



Historic Preservation
Resource Library
TacomaCulture.org

General Frequently Asked Questions

1. How can I tell if my property is listed on the historic register?

A property may be listed individually or as part of a historic district on the Tacoma Landmarks Register, the Washington State Heritage Register, or the National Register of Historic Places.

To determine if a property is listed as a Tacoma Landmark, you may either check the Tacoma Register of Historic Places or look your property up using the City of Tacoma's GIS-driven map search: Is My Property Historic? Please see the online RESOURCE LIBRARY on the historic preservation website.

To determine if your property is listed on the Washington State Heritage Register or National Register, visit the website of the Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (OAHP) at <http://www.oahp.wa.gov/> or call 360-586-3065. You may also do an online search for National Register listings at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/research/nris.htm>.

2. What does "historic listing" mean for my property?

If a property is listed on the Tacoma Register or is within a historic district, listing means that design changes must be reviewed by the Landmarks Commission. You may still add on or otherwise remodel your building, as long as it meets the applicable standards. For individual landmarks, the standards used are the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings. The Union Depot/Warehouse Historic District and the North Slope Historic District both have design guidelines as well. Properties listed on the Tacoma Landmarks Register also are eligible for the Special Tax Valuation Program, a property tax abatement program.

Please visit the Resource Library for helpful downloadable documents, and the Related Sites page for more online information.

Properties listed on the Washington Heritage and National Register do not require special historic approval before remodeling, unless the owner intends to use Federal Tax Credits. Properties on the National Register may be eligible for the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit. For more information, contact OAHP at the number above.

3. Can I build an addition to my historic house?

Yes. If your house is listed only on the National or State Registers, you can probably remodel without special approval (see question 2 above). If your house is listed as a Tacoma Landmark or is in a Tacoma historic district, the design must be approved by the Landmarks Commission before you receive your building permit.

Renovations and rehabilitations must meet the criteria described in the Secretary of the

Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Properties. Properties located within the Union Depot Warehouse District/Union Station Conservation District, and properties located in the North Slope Historic District, are also subject to the design guidelines for those districts.

4. What is the process for nominating a property to the Landmarks Register?

Contacting the Historic Preservation Officer is your first step in nominating your building to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places. Generally, your building or site must be at least 50 years old and meet one of eight criteria to be eligible as a Landmark. Once a nomination has been received, there is a public hearing before the Landmarks Commission, after which the Commission makes its recommendation to the City Council. Please see the Nominating web page of the Historic Preservation Website and the RESOURCE LIBRARY for more information.

5. Where can I receive technical information about historic rehabilitation?

Copies of technical information about treatments for historic buildings are available and can be requested by phone or e-mail.

In addition, the National Park Service's Technical Preservation Services (see the RESOURCE LIBRARY for the link) is an excellent online technical information resource.

6. Can the City recommend a good historic consultant/architect for a historic rehabilitation?

As a public entity, the City cannot endorse the services of any individual or business. The best method for finding suitable consultants is word of mouth. Be sure your consultants or contractors have the proper licenses and bonding, always check references, and solicit competing bids if appropriate. Check around your neighborhood for rehabilitations that appeal to you—and find out who did the project. For questions about Landmarks-approved projects, contact the Historic Preservation Officer.

The Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation website also posts a list of qualified preservation architects, consultants and archaeologists. Please visit their website at <http://www.oahp.wa.gov/>.

7. I have some historic documents that I want to get rid of. Can the City take them?

Generally, the Historic Preservation Office is not equipped to archive historic documents. People wishing to donate important historic documents, plans, photographs may wish to contact the Tacoma Historical Society or the Tacoma Public Library Northwest Room.

8. Does the Landmarks Commission take requests for name changes to streets and buildings?

Applications for name changes must be made in writing to the Mayor, who then considers whether to send the request to the Landmarks Commission. For more information, please see our brochure *How To Name a Place*, available from the Historic Preservation Office by calling 253-591-5220.

9. How can I learn more about my historic home?

The City has limited information about buildings that are not already on the Landmarks Register.

The City maintains historic building survey data for properties in Tacoma that have been recorded during architectural surveys dating from 1979 to the present. Although there are approximately 1,500 properties recorded, the Historic Preservation Office is in the process of updating these records and may not have information about a particular property available. To make an appointment to view these records, call the Historic Preservation Officer at 253-591-5220. Many of these records should be available online sometime in 2005.

The Pierce County Buildings index maintained by the Tacoma Public Library's Northwest Room is an excellent resource to start with. Please see our publication, *Researching the History of Your Tacoma Property*, which may be requested from the Historic Preservation Office by calling 253-591-5220.

10. I want to put a sign on my building. What are the requirements?

Landmarks and properties within historic districts must receive approval from the Landmarks Commission prior to receiving a sign permit. Generally, the Commission will review an application for architectural compatibility and to ensure that a proposed sign will not physically harm the building.

The Union Depot/Warehouse District and the Union Station Conservation District have design guidelines (link to Word format) with specifications for signs. Generally, signs should be of a proper scale for pedestrians, avoid containing more than 3 colors, and should not be internally lit or flashing. For a general overview of signs, please see our publication *Give Me A Sign!*

For a hard copy of these guidelines, please call the Historic Preservation Office at 591-5220.

For information regarding the Tacoma City Sign Code, please call Pam Combs at 591-5482.

