



Design Guidelines and Introduction to the Union Depot/Warehouse District

1. Introduction

The Union Depot-Warehouse Historic District (National Register of Historic Places, 1980, and Tacoma Register, 1983) flanks Pacific Avenue from South 17th Street to South 23rd Street and extends up the hill to Jefferson Avenue. The Union Depot-Warehouse District is surrounded by the Union Station Conservation District.

The architecture in the district is characterized by rugged brick warehouses and factories, examples of commercial high style and industrial vernacular architecture developed in America in the early 1900s. The district was a major distribution point for goods that arrived by railway during the 1890s through the 1920s.



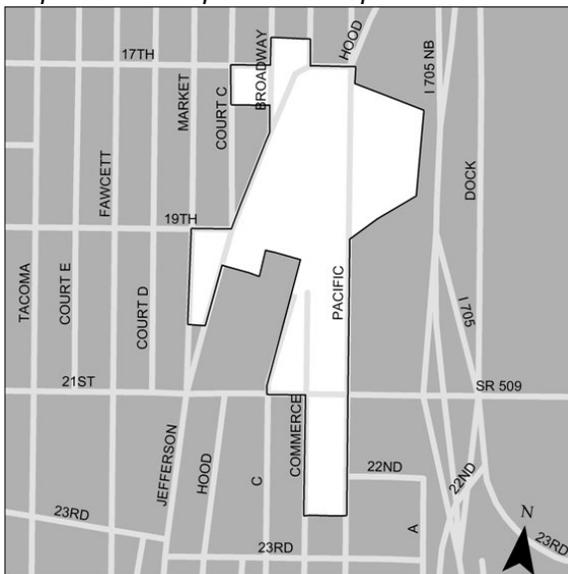
Union Station (1911) itself is a stunning landmark, with its massive arches and a copper-clad dome. The adaptive reuse of Union Station as a Federal Courthouse earned the City of Tacoma a National Preservation Honor Award in 1994.

In 1999, the National Preservation Honor Award again came to Tacoma with the University of Washington, Tacoma's adaptive reuse of the warehouse buildings along Pacific as its new urban campus. Other buildings in the district are being rehabilitated for use as apartments, businesses, restaurants and shops. Many of the projects in the Union Depot/Warehouse District are outstanding examples of historically sensitive adaptive reuse.

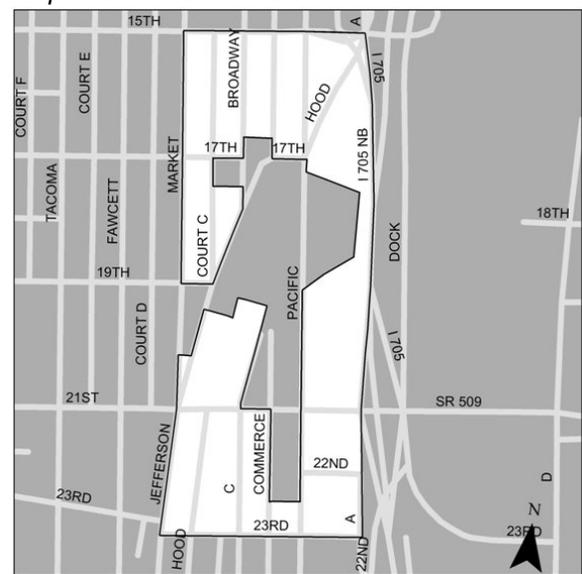
2. Boundaries

The approximate boundaries of the areas subject to the district design guidelines are illustrated below.

Map of Union Depot Historic Special Review District



Map of Union Station Conservation District



3. Design Guidelines

The following guidelines are extracted from Tacoma Municipal Code 13.07.270, and are intended to give project designers guidance for design within the historic and conservation districts.

Guidelines for building design and streetscape improvement review.

