION OF THE PROPERTIES AT 201 AND 205 N YAKIMA TO THE TACOMA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

OCTOBER 14, 2020

BACKGROUND

The Wahlgren house, at 205 N. Yakima Avenue, was built before 1902 and the Wahlgren Florist Shop, at 201 N. Yakima Avenue, was built in 1949. The house and shop are within the boundaries of the 1977 Stadium-Seminary Washington Heritage and National Register Historic Districts. Both of these structures have been nominated to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places by Historic Tacoma. The owner opposes this nomination.

PREVIOUS ACTIONS

On April 22, 2020, the Landmarks Preservation Commission reviewed a historic property assessment report prepared on behalf of the ownership as required by TMC 13.12.570.B for demolition of structures located within a National Register Historic District. Both buildings are planned for removal to make way for new development.

The Historic Property Assessment report determined that the properties did not appear to meet the criteria for designation, an assessment with which staff concurred. The Commission disagreed with the assessment report recommendations and found that the properties should be formally considered for inclusion on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places based upon its association with the flower industry in Tacoma and the Wahlgren family. Due to COVID-19, the recommendation is has been pending review at the City Council Infrastructure, Planning and Sustainability Committee.

On May 27, 2020, Historic Tacoma submitted an independent nomination for both properties to the Historic Preservation Office. Upon request of the owner, a 30-day review period was granted. On August 12, 2020 the Commission conducted a preliminary review of the nomination and voted to schedule it for a public hearing on September 9. Following the hearing, the Commission reviewed testimony and comments at its September 23 meeting.

FINDINGS

1. On May 27, 2020, Historic Tacoma, an independent non-profit historic preservation advocacy group, submitted a nomination for 201 and 205 N Yakima Avenue (Wahlgren's Florists and Wahlgren residence, respectively) to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places.
2. Nomination of properties to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places listing follows procedures defined in 13.07.050.
3. Any person may submit a nomination of a property to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places so long as evidence is provided in the nomination that the owners of the subject property have been contacted prior to submittal by the nominator. A letter to A&A Property Holdings LLC met this requirement.

4. On June 18, the Historic Preservation Officer determined that the nomination was complete and notified Historic Tacoma and the property owner, A&A Property Holdings LLC. At that time, the owner requested an additional 30 days to review and respond to the nomination as provided by the municipal code, which was granted and the nomination was scheduled for its first review (Preliminary Review) on August 12, 2020.
5. On August 12, 2020, the Landmarks Preservation Commission reviewed the nomination and concluded that the buildings did appear to meet the threshold criteria in the municipal code for age and integrity, and appeared to meet the nomination criteria A, B, C and F (discussed below). The Commission voted to schedule the nomination for a Public Hearing on September 9, 2020.
6. The hearing was conducted via virtual webinar on September 9, 2020. Notice was sent to adjacent property owners within a 400' radius 14 days prior to the meeting and published in the News Tribune on September 2, as well as posted to the Landmarks Commission agenda website and distributed by email.
7. Following the public hearing, the Commission reviewed testimony and discussion on September 23 and directed staff to prepare findings for review and action at the Commission meeting of October 14.
8. The building at 201 N Yakima was built in 1949 on its current site as a florist's shop. The building is a one story flat-roofed commercial building with large projecting canopy and a steel pipe column structural system supporting the front elevation, large glass display windows, Roman brick planter boxes below the windows, recessed lighting under the canopy, and originally, a Vitrolite glass parapet with a projecting neon sign that contained the name of the business. Several alterations have occurred over the years, including a 1951 addition to the rear of the property, two window replacements on the addition, loss of the original business sign and the removal or covering of the Vitrolite glass panels on the parapet with a corrugated metal sheathing.
9. The residence at 205 N Yakima was constructed in 1902 and converted to a multifamily residence sometime prior to the 1930s; this conversion resulted in the infill of a first floor alcove porch and the addition of a pent roof, installation of two separate entrances. The other principle changes to the building include an enclosed porch on the north elevation and a storage shed on the northeast corner of the building. The building was included in the 1977 inventory of the Stadium Seminary National Register Historic District as a "secondary" structure. Buildings within the district were categorized at the time as "Pivotal," "Primary," "Secondary" or "Intrusive."
10. The nomination submitted to the Commission cited several criteria for historic significance in the Tacoma Municipal Code.
 - (i) Criterion A for the buildings' association with the major flower and bulb growing industry in and around Tacoma from the 1920s to the 1960s.
 - (ii) Criterion B for the buildings' association with the lives of persons and communities significant to Tacoma's past. According to the nomination, the house is associated with Harry Nash, a Washington Territory pioneer who established a thriving Tacoma butcher and meat market business. It is also associated as the residence and business site of Swedish immigrant Fred P. Wahlgren, his wife Dora, and their children Lillian M. and Fred G., who all operated a successful florist business at the site for some 68 years.