11. How can I tell if a building is historically important?

Both the National Register of Historic Places and the Tacoma Register of Historic Places use criteria to determine historical significance. Generally, for the local register if a building is over 50 years old, maintains its original physical condition and appears to meet one of the criteria, it can be considered eligible.

For assistance interpreting the National Register criteria, it is recommended that property owners call the Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation at 360-586-3065 or visit <http://www.oahp.wa.gov/nr.htm>.

The City also maintains historic building survey data for properties in Tacoma that have been recorded during architectural surveys dating from 1979 to the present. Although there are approximately 1,500 properties recorded, the Historic Preservation Office is in the process of updating these records and may not have information about a particular property available. To make an appointment to view these records, call the Historic Preservation Officer at 253-591-5220.

Landmarks Commission Review

1. What kind of work requires review?

Generally speaking, all changes to the exteriors of buildings listed on the Tacoma Landmarks Register must go through design review. This includes new signs, exterior

paint, masonry repairs, new siding, windows, and so on.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission reviews all applications. In some cases, ordinary maintenance or in-kind repairs (repairs using the exact same materials that will not affect the appearance of the building) may not require Commission review. However, owners must still contact this office prior to starting work.

For Property Owners in the North Slope Only

Work on properties located in the North Slope Historic Special Review District that does not require a building permit does not require review by this office.

In addition, the following types of work do not require historic review, per Tacoma Municipal Code:

- Any alterations to non-contributing structures; provided, that the demolition of such structures is not exempt from the provisions of this chapter;
- Interior modifications to existing structures, unless those modifications affect the exterior appearance of the structure;
- The installation, alteration, or repair of public and private plumbing, sewer, water, and gas piping systems;
- The installation, alteration, or repair of electrical, telephone, and cable television wiring systems;
- The landscaping of private residences;
- The maintenance of existing parking conditions and configurations, including curb cuts, driveways, alleys, and parking lots;
- Signs not exceeding the limitations for a home occupation permit and those installed by the City of Tacoma for directional and locational purposes. (TMC 13.07.360).

For questions regarding permit requirements, contact the Permit Counter at the Buildings and Land Use Division at 253-591-5030.

2. How does the Design Review process work?

Generally, applications for design review are submitted to the Historic Preservation Officer, who then schedules the project with the Landmarks Preservation Commission. The Commission votes on the application at one of its regular meetings, which occur twice per month, and generates a written decision that is transmitted if necessary to other City departments. If permits are required for your project, those permits will not be issued without Landmarks Commission approval first.

Applicants should begin the application process by finalizing a design proposal, and then contacting the Permit Counter at Buildings and Land Use to ensure compliance with City code. The reason for this preliminary step is that if changes to the design are needed to meet code requirements, those changes can be incorporated into the design without repeated Landmarks review.

Applications for design review that require permits will NOT be processed without BLUS screening. The Permit Counter may be reached at 591-5030. For Sign Permits, call the Sign Inspector at 591-5482.

After determining that the project meets applicable City codes and regulations, 20 copies of the final application for design review should be submitted to the Historic Preservation Officer. The application must be received a MINIMUM of fourteen days in advance of the meeting you wish to attend.

You may fill the form out online (available both as a PDF and Word document; Acrobat Reader users please note you cannot save your changes) then print it and send the hard copy to:

Historic Preservation Office
City of Tacoma
747 Market Street, Room 1036
Tacoma, WA 98402

Once your project has been approved by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, a written approval is sent to the appropriate office within several days. The total process generally takes between 3 and 4 weeks to complete.

3. What are the application requirements?

Each application form contains a checklist that outlines the application requirements. In general, be sure to include the following:

- Twenty copies of the application form
- Twenty copies of supplemental illustrations, photographs, material descriptions and any other information
- Owner signature

Information that is commonly necessary to review an application includes:

- Measured architectural plans, elevations, site plans, and floor plans and sections
- Graphics (drawings or photographs) illustrating the current condition of the building and the effects of your proposed modifications.
- List of existing features to be modified and/or added
- Product descriptions and cut sheets (ie. specifications for exterior lighting)
- Renderings of new construction or additions, and in some cases sight line renderings and massing studies

The most common issue with applications is the lack of a clear proposal. Applications should state clearly exactly what is being proposed, and should also include any supporting documentation. Drawings should be to scale, clearly rendered, and clearly call out materials and fixtures. In some cases, it is necessary to hire a professional design firm to generate plans.

4. What are the standards used to evaluate projects?

All applications for modifications to historic buildings in Tacoma are weighed against the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings. These standards provide both guidelines for planning new uses in buildings, as well as a method for evaluating whether proposed changes are harmful to the building. For properties in Tacoma's Historic Districts, there are also design guidelines that must be followed (see the Resource Library):

- Union Station Conservation District Design Guidelines (for properties located downtown)
- North Slope Historic District Design Guidelines

In addition, the City has produced several helpful publications to guide design for historic buildings that are available from the Historic Preservation Office.

5. What is the approval process for projects that require variances?

If a project requires a variance, such as a setback variance, the variance application must be approved by the Land Use Administrator prior to final landmarks approval. However, the Landmarks Commission can provide feedback on the design application during the application period, and applicants may brief the commission prior to the variance approval. Please contact the Historic Preservation Officer for more information.