- A. Intent. The following are hereby established as the design review guidelines for rehabilitation, new construction, and public amenities. These guidelines are intended to ensure a certainty of design quality within the Historic Special Review District and Union Station Conservation District, protect the historic fabric of the districts, enhance the economic viability of the districts through the promotion of their architectural character, and provide a clear set of physical design parameters for property owners, developers, designers, and public agencies.
- B. The following guidelines are intended to provide a set of basic standards for architectural and physical design within the Union Station districts. The guidelines will be used by the Landmarks Preservation Commission as a baseline for the design review process, but will not supersede the authority of the Commission to exercise its judgment and discretion on a case-by-case basis. The guidelines are also set forth to provide assistance to owners, developers, and designers involved in project planning by providing general design and technical recommendations.
- C. From time to time, the Landmarks Preservation Commission may adopt policies and administrative rules for the purpose of clarifying and assisting property owners in interpreting these guidelines. Any such rules or policies shall be adopted by quorum vote and, once adopted, shall be made available to the public in electronic and printed formats.
- D. **Design Guidelines.** The following predominant historic building elements shall be recognized as essential to the districts' historic image and used as the basis for design review of proposals for rehabilitation of existing buildings and review of new construction within the districts:
1. **Height.** The centerpiece and height benchmark for the districts is the Union Station, with its dome cap height of approximately 96 feet above Pacific Avenue. Wing parapet walls are 30 feet in height above Pacific Avenue. No new buildings constructed in the districts shall exceed 85 feet in height.

In the rehabilitation of existing buildings, their existing height should be maintained and the parapets and cornices should be kept intact. Any rooftop additions, penthouses, building systems equipment, or roof-mounted structures should be set back from existing parapet walls sufficiently to conceal them from view from street level.
 2. **Scale.** Scale refers to a building's comparative relationship to neighboring buildings and its fit within the districts. The typical four-story building in the districts is 50 feet wide and 100 feet deep. Two such "basic blocks" side by side are proportionally similar to the main section of Union Station and illustrate the scale and size of structural components in the districts.

Scale is also determined by the proportions of the architectural elements within the composition of the individual building facades. Exterior building facades shall be of a scale compatible with surrounding buildings and shall maintain a zero setback from the sidewalk. Window and door proportions, including the size and design of the wood sash and frame floor height, floor shapes, street elevations, and other elements of the building facades, shall relate to the scale of the surrounding buildings.
 3. **Materials.** The predominant building material within the districts is masonry, including brick, granite, and terra cotta. Rehabilitation of existing buildings and construction of infill buildings shall utilize masonry as the predominant building material.
 4. **Minimum Maintenance.** All contributing historic buildings in the districts shall be maintained against decay and deterioration caused by neglect or defective or inadequate weather protection.

5. **Storefront Design.** A major character-defining feature of the buildings within the districts is the storefront. The composition of the storefronts is consistent from one building to the next, and serves as a unifying feature of the districts by forming a continuity along the street. Preservation of the storefront is essential to the maintenance of the districts' image and character. Rehabilitation of an existing building shall include preservation of the existing storefront or reconstruction of a new storefront which is compatible with the original in scale, size, and material. New construction shall also include storefronts. Street level retail sales and service uses, as described and defined in TMC 13.06, should be strongly considered for ground floor use along Pacific Avenue in order to more effectively implement storefront design.
6. **Awnings.** Awnings have been a traditional addition to the facades of buildings within the districts and shall be encouraged within the districts as a functional exterior feature. All awnings shall be compatible with the historic character of the buildings and shall be based in design upon historic counterparts. They shall also:
 - a. Reflect the shape and character of the window openings;
 - b. Be, or appear to be, retractable in the form of historic awnings;
 - c. Constructed with canvas-like fabric rather than high gloss in texture;
 - d. Not be back-lit or translucent;
 - e. Be in colors and/or patterns which complement the building and have basis in the historic record;
 - f. Be attached to the buildings in a manner which does not permanently damage the structure or obscure significant architectural features.
7. **Signs.**
 - a. General.
 - (1) All new exterior signs and all changes in the appearance of existing exterior signs require Landmarks Preservation Commission approval. This includes changes in message or colors on pre-existing signs.
 - (2) If there is a conflict between these standards and the requirements in the City's Sign Code, the more strict requirement shall apply.
 - b. Location and Size of Signs.
 - (1) Signs shall not dominate the building facades or obscure their architectural features (arches, transom panels, sills, moldings, cornices, windows, etc.).
 - (2) The size of signs and individual letters shall be of appropriate scale for pedestrians and slow-moving traffic. Projecting signs shall generally not exceed nine square feet on first floor level.
 - (3) Signs on adjacent storefronts shall be coordinated in height and proportion. Use of a continuous sign band extending over adjacent shops within the same building is encouraged as a unifying element.
 - (4) Portable reader board signs located on sidewalks, driveways, or in parking lots are prohibited.
 - (5) Existing historic wall signs are a contributing element within the district and should be restored or preserved in place. New wall signs shall generally be discouraged.
 - c. Messages and Lettering Signs.
 - (1) Messages shall be simple and brief. The use of pictorial symbols or logos is encouraged.
 - (2) Lettering should be of a traditional block or curvilinear style which is easy to read and compatible with the style of the building. No more than two different styles should be used on the same sign.
 - (3) Letters shall be carefully formed and properly spaced so as to be neat and uncluttered. Generally, no more than 60 percent of the total sign area shall be occupied by lettering.
 - (4) Lettering shall be generally flat or raised.

