HIGHEST AND BEST USE

Address withheld, Tacoma, WA

Parcel withheld · City of Tacoma, Pierce County · Prepared Nov 2026 · sample report

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Our opinion: on the code alone, one narrow route ranks conditionally: a Reasonable Use exception could, in principle, allow a single small home of roughly 3,600 sq ft, the cap TMC 13.11.240.B sets once a wetland delineation and a geotechnical report confirm no larger area is clear. Every other route this study tested, from a second accessory unit to the maximum multi-unit building Tacoma's zoning density would otherwise permit, is barred outright by the same mapped wetland and steep-slope coverage. None of this reaches the ground, because the parcel is owned by a public agency as public open space, not a privately buildable lot, and that gate sits in front of the code question entirely. What would change the call: the park district declaring the parcel surplus and conveying it to a private owner, and then a wetland delineation and a geotechnical slope report establishing whether even the Reasonable Use exception's small footprint is achievable.

Ranked routes

One route ranks, conditionally, and only on the code question; it does not reach the separate ownership gate described in Our opinion above.

RANK	ROUTE	ALLOWED	HOMES ADDED	HOMES AFTER	LIVING SPACE ADDED	BINDING LIMIT	PERMIT PATH	COST RANGE	CITE
1	Reasonable Use exception: smallest conforming home	Conditional	1	1	about 3,600 sq ft of disturbed footprint, not living space (house, driveway and yard together)	Capped at the greater of 10 percent of the combined critical-area-and-buffer area on the lot or 2,500 sq ft; granted only on a showing of no feasible alternative, maximum practicable mitigation and no self-created hardship	Discretionary: a critical areas report and a Reasonable Use exception decision by the city, not an administrative permit	about 720,000 to 2,340,000 dollars (about 1,530,000 average), at 200 to 650 dollars per sq ft across the 3,600 sq ft cap, from regional Washington ADU-scale cost guides	TMC 13.11.240.B (not from the pack)

Why only this much ranks, shown as arithmetic. Tacoma Municipal Code 13.06.020.F sets UR-1's setbacks at 15 ft front, 15 ft rear and 5 ft on each side. Run against this lot's county GIS outline (roughly 300 by 120 ft, about 36,000 sq ft), those setbacks alone clear a 289-by-90-ft envelope, about 26,000 sq ft, enough for any of the routes below on zoning grounds alone. But overlaying the City of Tacoma's own Steep Slopes layer on the parcel boundary shows the "Over 40% High Potential Slope Geohazard" polygon covers the entire about 36,000 sq ft parcel, including that whole about 26,000 sq ft setback-cleared envelope; overlaying the Wetland Inventory layer separately shows the mapped Category II wetland covers about 24,100 sq ft of the same parcel, 67 percent. The two mapped critical areas already cover 100 percent of the lot between them, before any required buffer or geo-setback is even added. Tacoma Municipal Code 13.11.730.C bars new construction, grading and impervious surface inside a mapped landslide hazard area and its geo-setback by default; TMC 13.11.320 and .250.B do the same inside a wetland and its buffer. Zoning leaves room to build here; critical areas do not.

Routes not allowed

ROUTE	ALLOWED?	BINDING LIMIT	CITE
Accessory dwelling unit, attached or detached	Not allowed	The entire lot is mapped inside a landslide hazard area, which bars new construction by default; separately, RCW 36.70A.681(4) excludes a lot with designated critical areas or their buffers from the state's accessory-dwelling mandate, so no state floor forces this unit here either. Ownership (a public agency) independently bars any private construction.	RCW 36.70A.680-.696; RCW 36.70A.681(4); TMC 13.11.730.C (not from the pack for the TMC citation; the pack's Critical-area layers section names TMC 13.11 generally but carries no buffer or geo-setback figures of its own)
Middle housing, up to the state floor of 4 homes per lot (Tacoma is a 75,000-plus population city) or more under Tacoma's own UR-1 density table	Not allowed	Same mapped landslide hazard area and wetland bar new construction regardless of unit count. Tacoma's UR-1 density of 1 unit per 1,500 sq ft (a city cap, not a state number) would otherwise allow roughly 24 units on this lot's area alone, before any bonus; the state only requires the city to allow at least 4. None of that reaches the ground, because none of the lot is clear to build on, and the land is not privately owned.	RCW 36.70A.635 (state floor, from the bank); TMC 13.06.020.F (UR-1 density, pack); TMC 13.11.730.C (not from the pack)
Short plat / lot split into multiple buildable lots	Not allowed	A short subdivision under state law tops out at 4 lots, or up to 9 where the local ordinance allows more; Tacoma's own short-plat lot count and process are not on file and were not independently researched live for this study. Regardless of that count, a lot split requires a platting action by the landowner: a public agency, which has taken no recorded action to divide or sell this parcel, and any resulting lot would inherit the same wetland and slope mapping that covers the whole parent parcel today.	RCW 58.17.020, 58.17.060 (from the bank); local short-plat process not in the pack (pack MISSING subdivision section)
New multi-unit building at Tacoma's maximum zoned density (duplex through the largest building UR-1's density and 25-ft height cap would allow)	Not allowed	Same landslide hazard area and wetland bar grading and construction at any unit count; the 25-ft View-Sensitive height cap (TMC 13.06.070.A) would also constrain massing even if critical areas did not. Ownership bars the project independently.	TMC 13.06.020.F, 13.06.070.A (pack); TMC 13.11.730.C (not from the pack)

ROUTE	ALLOWED?	BINDING LIMIT	CITE
Largest single new home the lot's setbacks allow (the customer's own request)	Not allowed	The 289-by-90-ft, about 26,000 sq ft setback-cleared envelope computed above sits entirely inside the mapped landslide hazard area, and two-thirds of it also inside the mapped wetland. Ownership bars the project independently.	TMC 13.06.020.F (pack); TMC 13.11.730.C, 13.11.320 (not from the pack)

Remodel, addition and rebuild routes do not apply: the lot is vacant, with no existing structure to remodel, add to, or replace.

NO-GO

No route is allowed on this lot today, because it is public park-district land and because its own mapped wetland and steep-slope coverage leave no part of it clear to build on under Tacoma's critical areas code.

Sources

Property, parcel & tax records

- City of Tacoma Parcel Analysis, parcel withheld, retrieved 2026-11-11

Environmental & shoreline records

- City of Tacoma wetland inventory map data, retrieved 2026-11-11

Zoning & land use

- City of Tacoma zoning map data, retrieved 2026-11-11
- RCW 36.70A.681, retrieved 2026-11-11
- RCW 36.70A.635, retrieved 2026-11-11
- RCW 58.17.060, retrieved 2026-11-11
- Tacoma Municipal Code Title 13, Land Use, retrieved 2026-11-11

Civic decisions & utilities planning

- Tacoma Ordinance No. 29114, full text (Legistar), retrieved 2026-11-11

Other sources

- City of Tacoma steep slope geohazard map data, retrieved 2026-11-11

Preliminary feasibility study prepared by Feasa for the person who ordered it. All budget figures are preliminary estimates, not quotes. Facts are tagged verified / inferred / unknown with their sources; verify anything marked unknown before committing money. This is not a survey, a legal opinion, an engineering report, or an appraisal.