




City of Tacoma

City Council Action Memorandum

TO: Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager
FROM: Peter Huffman, Director, Planning and Development Services 
COPY: City Council and City Clerk
SUBJECT: Resolution - set public hearing date for a proposed six-month extension of a moratorium on the nomination and designation of Historic Special Review and Conservation Districts - January 28, 2025
DATE: January 8, 2025

SUMMARY AND PURPOSE:

A resolution setting Tuesday, February 11, 2025, as the date for a public hearing before the City Council on a proposed six-month extension of the existing one-year moratorium on the nomination and designation of new Historic Special Review and Conservation Districts, to extend the termination of the moratorium until November 5, 2025.

BACKGROUND:

On November 15, 2023, the Planning Commission, in response to Resolution No. 41226, voted to recommend the City Council establish a moratorium on the consideration and adoption of new local historic special review districts for a period of one year, and that the moratorium should terminate following the adoption of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan and Code Amendment package.

The City Council subsequently established the moratorium under Amended Ordinance No. 28962 on April 23, 2024, with an effective date of May 5, 2024, until May 5, 2025. The proposal would extend the existing moratorium until November 5, 2025, to complete the 2024-25 Comprehensive Plan and accompanying regulatory code amendments.

On December 20, 2024, the Washington State Growth Management Hearings Board (GMHB) overturned Amended Ordinance No. 28962, finding that the City's adopted workplan did not provide sufficient detail to meet the requirements of RCW 36.70A.390. The City has until March 12, 2025, to provide a revised workplan.

In addition, the policy and code work is currently underway but will not be concluded before the termination date of May 5, 2025. There are three principal components of this effort:

1. Historic preservation policy review and update, currently underway as a part of the Comprehensive Plan amendment process, which is scheduled to be considered by the City Council in June 2025;
2. Historic preservation incentives study, intended to identify potential improvements to incentive programs that encourage historic preservation, which is also currently underway and scheduled to conclude in March 2025; and
3. Historic preservation code amendments, which will include proposed amendments to the Tacoma Municipal Code in response to the updated Comprehensive Plan (focusing on the process for creation of new local historic district overlay zones), scheduled to conclude in October 2025.

Both the GMHB decision and the current review schedule for the required amendments necessitate revisions to the workplan, which will be reviewed by the Planning Commission on January 15, 2025. That document is attached as an exhibit.

Following the public hearing, if conducted, the City will prepare an ordinance extending the moratorium for Council's consideration in February.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/ CUSTOMER RESEARCH:

This issue has been extensively discussed at the Landmarks Preservation Commission, Planning Commission and City Council, and was subject of a previous City Council public hearing on March 5, 2024.

2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Equity and Accessibility: (Mandatory)

The recommendations from the Landmarks Preservation Commission are intended to address equity issues, and includes the following language:

“A. The Historic Comprehensive Plan Element and associated regulatory codes should be reviewed during the next code and policy amendment process to assess and evaluate compatibility with the broad City policy of objectives concerning diversity, equity and inclusion, to identify barriers, gaps in preservation policy, and criteria used by the Commission, and to identify additional tools and incentives for owners and residents of historic properties.”

Similarly, the Planning Commission identified a need to incorporate equity goals into this review and designation process. Their recommendation includes:

“The Planning Commission recommends that Comprehensive Plan policies and regulatory code relating to historic districts be reviewed [and] amended at the earliest appropriate amendment cycle, to include review of consistencies between historic preservation policies and policies elsewhere in the Comprehensive Plan relating to housing, equity, and sustainability.”

Civic Engagement: Equity Index Score: Moderate 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.

Livability: Equity Index Score: Moderate Opportunity

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

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

Historic preservation honors the legacy of Tacoma and adds character to neighborhoods, improving perception and overall quality of life. However, preserving history should be complementary to equity access to housing options throughout the City. Both the Planning and Landmarks Preservation Commissions have communicated a need to review code language, and the moratorium was established in response. The work requested is still underway.

ALTERNATIVES:

Alternative(s)	Positive Impact(s)	Negative Impact(s)
1. No action.	Maintain maximum flexibility for applicants to Historic Special Review and Conservation Districts.	The moratorium will expire, potentially resulting in staff time and resources into a process that Commissioners have already requested we change; review of submittals under current regulations.



EVALUATION AND FOLLOW UP:

The recommendation for a moratorium includes a timeline that will conclude with the adoption of new policies and regulations under the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Amendment Package. Action by the City Council on the amendment package should address the majority of concerns identified during recent historic district reviews by the respective commissions.

STAFF/SPONSOR RECOMMENDATION:

The Planning Commission, in response to Resolution No. 41226, recommended that the City Council establish a moratorium on the consideration and adoption of new local historic special review districts for a period of one year, and that the moratorium should terminate following the adoption of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan and Code Amendment package. The amendment package and code updates have yet to be completed but are underway and scheduled to conclude in their entirety by October 2025.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Planning Commission/Long-Range Planning work program is currently full. Recent additions to the work program, such as this moratorium consideration, have stretched existing resources and forced adjustments to the work program. While the process to evaluate this moratorium has already impacted the work program, the subsequent policy and code update called for in this moratorium was already largely programmed as part of the Growth Management Act-mandated Periodic Comprehensive Plan Update, which is underway and expected to be completed this summer.

