

**CITY OF SEATTLE
ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR
OF THE DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOODS**

**SEPA Threshold Determination
for revisions to the International Special Review District Design Guidelines**

Project Sponsor:	City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods
Location of Proposal:	The boundaries of the International Special Review District Design Guidelines will be consistent with the historic district boundaries, as reflected on Map A of SMC 23.66.302.
Scope of the Proposal:	The proposal is a departmental non-project action to update the International Special Review District Design Guidelines and replace earlier versions adopted in 1988, 1990 and 1993, respectively.

BACKGROUND

Proposal description

The Department of Neighborhoods (DON) is recommending that revisions to the International Special Review District (ISRD) Design Guidelines be adopted, pursuant to Sections 3.02 and 23.66.025 of the Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) that provides the Director of DON rulemaking authority to update the ISRD Design Guidelines.

A Certificate of Approval, pursuant to SMC 23.66.030, is required prior to making any visible change to the exterior appearance of any structure, or to the public rights-of-way or other public spaces in a special review district and prior to the issuance of any other City permits necessary for project development. The application of the ISRD Design Guidelines, a part of the Certificate of Approval process, helps to ensure that the alteration of existing buildings, design of new construction and alterations within rights-of-way or public spaces, within the boundaries of the ISRD, respond appropriately to the district and surrounding context. Developers, architects, community members, City staff and members of the ISRD Board use the ISRD Design Guidelines in conjunction with the design standards in the land use code to determine whether or not proposed changes are appropriate and compatible with and make positive contributions to the ISRD.

The Certificate of Approval process allows flexibility in the application of ISRD Design Guidelines to determine the appropriateness of proposed exterior alterations, site alterations or the design of an addition or new construction, in conjunction with consideration of the design standards contained within Chapter 23.66 SMC. A Certificate of Approval is issued when the Director of DON, after review and recommendation by the ISRD Review Board or Board Coordinator, where applicable, determines that a proposed alteration or modification within the ISRD would result in a better overall building design and compatibility with the surrounding buildings and the historic character of the ISRD.

ISRD Design Guidelines supplement Title 23 SMC by providing additional design direction for residential and commercial development, façade alterations and changes within the open spaces and the public right-of-

way. The ISRD Design Guidelines intend to address such aspects of development and design as site planning, height, bulk and scale relationships, architectural elements, landscaping and the pedestrian environment.

International Special Review District Design Guidelines

This non-project proposal would update the ISRD Design Guidelines. If adopted, these ISRD Design Guidelines would guide the design and shape of future development subject to a Certificate of Approval within the ISRD. The existing ISRD Design Guidelines, adopted in 1988, 1990 and 1993 will be replaced with this set of proposed updated ISRD Design Guidelines.

The ISRD was established to promote, preserve and perpetuate the cultural, economic, historical and otherwise beneficial qualities of the area. The specific purpose of the ISRD Design Guidelines is to assist in implementing the provisions of Chapter 23.66 SMC and guide the design of future developments and alterations to existing sites and buildings so that is it some compatible with the unique historical and cultural character of the District; encourage the rehabilitation of existing structures and improve the visual and urban design relationships; encourage the prevention of irreversible damage to historic resources; encourage the use of street-level spaces for pedestrian-oriented retail specialty shops with colorful and interesting displays and promote a safe and welcoming environment for residents, the business community and visitors. The proposed update to the existing ISRD Design Guidelines will provide greater clarity for applicants and members of the ISRD Review Board, as well as community stakeholders who wish to provide public comment, to help guide future development to respond to the unique Chinatown International District historic, cultural character and identity.

In 2011, portions of the International Special Review District were upzoned through the Historic South Downtown rezone. Additionally, in 2018, the boundaries of the ISRD expanded east to Rainier Ave. S. and north to S. Main St., incorporating the remainder of the Little Saigon neighborhood, which had not previously been included within the ISRD. The guidance within the proposed updated design guidelines these changes into consideration and address the geographic and cultural sub-areas of the Chinatown International District, individually referred to as Chinatown, Japantown and Little Saigon.