- (iii) Criterion C for embodying for embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type and period. The florist shop at 201 N. Yakima Avenue was nominated as an example of Modernist-style commercial architecture. The house at 205 N. Yakima Avenue has undergone some alterations since its initial construction; it was nominated as an example of the Free Classic variant of the Queen Anne-style found in modest, early 20th Century residences.
- (iv) Criterion F. Wahlgren's Florist shop at 210 N. Yakima has been a prominent feature of the corner of N. Yakima Avenue and N. 2nd Street since its construction in 1949.
11. During the preliminary nomination review, the owner was represented by Ellen Mirro, a professionally qualified architectural historian. Ms. Mirro stated that the owner did not support the nomination and that while the owners recognized the significance of the Wahlgren family and the florist business associated with the buildings, they did not believe it was sufficient to meet the threshold criteria for nomination. Ms. Mirro also indicated that Fred Wahlgren did not consider the properties part of his family's legacy, and presented a letter from him stating his intention in the decision to sell them. Further, she argued that the buildings had been altered, which in turn affected the ability of the building to convey their period as well as original designs.
12. At the preliminary nomination review, the Commission found that the properties appeared to meet the threshold criteria for age and integrity, and appeared to meet several of the designation criteria, and voted to schedule the nomination for a public hearing to receive public comment.
13. The hearing was conducted via virtual webinar on September 9, 2020. Notice was sent to adjacent property owners within a 400' radius 14 days prior to the meeting and published in the News Tribune on September 2.
14. A total of 19 email, written and oral comments were received at the hearing. The majority of the comments (15) were in support of the nomination. Specific reasons for support included: the buildings are historically or architecturally significant (9), the commenter is opposed to the proposed development (4), and general support (5). Comments opposing the historic designation (4) included: the original owner does not support (1), current owner intends to provide housing (1), people are opposing the nomination because they do not want apartments (1), the city needs new development (1), and the subject buildings do not meet the historic eligibility criteria (1).
15. The first criterion cited in the nomination is Criterion A, which states: *Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.*
16. The nomination states that the florist shop is significant under this criterion for its association with the major flower and bulb growing industry in and around Tacoma from the 1920s through the 1960s. Fred Wahlgren established a floral business at the site in 1934 that continued for 68 years. According to the nomination, the business is also significantly associated with Japanese American Robert T Mizukami and the Fife Gardenville Greenhouses, as well as the annual Daffodil Festival.
17. The owner contends that the subject building is not known to be associated in a significant way with an historic event with a significant effect upon the community, city, state, or nation, nor does it convey any historical association with the broad patterns of history, in this case the flower industry in Tacoma and the Japanese American community, through its appearance. The owner stated that the building therefore does not qualify for designation under this criterion.

