July 16, 2024

Dear Councilmembers:

In late 2021, the City Council, through Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) SDCI-004-A-000 (attached), asked the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) to convene a stakeholder group and provide a report to the Council's Land Use Committee on Design Review Program outcomes. Council asked that the stakeholder group conduct a Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) analysis of the Design Review Program and include the following: (1) Design Review Program outcomes since the program was modified in 2017, including review times by design review type and project complexity; (2) An analysis of departures sought through the program that quantifies the number and percentage of projects, by design review and project type, seeking departures, identification of departures sought, and whether those departures were granted; (3) An analysis of whether the program increases housing costs; (4) A review of national best practices for design review programs with significant public participation components; and (5) Recommendations for how the program should be modified to address the findings of the stakeholder group.

SDCI worked in partnership with the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) on this SLI and hired both Paradigm Shift and Broadview Planning to complete the report, attached. Appendix B of the report includes a letter from the consultant Paradigm Shift, who was originally hired to facilitate the Design Review Stakeholder Group. The letter calls out late additions to the Stakeholder Group that were made by the Mayor's Office on behalf of AIA Seattle and Seattle for Everyone representatives. Further challenges were faced by the consultant as the scope of discussions shifted from racial equity into overarching program refinements, and that this was the reason they resigned as a consultant after the interview process with stakeholder members was completed.

While there was some early confusion regarding the role of the stakeholder group, both the Mayor's Office and Councilmembers verbally stated throughout the process that one of the underlying principles of the SLI was to decrease the complexity of the design review program, streamline the permit process and increase program predictability while making public engagement more equitable, all in an attempt to increase housing production in Seattle. In fact, several for-profit and non-profit housing organizations, including AIA Seattle, Futurewise, Habitat for Humanity, and the Housing Development Consortium, stated concerns in a letter to the City dated March 14, 2023 that overall program improvements were not discussed enough as part of the stakeholder process. The letter states that "a discussion of equity cannot separate program participation from other reforms related to efficiency, predictability and accountability."

One of the stated goals of the Harrell administration is to increase housing supply for all current and future Seattleites, through a permit process that is efficient and consistent. SDCI recognizes the role we play in building a better process and continually strives to implement process improvements and remove barriers and enhance understanding of permit review.

While these goals remain in place, state-mandated changes regarding design review have significantly altered the landscape from the time that the work of the SLI stakeholder group took place, specifically the passage of House Bill 1293 during the 2023 State Legislative Session. H.B. 1293 requires that all design standards must be clear and objective and that there be a maximum of one public meeting. Furthermore,

per H.B. 1293 these changes need to be adopted by the City Council within six months after the Comprehensive Plan is updated.

We are currently working to determine how to best address these new requirements put forward by the State Legislature within our own Design Review program, and to ground the work with the end result being equity and transparency. We look forward to working with you as this proposal takes shape to ensure we develop the best program to meet the needs of all Seattleites. We recognize that we have a housing shortage and that we must balance permit efficiency, housing production and design quality.

Please let us know if you have any questions about the report. SDCI and OPCD plan to work in 2024 on legislation to refine the design review process and will use the final report attached as a resource.

Sincerely,

Nathan Torgelson, Director
Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections

Rico Quirindongo, Director
Office for Planning and Community Development

Prepared for:

SEATTLE DEPARTMENT OF CONSTRUCTION & INSPECTIONS

IN RESPONSE TO COUNCIL'S STATEMENT OF LEGISLATIVE INTENT SDCI-004-A-001

March 2023

Prepared by:

BROADVIEW
PLANNING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Seattle City Council's Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) SDCI-004-A-001 requests that Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections (SDCI) report on design review program outcomes, process improvements, and equity – all under the umbrella of a racial equity toolkit (RET) analysis. Starting in 2022, the City convened an 18-person stakeholder committee to undertake the RET analysis (a list of participants is included in Appendix A), but ultimately, that process was not completed (see Appendix B for letter of resignation from Paradigm Shift Seattle). As a result, in October 2022, Broadview Planning (BvP) was tasked with facilitating the remaining stakeholder meetings, synthesizing all the work done to date, and identifying barriers to undertaking a RET process specific to design review.

While this report emphasizes RET barriers, we have also collected and organized any input from interviews, focus groups, stakeholder committee meetings, and technical reports related to opportunities for process and program improvements. It is important to note that across all inputs into the SLI response process, there was no indication that stakeholders want to abandon design review.