Public Comment

Proposed changes to the International Special Review District Design Guidelines require approval from the Director of the Department of Neighborhoods. Opportunity for public comment will occur during a public meeting before the International Special Review District Board. Community members can also submit public comment to rebecca.frestedt@seattle.gov or Rebecca Frestedt, Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, 600 4th Ave. 4th fl., PO Box 94649, Seattle, WA, 98124.

ANALYSIS – OVERVIEW

The following describes the analysis conducted to determine if the proposal is likely to result in *probable significant adverse environmental impacts*. This threshold determination is based on:

- the proposed draft ISRD Design Guidelines, as well as the description above;
- the information contained in the SEPA checklist (dated May 12, 2023);
- an analysis of the changes prepared by City staff; and
- the experience of DON Historic Preservation staff in reviewing similar documents and action.

ELEMENTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Adoption of the International Special Review District Design Guidelines is not expected to result in short or long-term significant adverse impacts in the International Special Review District. The Design Guidelines are supplemental to the existing development standards in Title 23 SMC; their adoption would help guide the design and shape of future development consistent with the existing design standards and City Codes.

Short Term Impacts

As a non-project action, the proposal is not anticipated to have any short-term impacts on the environment. Future development proposals affected by this proposal will be reviewed separately under existing laws, including the City's SEPA ordinance, to address any short-term impacts on the environment.

Long Term Impacts

As a non-project action, the proposal is not anticipated to have any long-term impacts on the environment.

The natural environment includes potential impacts to earth, air, water, plants/animals/fisheries, energy, natural resources, environmentally sensitive areas, noise, releases of toxic or hazardous materials. Adoption of the proposed ISRD Design Guidelines is not anticipated to result in adverse impacts on any of these elements of the natural environment.

These ISRD Design Guidelines will affect the built environment but will not result in any adverse impacts. The impacts to the built environment include any impacts related to the land and shoreline use, height/bulk/scale, housing, and historic preservation. Below is a discussion of the relationship between the proposal and the built environment:

Land Use

Because the ISRD Design Guidelines do not allow or prohibit land uses, the proposal would not allow or encourage any land uses that are incompatible with the existing Comprehensive Plan. For the ISRD, the proposal is intended to implement the objectives of SMC 23.66.025 and design standards included within Chapter 23.66 SMC.

If adopted, the ISRD Design Guidelines will help to guide and shape future development to reflect the unique cultural and historical character of the Chinatown International District. The ISRD Design Guidelines will provide additional design guidance to supplement the provisions of 23.66 SMC and help guide future development, exterior and site alterations to be compatible and reflect the architectural and cultural character of the historic district. The proposed ISRD Design Guidelines would not directly impact the city's shorelines, since the area is not located within a Shoreline environment.

Height/Bulk/Scale

The proposed ISRD Design Guidelines will supplement 23.66 SMC and address height, bulk and scale issues by encouraging new development to integrate with the existing historical character of the neighborhood.

Historic Preservation

This is a non-project action proposal that will impact the design review of proposed projects within the boundaries of the International Special Review District. The adoption of these guidelines is expected to improve combability and enhance urban design relationships to reflect the cultural and architectural character of the existing historic district.

Noise, Shadows on Open Spaces, Light & Glare, Environmental Health, Public View Protection

This proposal would not make these types of impacts more likely. At the individual project level, the City’s regulations, including SEPA regulations, will analyze and identify any needed mitigation of these impacts.

Transportation, Parking, Public Services and Utilities

The proposal is not anticipated to result in any direct impacts on transportation or parking, public services and/or utilities. Adoption of the proposed design guidelines is expected to help improve urban design relationships between the built environment and the right-of-way.

DECISION – SEPA

This decision was made after review by the responsible official on behalf of the lead agency of a completed environmental checklist and other information on file with the responsible department. This constitutes the Threshold Determination and form. The intent of this declaration is to satisfy the requirements of the State Environmental Policy Act (RCW 43.21C), including the requirement to inform the public agency decisions pursuant to SEPA.

- Determination of Non-Significance. This proposal has been determined to not have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is not required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).
- Determination of Significance. This proposal has or may have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).

RECOMMENDED CONSITIONS – SEPA

Signature: Rebecca Frestedt Date: 5/12/2023

Rebecca Frestedt, ISRD Coordinator
 Historic Preservation Program
 Seattle Department of Neighborhoods