18. Upon analysis, the Commission believes the florist shop is a rare surviving connection with the cut flower industry in Tacoma and the south Puget Sound. Tacoma was the center of one of the largest flower industries in the United States, but now the local industry is gone. The Commission further feels that the association with the historical narrative of Tacoma's flower industry is intact despite the loss of the vitrolite panels on the parapet, and the business identity sign.
19. However, the Commission does not find the association with the Japanese American flower business nor the association with Robert T. Mizukami to be significant as documented in the nomination document.
20. The florist shop is also nominated under Criterion B, which states: *Is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.*
21. The nomination states that 201 N Yakima is eligible for its association with Harry Nash, a Washington Territory Pioneer who established a thriving butcher and meat market business, and with the Wahlgren family and their business.
22. Conversely, the owner contends that although the subject buildings are associated with the Wahlgren family and Wahlgren's Floral, the mere longevity of a business and residency is not enough to consider the members of the Wahlgren family to be considered "significant" to the history of the city of Tacoma.
23. Upon review of the criteria, the Commission believes that, although the building is associated with the Wahlgren family and their business, that association is diminished due to the loss of the sign on the building. There is no evidence of any association for this building with Harry Nash, nor evidence of the historical importance of Mr. Nash. The Commission therefore finds that the florist's shop does not meet Criterion B.
24. The florist shop is nominated under Criterion C, which states: *Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.*
25. According to the nomination, 201 N Yakima is eligible as an "excellent and rare" example of Modernist style commercial architecture in the Stadium District and exhibits a high quality of design through its enframed window walls, flat roof and parapet and extended awning with original light fixtures and Roman brick planters.
26. The owner contends that, although the building is a midcentury commercial building, being a "type" of building does not alone convey significance. Due to alterations, it no longer has the ability to embody or convey its type.
27. Upon review of this criterion, the Commission acknowledges that the building is an example of a midcentury building. Although it is "emblematic" of a midcentury commercial building, and does possess some distinctive characteristics of the type, the Commission finds that it is not a significant or exceptional example of a midcentury commercial building, and therefore does not meet Criterion C.
28. The florist shop is also nominated under Criterion F, which states: *Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristics, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood or City.*

29. The nomination contends that 201 N Yakima is eligible as it has been a prominent feature on the corner of N Yakima Avenue and N 2nd Street since 1949, and that this significance is evidenced by its being prominently featured on a mural at Shake Shake Shake, a nearby restaurant.
30. The ownership acknowledges that the building does appear on a community mural, but also contends that being a structure on a corner does not alone indicate that a building is significant.
31. Upon review of this criterion, the Commission finds that the building does have singular physical characteristics and is clearly an established and familiar feature of the neighborhood, and therefore meets Criterion F.
32. The residence at 205 N Yakima is nominated under Criterion A, which is described above.
33. The nomination states that the house at 205 N Yakima is significant under Criterion A for its association with the Wahlgren Family, and their floral business, which is also associated with the Japanese American florist and businessperson Robert T Mizukami. The house is also nominated under this criterion as an example of housing for working and lower middle class residents of Tacoma.
34. The owner states that the association of this house with the history of the floral industry and with the Mizukami Family business is tenuous, and that it does not appear to meet any of the criteria for significance and designation under the Tacoma Municipal Code.
35. Upon review of this criterion, the Commission does not find any significant association with Robert T. Mizukami or the Japanese flower industry. The Commission also finds that, although the home is clearly associated with the Wahlgren family, the association with the business does not appear to be historically significant. Lastly, the home does not appear to be significant as an example of housing for middle/working class people. Therefore, the Commission finds that the residence does not meet Criterion A.
36. The residence is also nominated under Criterion B, described above.
37. The nomination states that 205 N Yakima is eligible for its association with Harry Nash, a Washington Territory Pioneer who established a thriving butcher and meat market business, and with the Wahlgren family and their business. A brief biography of Mr. Nash is included in the nomination, describing his life and businesses.
38. As with the florist shop, the owner contends that the mere longevity of a business and residency is not enough to consider the members of the Wahlgren family to be considered "significant" to the history of the city of Tacoma.
39. Upon review of this criterion, the Commission does not find any significance in the association of the house to the Wahlgren family, or with Mr. Nash. Therefore, the Commission finds that the residence does not appear to meet Criterion B.
40. The residence is also nominated under Criterion C, which is described above.
41. The nomination indicates that 205 N Yakima is eligible as an example of the Free Classic variant of a Queen Anne style residence built in the early 20th century, with elements that include a steeply pitched cross gabled roof, asymmetrical entrance, wood shake siding and projecting bay, and decorative windows.

42. The owner counters that because the house has been altered, it no longer clearly conveys its architectural types or period of construction in a significant way.
43. Upon review of this criterion, the Commission finds that it is not a significant example of a Free Classic Queen Anne residence, and therefore does not meet Criterion C.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

1. The Commission finds that the florist shop at 201 N Yakima meets Criterion A, for its association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns or our history.
2. The Commission also finds that the property at 201 N Yakima meets the eligibility criteria for Criterion F, as an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood.
3. The Commission finds that the residence at 205 N Yakima does not appear to meet the criteria for inclusion in the Tacoma Register of Historic Places.
4. Therefore, the Commission recommends to City Council that Wahlgren's Florist Shop at 201 N Yakima should be listed on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and F.