

Landmarks Preservation Commission

Planning & Development Services Department



North Union Avenue Greenway Nomination

Findings and Recommendations Report March 11, 2026

Background

1. The North Union Avenue Greenway nomination includes approximately 18 blocks of median running along North Union Avenue, from North 9th Street to North 30th Street. The nomination includes only the median itself, and not furniture, trees or other elements, and is contained entirely within Public Right of Way. The nomination specifically refers to its scope as being the “physical medians, their layout and park-like character and use.”
2. The final draft of the nomination was submitted by Marshall McClintock on behalf of Historic Tacoma, a historic preservation advocacy organization, on November 12, 2025.
3. The draft nomination was forwarded for review and comment to the City of Tacoma Real Property Services Division of Public Works on July 7, 2025 and the final draft was provided on November 18, 2025.

Process

4. Nominations to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places are administered according to Tacoma Municipal Code 13.07.050, and are reviewed by the Landmarks Preservation Commission at a minimum of two separate meetings. At the first meeting, the Commission is tasked with making a threshold determination of significance and scheduling the nomination for public comment at an upcoming Public Hearing. Following the Hearing, the Commission may deliberate for up to 45 days before making a recommendation to City Council or denying the nomination.
5. The Commission first reviewed the North Union Avenue Greenway nomination at its meeting of January 28, 2026 and voted to forward the nomination for Public Hearing on February 25, 2026.
6. Subsequent to the Landmarks Commission action on January 28, public notice was sent to occupants and taxpayers of record within 400’ of the Union Avenue corridor and the Commission general hearing list, as well as published online at www.tacoma.gov/LPC-agenda and published in the Tacoma News Tribune on February 12, 2026.

Findings

7. Criteria assessment. Nominated properties must meet one of eight criteria listed at Tacoma Municipal Code 13.07.040. The following includes the criteria addressed in the nomination document:
 - a. **Criterion A: Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.**

The nomination states that the Greenway meets this criterion for its association with events that made a substantial contribution to Tacoma’s history.

According to the Statement of Significance, the medians are enduring physical expressions of these events, originating in the late 1880s with Allen C. Mason’s residential development of the North End and F. C. Ross’ Tacoma & Lake City Railroad (T&LCRR). The remaining broad layout preserves the footprint of the T&LCRR, and their tree-lined form embodies City Beautiful era ideals. The southern section reflects the establishment and expansion of the University of Puget Sound campus. Per the nomination, as a vernacular landscape, the

Greenway uniquely integrates history and form, making it one of Tacoma's most distinctive historic landscapes.

The Union Avenue medians are a physical result of many individual actions taken over the course of their history, including plats and transportation history, and they are unique to Tacoma's residential streets.

b. Criterion F: Abuts a property that is already listed on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places and was constructed within the period of significance of the adjacent structure.

Union Avenue abuts Nellie Hoyt Elementary School at 2708 N Union Avenue, which was added to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places. Hoyt was constructed in 1957, falling within the proposed period of significance for the greenway.

However, it is important to assess whether this is a significant association, such as sharing a development history, or design/style intent. In this particular case, the association between Hoyt Elementary and the Union Avenue median is not particularly strong or noteworthy.

c. Criterion H: Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristics, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood or City.

According to the nomination, North Union Avenue Greenway is significant under Criterion G as a 135-year-old, established, familiar and unique feature of the city, with exceptionally wide medians (8 are 20 ft. wide and 10 are 40 ft. wide) with approximately 205 mostly large, mature trees, most of which date to 1912 in the northern section and the 1960s in the southern section. The statement of significance notes that the greenway has become a familiar civic feature and site of community use, including a Tacoma Wheelmen's bicycle path in 1900, the North End Neighborhood Council's Mason-Union Loop in 1997, and neighborhood efforts to preserve the trees in the 1960s, city residents consistently invested the medians with meaning.

A significant number of public comments received noted this history and the role it has played over the years as a valued public space that has been used and enjoyed by generations, which appears to meet this criterion.

8. The period of significance stated in the nomination begins in 1886, with the naming of Union Avenue north of Puget Gulch and the subsequent development of the Tacoma and Lake City Railroad, completed in 1890, which ran from North 26th along Union Avenue to North 9th Street, where it curved to join North Proctor Street, and ends in 1964 when the southern section of Union was paved.
9. Character defining features.
 - a. There are no buildings, structures or furnishings in the medians. Although the nomination notes that part of the "uniqueness" of the medians is the "size, number and variety" of tree plantings, the trees themselves are not included in the proposed nomination.
 - b. The nomination notes that it also includes its "park-like character and use." The current use of the medians is Public Right of Way, although it is a popular walking area for residents. "Park-like" suggests landscaped green space. The use of a property is not something that is managed or governed by the Tacoma Register of Historic Places.
 - c. The other character defining element noted in the nomination is the overall plan and configuration of the medians.

Conclusions:

1. North Union Avenue Greenway should be added to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places, appearing to meet Criteria A and H as outlined in the Tacoma Municipal Code 13.07.040.
2. The character defining elements in regard to this nomination includes the overall plan and landscaping configuration of the medians, including footprint, width and length. These elements should be included in the controls section of the designating Council resolution, if so approved.
3. The Commission places weight on the input of the Public Works and Environmental Services Departments. Nothing in the historic designation shall prevent the City from meeting applicable city, state or federal regulations relating to Right of Way standards.

Recommendations:

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.
 - 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.