What Funding is being used to support the expense?

No fiscal impact.

Are the expenditures and revenues planned and budgeted in this biennium's current budget?

NO, PLEASE EXPLAIN BELOW

N/A

Are there financial costs or other impacts of not implementing the legislation?

No

Will the legislation have an ongoing/recurring fiscal impact?

No

Will the legislation change the City's FTE/personnel counts?

No

ATTACHMENT:

Revised Historic Moratorium Workplan

Historic Moratorium – Workplan Background and Scope

In 2020 and 2022, the City of Tacoma Planning Commission considered and rejected a proposal to establish a new primarily residential local historic district overlay zone in the North End of Tacoma. In both cases, the Landmarks Preservation Commission and the Planning Commission differed in their findings regarding the appropriateness of establishing a local historic district. However, both Commissions recommended that the relevant policies and codes be reviewed at the next available cycle to address consistency and alignment between historic preservation regulations and other City priority policies and initiatives, including:

- A. The Historic Comprehensive Plan Element and associated regulatory codes should be reviewed during the next code and policy amendment process to assess and evaluate compatibility with the broad City policy of objectives concerning diversity, equity and inclusion, to identify barriers, gaps in preservation policy, and criteria used by the Commission, and to identify additional tools and incentives for owners and residents of historic properties.
- B. Specifically, Comprehensive Plan policies and regulatory code relating to historic districts should be reviewed and amended at the earliest appropriate amendment cycle, to include review of consistencies between historic preservation policies and policies elsewhere in the Comprehensive Plan relating to housing, equity, and sustainability.
- C. A review of the historic district designation process to be conducted to clarify the roles and scope of the review by the Landmarks Commission and Planning Commission, and to improve coordination between the two processes.
- D. The City should identify additional resources to support researching and proactive creation of historic districts and designation of historic buildings, especially in areas that are underserved by historic preservation, in order to improve familiarity with and access to historic preservation land use tools, promote investment in older neighborhoods, and celebrate neighborhood identity and enhance quality of life.
- E. The design review fee schedule for properties on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places, including those within locally designated historic districts and individual City Landmarks, should be reviewed, particularly to determine whether the value to the City is appropriately balanced with the impact to community members.
- F. For future local historic district proposals, the Planning Commission concurred with the Landmarks Preservation Commission's recommendation to reduce the burden on property owners and residents within local historic districts by relaxing or reducing design review requirements.

The City Council, per Ordinance No. 28962, enacted a temporary, limited moratorium on the nomination and designation of new Historic Special Review and Conservation Districts to allow for the requested policy and code update to be completed before any new applications were considered.

To address this direction, the City's workplan includes three primary components:

1. Historic Preservation policy review and update (coordinated with the state-mandated periodic Comprehensive Plan update)
2. Historic Preservation Incentives Study (to inform both the policy and code updates)
3. Historic Preservation code amendment (including updates to the designation process and procedures)

Historic Moratorium – Workplan Schedule

Comprehensive Plan Amendment (2024-2025)

Purpose: Address inconsistencies between historic preservation policies and other policy areas within the Comprehensive Plan (Recommendations A, B, C)

Schedule:

Date	Action	Status
March - June 2024	Community Launch/Citywide Engagement	<i>Complete</i>
July - December 2024	Policy Development and Plan Drafting	<i>Complete</i>
October 2024	Planning Commission briefing on Historic Preservation Element update to the Comprehensive Plan	<i>Complete</i>
December 2025	Internal stakeholder review of Draft Plan	<i>Underway</i>
January 2025	Planning Commission review of Draft Plan and release for public comment	
February 2025	Landmarks Commission review of Draft Plan	
March 2025	Planning Commission Public Hearing on Draft Plan	
April 2025	Planning Commission Recommendation	
May 2025	City Council Public Hearing on Recommended Plan	
Jun 2025	Council Adoption	

Historic Preservation Financial Incentives Study

Purpose: Identify tools and incentives for owners and residents of historic properties, to encourage preservation compatible development, and to reduce barriers to access. (Recommendations A, E, F)

Schedule:

November - December 2023	Request for Proposals Review and Award	<i>Complete</i>
January - February 2024	Contracting	<i>Complete</i>
Spring - Summer 2024	Stakeholder research and interviews	<i>Complete</i>
Dec 2024 - Jan 2025	Review of Draft Report and Recommendations	<i>Underway</i>
January - March 2025	Incorporate relevant reviews into Comprehensive Plan Draft and/or Code Draft	

Historic Preservation Code Amendment

Purpose: Amend relevant regulatory codes including Tacoma Municipal Code Chapters 13.05, 13.07 and 13.12 to address policy amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and district nomination and designation process.

Schedule:

April - July 2025	Code development and Landmarks/Planning Commission briefings
July 2025	Planning Commission review of Draft Code and release for public comment
August 2025	Landmarks Commission Recommendation Planning Commission Public Hearing
September 2025	Planning Commission recommendation
October 2025	City Council Public Hearing Council Adoption