



**TO:** Hyun Kim, City Manager  
**FROM:** Peter Huffman, Planning and Development Services *PH*  
**COPY:** Infrastructure, Planning and Sustainability Committee; Ramiro A. Chavez, P.E., PgMP; Anna Le; Marvin Griffin  
**PRESENTER:** Reuben McKnight, Planning and Development Services  
**SUBJECT:** Landmarks Commission recommendation to designate the North Union Avenue Greenway to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places  
**DATE:** May 13, 2026

**PRESENTATION TYPE:**  
Request for Resolution

**SUMMARY:**

On May 13, 2026, Planning and Development Services staff will present the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) Findings and Recommendations to add the North Union Avenue Greenway to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places and seek concurrence from the Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee (IPS).

**BACKGROUND:**

On March 11, 2026, the LPC voted to recommend to the City Council that the median along Union Avenue, between 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 LPC 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.

**ISSUE:**

Because this property is within the public right-of-way, which represents unique factors that differ from conventional real estate parcels, this presentation is an opportunity to familiarize IPS with the recommendation and requirements prior to the full City Council consideration.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

Alternative courses of action include:

Not adding the North Union Avenue Greenway to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places.

This would reject the LPC's recommendation, and result in the property not being recognized as being historically significant or protected by design review requirements.

Adding the North Union Avenue Greenway to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places, but amending the historic protections recommended by the LPC.

The current recommendation exempts many activities involving the medians from LPC oversight to address some of the operational concerns expressed by City departments. The Council resolution for each nomination includes a section titled "Controls" that identifies the portions of a historic property that require LPC approval if altered. The Council could add or remove from the Controls section in its designating resolution if it disagrees with the LPC recommendation. Depending on the changes to the designating resolution, this alternative if adopted would result in the property being added to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places, but with a lower or higher level of historic oversight.



**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There are no specific fiscal impacts resulting from this action. If the LPC recommendation is adopted, it is likely that large scale infrastructure projects would require design review, which could result in increased costs in terms of public process and engagement that is sometimes characteristic of high-profile public projects.

The activities of the Historic Preservation Program are budgeted, and this is within the scope of already budgeted activities and would not result in a specific fiscal impact to the program.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

In the Conclusions and Recommendations section of its Findings Report, the LPC states the following:

Conclusions:

1. North Union Avenue Greenway should be added to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places, appearing to meet Criteria A and G as outlined in the TMC 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 LPC 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.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

LPC Findings – North Union Greenway  
Public Works Department Memo – North Union Greenway

# 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 9<sup>th</sup> Street to North 30<sup>th</sup> Streets. 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](http://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<sup>1</sup>: 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 G<sup>1</sup>: 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 26<sup>th</sup> along Union Avenue to North 9<sup>th</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note: the 2025 Historic Preservation Code update included a new significance criterion and renumbered the criteria; the nomination form has not yet been updated to reflect these changes and uses Criteria E and G on the form, which are now respectively F and H.

- 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 G 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 13.05.40.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 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.



City of Tacoma

Public Works Department | Facilities Management | Real Property Services

## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** February 24, 2026

**To:** Reuben McKnight, Historic Preservation Officer/Principal Planner

**From:** Susie Rogers, Real Property Manager

**CC:** Mike Carey, Jennifer Kammerzell, Darius Thompson, Brian Wang, Teresa Dressler

**Subject:** North Union Greenway Historic Nomination

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**Summary:** To the extent that such a designation would otherwise limit or restrict operation and maintenance of City facilities in the right-of-way (“ROW”), the Public Works Department and Environmental Services Department have concerns about the proposal. The City of Tacoma will maintain authority to conduct work within the Public ROW. As such, should the Landmarks Preservation Commission (“Commission”) vote to move this application for City Council Consideration, staff recommends the Commission recommend exceptions to allow for the City’s ability to conduct work or alternations on or within the median area for necessary work that may be required in order to address any public health, safety or welfare issues and to comply with any local, state, or federal code, rules, or regulations.

**Background:** In June 2025, the North End Neighborhood Council (NENC) submitted an application to the Commission to nominate the public roadway median located within Union Ave. from N. 9<sup>th</sup> ST to N. 30<sup>th</sup> ST as property to be listed under the Tacoma Register of Historic Places (Register). As the property in question is not parceled property, but rather public right-of-way, Public Works and Environmental Services Departments have been asked by the Planning & Development Services Department to review the application and comment on any potential impacts such a designation may have on street and utility operations and maintenance.



## City of Tacoma

Public Works Department | Facilities Management | Real Property Services

Real Property Services section on behalf of the Public Works Department has gathered the following comments, in coordination with Environmental Services staff, concerning potential impacts to Public Works and Environmental Services operations and maintenance, should the public roadway median be placed on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places.

### Comments:

1. Given that we do not yet have a final defined vision of the cross section of Union Ave., including design requirements, we would caution against defining the median as a historic district that would inhibit our ability to achieve the goals of Union Ave. as a transportation corridor, under our planning documents such as the Transportation and Mobility Plan, the One Tacoma Comprehensive Plan, and as required per our Right of Way Design Manual.
2. The City recognizes that the process for nomination of a tree into the Heritage Tree program is governed by the TMC 9.20, and outside of the authority of the North Union Greenway Historic Nomination.
3. The medians contain utilities and utility infrastructure. Environmental Services and other utility service providers are required to maintain, operate, and alter these facilities to align with City goals, public safety, and welfare. We want to ensure any considered designation on the Register will not limit the ability for Utilities to provide safe, reliable service.
4. Environmental Services is currently undertaking stormwater basin planning to address water quality treatment and flow control needs associated with ongoing densification. A key concern is the diminishing availability of open available land suitable for the installation of stormwater treatment and flow control facilities. Department of Ecology has also increased requirements for water-quality and flow-control mitigation requirements. The City would like to keep options available to enhancing these medians with stormwater treatment and flow control facilities in addition to the existing trees in support of future adherence to state and federal environmental requirements.
5. Accessibility Improvements especially at the intersections could cause a conflict with the medians and the need to have pedestrians be able to cross the road safely and make them accessible to all. City would like to ensure that any considered designation on the Register will not limit the ability for the City to provide safe, accessible access.



## City of Tacoma

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6. South of N 19th ST appears to have a defined curb and gutter that define the medians as well as the amenity/sidewalk zones. However, north of N 19<sup>th</sup> ST, it appears these medians are less defined. The median may or may not have wedge curbs, undefined and varying widths, and trees planted very close to the roadway edge. These conditions may create issues with future roadway maintenance or improvements. City would like to ensure that any considered designation on the Register will not limit the ability for the City to address deficiencies and construct permanent roadway sections as may be necessary to provide safe, accessible access.
7. There appears to be signal and signage infrastructure within these medians. The City is required to properly operate and maintain this infrastructure, in addition to allowing for future improvements to add infrastructure to these medians
8. Illumination needs for the wide right-of-way have not been identified. Currently, there is a mix of pedestrian scale and overhead streetlights on both sides of the street. Future improvements may require lighting in the median, which could be hindered by historic median designation. City would like to ensure that installation of lighting for illumination needs as may be required in the medians be exempt from review.

**Summary:** The City will maintain authority to conduct work within the Public ROW. Public Works and the Environmental Services Department recommend any designation include exceptions to review in order for the City to conduct work or alternations on or within the median area for the benefit of safe public transportation and utility operations. We recommend exceptions made for any necessary work that may be required in order to address any public health, safety or welfare issues and to comply with any local, state, or federal code, rules, or regulations.