Among the equity, process, and programmatic improvements that were generally well-supported by stakeholders and staff, we'd like to elevate the following as critical opportunities to make the design review process more efficient and equitable for all:

- Formalize the design review program structure to meaningfully embed equity throughout the process by **creating a design review program mission, vision, and goals** that explicitly account for institutional racial equity and shifting power. **Convene a group of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) community members to craft an evaluation plan** that ties vision and goals to an equity accountability framework and allows the program to track its progress, including improving permit review times.

- **Build community capacity to engage in design review and the building, permitting, and development process overall,** particularly in neighborhoods with high disparities between race and opportunity of housing, health, and socioeconomics. Fund Community Development Authorities or other organizations to **lead deep engagement in Equity Areas.**

- **Reevaluate the early design guidance (EDG) process** with the Department of Neighborhoods and create more outreach structure and accountability.

- **Improve communication processes by** rewriting all outreach and communication materials (notices, memos, etc.) so they are shorter, use plain language, and are easy to translate; revamp the City's website with clearer language, and include language translation.

- Explore land use code changes that **allow for more flexibility to develop and negotiate site-specific solutions.**

- **Rewrite citywide design guidelines to** simplify, eliminate redundancy, and improve clarity for

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applicant, staff, board, and community understanding/interpretation. Create **targeted design guidelines in Equity Areas** that have been crafted by community stakeholders.

– **Increase the predictability of the review process by** standardizing clear, effective design review corrections reports to limit the amount of review time and micromanaging design guidance.

– **Reevaluate packet requirements** based on the type of design review and reform associated requirements for design and graphic submittals.

While these were broadly supported, we encourage you not to adopt or implement any process or programmatic changes without thoughtfully determining appropriate next steps. In reviewing the draft opportunities for process and programmatic improvements, particularly, you will notice that some may be appropriate for staff to evaluate and implement immediately, while others will require legislation. Many will be best considered through a robust and meaningful community-oriented stakeholder engagement effort. **Ultimately, the equity impacts of these opportunities have not been thoroughly considered, so all should be subjected to a RET analysis to determine who benefits and who is burdened by any programmatic or process changes.**

> *"Slow down the process of reviewing the current Design Review program. It is clear the program needs to evolve, and it will take the right people, openness, and time to ensure that change happens responsibly and is replaced with a process that centers racial equity."*
>
> Paradigm Shift Seattle, 2022

This balance of this report includes:
– A brief background of design review, City Council's SLI, and the City's RET analysis process.
– A review of the design review RET process and why a complete RET analysis was not possible.
– Answers to each of the questions from City Council's SLI.
– Opportunities for process and programmatic improvements, as gleaned from multiple stakeholder engagement strategies.
– Supplementary research and analysis provided in several appendices.

What is design review?

Design review is a component of the Master Use Permit (MUP) application, administered through SDCI. Until recently, it has been required for most new commercial, mixed-use, and multifamily developments. On December 13, 2022, Council passed an ordinance allowing a one-year design review exemption to affordable housing developers, extending a pandemic-era rule.

Important to consider: There was near unanimity among stakeholders engaged in this process that Seattle's design review is valuable and should not be eliminated.

Design review is intended to provide a forum through which neighborhoods, developers, architects, and City staff can work together to ensure that new developments contribute positively to Seattle's neighborhoods. Design review has three principal objectives:

- Encourage excellence in site planning and design such that they enhance the character of the city.
- Provide flexibility in the application of development standards.
- Improve communication and participation among developers, neighbors, and the City early in the design and siting of new development.

Design review "*can enhance the overall image of the community for both residents and visitors, strengthen established neighborhoods, and protect and leverage the value of environmental assets.*"

American Planning Association, 2018

Why do cities have design review?

Seattle is not alone in including design review as a tool for evaluating the design of proposed developments. Many other localities – at least 300 cities and towns – also include design review because of the recognition that design affects our daily life and has the potential to enhance our experience of the built environment. According to the American Planning Association, "Design review is about ensuring that both existing development and new development can work together to create vibrant, dynamic, and appealing places to live and work. Many localities regard it as a part of their economic development strategy as it can enhance the overall image of the community for both residents and visitors, strengthen established neighborhoods, and protect and leverage the value of environmental assets. By blending public and private objectives for community design, appearance, and function, design review can attract new development." [1]

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[1] Hinshaw, M. & Morris, M. (2018). Design review: Guiding better development. PAS Report 591. American Planning Association. Accessed on March 28, 2023, from https://planning.org/publications/report/9154841/

What was included in the Seattle City Council's SLI, and how did SDCI answer it?