- d. Color.
 - (1) Light-colored letters on a dark-colored background are generally required as being more traditional and visually less intrusive in the context of the Union Station District's predominantly red-brick streetscapes.
 - (2) Colors shall be chosen to complement, not clash with, the facade color of the building. Signs should normally contain not more than three different colors.

- e. Materials and Illumination
 - (1) Use of durable and traditional materials (metal and wood) is strongly encouraged. All new signs shall be prepared in a professional manner.
 - (2) In general, illumination shall be external, non-flashing, and non-glare.
 - (3) Internal illumination is generally discouraged, but may be appropriate in certain circumstances, such as:
 - (i) Individual back-lit letters silhouetted against a softly illuminated wall.
 - (ii) Individual letters with translucent faces, containing soft lighting elements inside each letter. Metal-faced box signs with cut-out letters and soft-glow fluorescent tubes.
 - (iii) However, such signs are generally suitable only on contemporary buildings.
 - (4) Neon signs may be permitted in exceptional cases where they are custom-designed to be compatible with the building's historic and architectural character.

- f. Other Stylistic Points
 - (1) The shape of a projecting sign shall be compatible with the period of the building to which it is affixed, and shall harmonize with the lettering and symbols chosen for it.
 - (2) Supporting brackets for projecting signs should complement the sign design, and not overwhelm or clash with it. They must be adequately engineered to support the intended load, and generally should conform to a 2:3 vertical-horizontal proportion.
 - (3) Screw holes must be drilled at points where the fasteners will enter masonry joints to avoid damaging bricks, etc.

8. **Color.** Building colors should contribute to the distinct character of the historic building. Original building colors should be researched and considered in any new color scheme. Whether contrasting or complementary, the colors should reflect the design of the building. Building colors should utilize a limited palette. Colors should be selected to emphasize building form and highlight major features of the building. Color schemes using several colors should be avoided and surfaces which are not historically painted should not be painted.

9. **Views.** All new construction in the Union Station District should be designed to preserve existing views and vistas. Of particular importance are views of Commencement Bay, Mount Rainier, and Union Station.

E. **Streetscape Guidelines.** Streetscaping is essential in the development of the districts in order to create value and enhance private development efforts. Proper design of streetscapes and public open spaces provides a unifying theme and unique identity for the districts, complements and extends the presence of Union Station, encourages pedestrian circulation, and creates a gateway to downtown and the waterway. The pattern of traffic routes and open space is based upon the historic function of the district and has a direct relation to such physical features as views from the upper floors of the building, sunlight, façade visibility, and streetscape appearance. Any significant loss or reconfiguration of existing open space and street corridors is discouraged.

The following improvements are to be encouraged:

- 1. Sidewalk paving. Paving should be of brick or brick and brushed concrete. Existing granite curbs should be maintained or reconstructed, where possible.

2. Street paving. Where feasible, historic street paving and gutters, either brick or cobblestone, should be preserved and restored. Where feasible, existing railroad or streetcar rails should be preserved in place.
3. Streetlights. Historic streetlights should be used throughout the district as unifying elements.

F. The Landmarks Preservation Commission may, at its discretion, waive mandatory requirements imposed by Section 13.07.290 of this chapter. In determining whether a waiver is appropriate, the Landmarks Preservation Commission shall require an applicant to demonstrate by clear and convincing evidence that, because of special circumstances not generally applicable to other property or facilities, including size, shape, design, topography, location, or surroundings, the strict application of those mandatory requirements of Section 13.07.290 would be unnecessary to further the purposes of this chapter. Such waiver shall not exceed the requirements set forth in the underlying zoning district, except where specifically provided for in TMC 13.06A.070.B. (Ord. 27748 Ex. A; passed Oct. 14, 2008; Ord. 27429 § 3; passed Nov. 15, 2005)

4. District Exemptions. The following actions are exempt from the requirements imposed pursuant to 13.07.280:

- A. Any alterations to non-contributing properties, as defined by the District Inventory adopted by the Commission and kept on file at the Historic Preservation Office; provided, that the demolition of such structures is not exempt from the provisions of this chapter; and
- B. Interior alterations to existing properties, unless those modifications affect the exterior appearance of the structure.