



City of Tacoma

City Council Action Memorandum

TO: Hyun Kim, City Manager
FROM: Reuben McKnight, Historic Preservation Officer
Peter Huffman, Director, Planning and Development Services Department 
COPY: City Council and City Clerk
SUBJECT: Resolution – Adding the North Union Avenue Greenway to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places – August 18, 2026
DATE: August 3, 2026

SUMMARY AND PURPOSE:

A resolution adding the North Union Avenue Greenway, located along Union Avenue from North 9th to North 30th Streets, to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places.

BACKGROUND:

This Department's Recommendation is Based On:

On March 11, 2026, the Landmarks Preservation Commission voted to recommend to City Council that the median along Union Avenue, from 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 Landmarks Preservation Commission 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.

On May 13, 2026, staff presented the Commission's recommendation to the Infrastructure, Planning and Sustainability (IPS) Committee. The IPS Committee recommended that staff research potential alternative options that would achieve the objectives of the historic designation, conduct additional meetings with City Council Members, and return to the full Council no sooner than two months following the IPS Committee briefing. After extensive internal discussions between staff from the Public Works, Environmental Services, and Planning and Development Services Departments, it was determined that there is no existing mechanism in City regulations or programs that would create a public design review process and historic protections for this area as a historic designation would, and that there is no alternative recommendation from staff.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/ CUSTOMER RESEARCH:

This action would create a set of design review requirements for significant layout or landscaping alterations to this portion of public right-of-way, which would require approval from the Landmarks Preservation Commission via public design review outlined in TMC 13.05.040. No private property owners would be directly affected by this action; however, there is potential that the historic review process for alterations could increase the project planning timeline and require more costly alternative design solutions than a project would that has no historic review requirements.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission received public comment from the North End Neighborhood Council, University of Puget Sound, and over fifty other private residents in response to its public hearing on February 25, 2026. Notice was sent to residents and property owners within 400 feet of the affected right-of-way and advertised pursuant to notice requirements in TMC 13.07 for nominations to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places, and comment was solicited directly from Public Works and Environmental Services. The Commission discussed the nomination at its public meetings on January 28, February 25, and March 11, 2026 prior to making its recommendation to Council.

2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Civic Engagement: *Equity Index Score:* High 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:* High 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).

Public comment received in response to this nomination consistently noted that this median area has a long history of public use, as a walking path, park, a bicycle route, and noted that spaces like these are important to individuals of all backgrounds. Moreover, historic designation provides a conduit for public review and commentary on proposed significant alterations to this public space.

ALTERNATIVES:

Presumably, your recommendation is not the only potential course of action; please discuss other alternatives or actions that City Council or staff could take. Please use table below.

Alternative(s)	Positive Impact(s)	Negative Impact(s)
Decline to add property to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places.	Future alterations to this portion of right-of-way will have fewer permitting and regulatory steps, likely resulting in lower costs and shorter timelines if historic review is not a factor.	Although the Landmarks Preservation Commission found the property to have historic significance, if it is not included in the register, there will be no avenue for public input for future changes unless outreach is specifically planned for such a project, and its historic character may not factor into future decisions.

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW UP:

The Landmarks Preservation Commission provides an annual update to City Council as well as the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation regarding program activities and performance.

STAFF/SPONSOR RECOMMENDATION:

The Landmarks Preservation Commission recommends that the North Union Avenue Greenway be added to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places as follows:

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.



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- 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.

Staff concurs with this recommendation.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There are no anticipated direct fiscal impacts associated with this action.

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

YES

Any expenditures associated with maintaining the Tacoma Register of Historic Places are included in the program general operating budget. There are no specific expenditures planned for this specific historic designation.

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

ATTACHMENTS:

- Landmarks Preservation Commission Recommendation dated March 11, 2026
- Maps