In 2021, Council adopted SLI SDCI-004-A-001 that requests that SDCI report on design review program outcomes, process improvements, and equity. As part of the SLI, Council asked SDCI to convene a stakeholder group that represents a range of interests and includes BIPOC professionals and residents to conduct a RET analysis of design review. Figure 1 presents a complete timeline and overview of the project stages.

Figure 1. Timeline and overview of project stages.
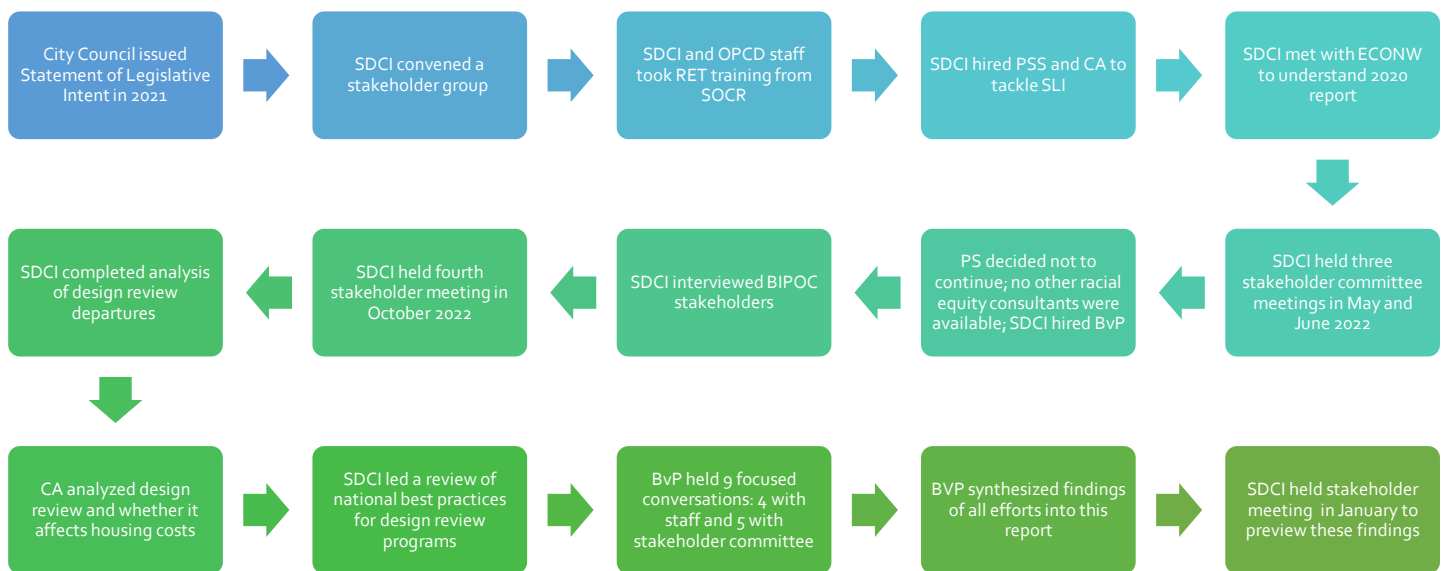
SDCI partnered with Seattle's Office of Planning & Community Development (OPCD) to answer Council's SLI. Together, they convened the stakeholder group and undertook RET training from the Seattle Office of Civil Rights. SDCI also hired consultants who specialize in racial equity and facilitation, Paradigm Shift Seattle, and consultants who specialized in economic analysis, Community Attributes.

After convening the stakeholder group for three meetings, Paradigm Shift Seattle determined that the process for extending invitations to that group was motivated by political concerns and that "the desire to make changes was rooted in pressure primarily from the development community, and more specifically, in money and the current cost of the process." This pressure came from both the market-rate and affordable housing developers, and Paradigm Shift decided to step away because it was no longer possible "to continue to participate in this process from a place of integrity and in alignment with [their] values." It was determined at that time that a complete RET analysis was not possible given the misalignment of priorities, disparity of opinions among the stakeholders, and the unrealistic timeline for completion. In October 2022, BvP was brought in to stitch together all the pieces of previous work done to date, and to deliver this summary report.

Why was a RET ultimately impossible?

The City's RET process lays out a set of questions to guide the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies, initiatives, programs, and budget issues to address the impacts on racial equity. See Figure 2 provides on overview of the City's of the six-step RET process.

