



Tacoma Totem Pole De-accession and De-listing

City of Tacoma | TVE: Office of Arts & Cultural Vitality
and PDS: Historic Preservation Office

City Council Study Session
June 29, 2021



OVERVIEW



- Tacoma Arts Commission and Landmarks Commission found that the Tacoma Totem Pole is inauthentic and is an example of cultural appropriation, and that its continued status as a City Landmark is harmful to the community and counter to the City's commitment to antiracism and reconciliation.
- Resolution rescinding the Tacoma Totem Pole from the Tacoma Register of Historic Places.
- Deaccession and disposition recommendations of the Tacoma Totem Pole from the Municipal Art Collection.

BACKGROUND



- **March 8:** Tacoma Arts Commission (TAC) unanimously voted to deaccess the Totem Pole from the Municipal Art Collection based on recommendations by the de-accession panel.
- **March 14:** Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) voted to begin consideration of "rescission of landmarks designation" per its process in TMC 13.07.055.
- **May 12:** LPC conducted a public hearing and continued to accept comments through May 22.
- **May 26:** LPC unanimously voted to recommend removal of the pole from the historic register on May 26, following review of the testimony.

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ISSUES






- The Tacoma Totem Pole was commissioned by Tacoma businessmen William Sheard and Chester Thorne in 1903 as a way to attract tourism and investment in Tacoma and the Alaska-Yukon expansion. It was recorded as a Tacoma Landmark in 1975.
- The Tacoma Totem Pole is believed to be fraudulent in origin and misrepresents Native American peoples and artforms. The original artists are unknown.

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Images of the Tacoma Totem Pole at 3 different locations past to present, Courtesy Grit City Magazine

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ISSUES



Deaccession and Disposition of the Tacoma Totem Pole

- Tacoma Arts Commission convened the de-accession panel that centered indigenous voice, including members from the Puyallup, Haida/Tlingit tribes on February 25.
- Confirmed the fraudulent origins of the Tacoma Totem Pole and the resulting harm this causes.
- Recommends removal of the object from the collection and physical site based on de-accession categories "inauthentic" and lack of "aesthetic quality".

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ISSUES



Deaccession and Disposition of the Tacoma Totem Pole

- Removal of the pole by end of August 2021
- Commission new works by Puyallup/Coast Salish artists in collaboration with the Puyallup Tribe.

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ISSUES



Rescission as a City of Tacoma Landmark

- TMC 13.07 provides a process to remove the pole from the Tacoma Register of Historic Places
- Landmarks Preservation Commission conducted hearing 5/26/21
- Unanimous recommendation to rescind the historic designation
- Resolution before Council 6/29/21

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●●● HEALTH, EQUITY & SUSTAINABILITY ANALYSIS

- Removal of the Tacoma Totem Pole from the Municipal Art Collection, public display and rescission from the historic register will remove a barrier to reconciliation and inclusion with the Puyallup Tribe and other native and indigenous people, by ending the celebration of an item of cultural appropriation.

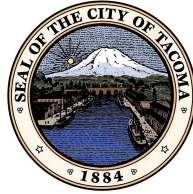
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●●● NEXT STEPS

- Rescission Resolution to City Council – June 29, 2021
- Removal of Totem Pole – August 2021
- Coordinate and collaborate with representatives from the Puyallup Tribe.
- Commission new artwork from Puyallup/Coast Salish artists at Firefighters Park and elsewhere – ongoing.

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