The two anchor requirements of the RET include:
- Prioritizing transformational change (decision-making process) over merely relying on transactional change (products of decisions).
- Analyzing how White supremacy culture contributes to these racial inequities and identifying what cultural changes need to be made.

Figure 2. Six-step Racial Equity Toolkit process.

Ultimately, because neither requirement was satisfied, a complete RET analysis was not possible. Several barriers to completing a RET analysis emerged, including lack of trust; miscommunication and misunderstandings about the Stakeholder Committee process; aggressive and unrealistic timelines; lack of programmatic vision, goals, and objectives; and ultimately, SDCI management's overemphasis on transactional rather than to transformational change.

Specifically, we learned that:
- Relationships are broken and there's a serious lack of trust. Without rebuilding trust, there's no path for transformational change.
- There's no clear Design Review "program" and without a distinct program with a vision, goals, and objectives there's no way to measure progress.
- Miscommunication and misunderstandings abounded about the stakeholder committee process and how input would be used.
  - By beginning the process with outcomes already created, there was a missed opportunity to build a meaningful, collaborative process.
  - Many people serving felt their time was not respected and that they risked their professional reputations by participating in the Stakeholder Committee.
- Aggressive and unrealistic timeline did more to harm relationships than advance the conversation on equity and process improvements.
- There's no indication that City management is interested in or committed to transformational change; instead, they feel pressure to make short-term transactional changes to improve process outcomes.
- Design review board meetings are the only consistent City outreach presence. As such, these meetings and board members bear the brunt of dealing with non-project related input from residents who are unhappy with development pressure in their neighborhoods but have no other recourse for connecting with City staff.

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Was SDCI able to answer the questions in the SLI?

The SLI posed five questions, all of which fell under the umbrella of a RET analysis. Despite an incomplete RET analysis, SDCI – in collaboration with stakeholders, consultants, and our team – was able to answer several questions from the SLI. We synthesized quantitative and qualitative data from multiple sources, including dozens of hours of stakeholder interviews, a series of focused conversations with internal and external stakeholders, and staff- and consultant-produced reports, letters, and analyses. These sources are included in Appendices C – H. High-level findings are included below; however, many questions and considerations remain before advancing significant program or code changes.

> *"Our recommendations seek to combat a sense of urgency. A sense of urgency drives us to focus on timelines and getting it done over investing in relationships and change that can transform systems and outcomes. It also leads us to not look at the whole picture of contributing factors to success or failure."*
>
> Paradigm Shift Seattle, 2022

Question 1: Does the Design Review Program create barriers to BIPOC participation, and does it reinforce racial exclusion?

The current structure and practice of design review present many barriers to achieving racial equity (see Appendix C for Paradigm Shift's Stakeholder Interview Report for more details). There are opportunities for design review to become more equitable by shifting and sharing power. While design review meetings aren't seen as equitable or of value to BIPOC communities, neither is the absence of meetings (either through administrative design review or eliminating the requirement for design review meetings).

> Important to consider: While design review meetings aren't seen as equitable or of value to BIPOC communities, neither is the absence of meetings.

Findings:
- The current structure and practice of design review presents many barriers to achieving racial equity. Because it exists in a culture and power structure of White supremacy, the design review program creates barriers to BIPOC participation and reinforces racial exclusion.
   - For example, persistent challenges with transparency and disparate access to power – especially who can access leadership and management – mean that design review is easy to navigate for developers who are familiar with the process but much less so for everyone else.

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- Limited, passive outreach that doesn't center those most impacted by systems of oppression makes design review inaccessible to most community members.
  - Rather than tick-the-box engagement, there are missed opportunities to build community capacity so community members can meaningfully engage in the development of their neighborhoods.
- It is very challenging to focus on racial equity over process improvements when equity isn't truly and embedded into every aspect of the design review program.
- There are opportunities for design review to become more equitable by shifting and sharing power.

> "*We caution against doing away with Design Review, or replacing it with technical design review, without adequately and thoroughly addressing and systematizing where community members have the opportunity to have their voices heard in the building process.*"
>
> Paradigm Shift Seattle, 2022

Question 2: What are average Design Review times since the program was modified in 2017, by design review type and project complexity?

Permit timelines reflect project complexity. Complex projects require more reviewers, greater coordination, and more time with both SDCI and with the Applicant. Design review timelines are about the same as complex non-design review Master Use Permits (MUP). Permit time with SDCI vs. with the Applicant were very similar for both design review and non-design review projects. See Appendix D for SDCI's permit timelines report.

> Important to consider: Fundamentally, are overall permitting times too long? Why? How can we address this holistically?

Findings:
- Permit timelines overall reflect project complexity. These projects require more reviewers, greater coordination, and more time with both SDCI and with the Applicant.
- Project complexity can be impacted by:
  - The number of reviews on a permit (Ex. land use, zoning, mandatory housing affordability, incentive zoning, city light, public utilities, sustainability, housing, ECA, geotechnical, shoreline, tree, transportation, and historic reviews).
  - Coordination with other departments and/or agencies
  - Code requirements
  - Appeals

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- Design Review MUP permit timelines are about the same as complex non-design review MUPs. From MUP intake to MUP issuance:
  - o Full Design Review: 582 calendar days
  - o Administrative Design Review: 477 calendar days
  - o No design review - SEPA EIS: 613 calendar days
  - o No design review - Rezone: 652 calendar days
  - o No design review - Environmentally Critical Areas (variance, ACU, etc.): 582 calendar days
- Permit time with SDCI vs. with the Applicant were very similar for both design review and non-design review projects.
- Percent of overall permit time for the Early Design Review phase was higher for Streamlined Design Review (SDR), but SDR also has a different permit process than Administrative Design Review (ADR) or Full Design Review (FDR).
- Overall, the data showed that SDR and ADR had shorter review times compared to FDR times. In addition to the design review board public meetings, which may add time to FDR projects, there are other possible reasons for this difference in time:
  - o SDR and ADR projects are smaller in size and usually less complex.
  - o FDR projects are larger in size and tend to be more complex with additional coordination between different departments and agencies and more complex code requirements and are appealed more frequently.

> "*The design review program is one of many steps to building and development in Seattle. If the experience of design review is to become more equitable, the whole planning, permitting, building, and development process needs to change to become more equitable."*
>
> Paradigm Shift Seattle, 2022

Question 3: How many projects include design review departures/adjustments?

The SLI required an analysis of how many projects seek design review departures/adjustments, and how many of those departures/adjustments are granted (see Appendix E for SDCI's departures and adjustments summary report). The analysis found that most design review projects request departures or adjustments, and most requested departures and adjustments are granted.

Findings:
- Many departures and adjustments can result in larger developments than a code- compliant design.
- Departures are intended to result in a design that is a better response to design guidelines,

compared to a code-compliant option.

- Past changes to design review thresholds have not applied to projects with departures, thereby incentivizing applicants to meet the code and avoid departures that are intended to provide a more contextual design response and overall better design.
- Many departures/adjustments can increase building area by extending the building into areas otherwise not allowed in the Land Use Code.

Question 4: Does design review increases housing costs?

We cannot answer this question given the constraints of available data. Answering this question requires access to developers' proformas.[2] One way to do this is to create a pilot program with a robust evaluation plan that includes reviewing proformas from developers to track development, design review, and other permitting costs, as well as housing costs. See more details in Community Attributes' cost impact of design review analysis in Appendix F.

> Important to consider: If evaluation reveals that design review does increase housing costs, access to developer's proformas would help ensure that cost savings are passed on to people who live in new housing developments.

Findings:

- Design review is embedded within the overall permitting process. Disentangling the design review impacts is challenging and requires looking at all permitting milestones and processes. Many stakeholders acknowledge that complaints about the design review program are actually about the broader permitting process. By looking at timelines for all permits required for projects, we could identify and address inefficiencies more holistically.
- Design review makes up a portion of the total 5-8% design cost and influences other soft costs (such as carrying costs); however, this remains difficult to parse out from the actual cost without proforma data. There are design review programs in other cities that require proforma information as part of their review. Seattle needs to figure out how to provide more transparency into the cost/value conversation for design review.
- Internal and external stakeholders noted that the design review program seems insufficiently staffed. In a city that is growing as quickly as Seattle, an efficient and robust design review program needs more staff and resources. This would alleviate at least some of the backlogs and reduce the time required to move projects through design review.

Question 5: How does Seattle's design review program compare to other cities that require design review with significant public participation?

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[2] A real estate development proforma, also known as a real estate development model, is a feasibility study of a development project used to determine the project's financial viability. Real estate development proformas consider all sources of financing and project costs and are used to project the cash flow on a project timeline.

Many cities with design review programs that are also experiencing an affordable housing crisis are grappling with similar challenges. [3] No city has fully figured out how to embed equity into the external design of architecture through the design review process (see Appendix G for SDCI's best practices report). Some cities have elements of the process that are more responsive to equity, mainly in how/when outreach is done, or guidelines that speak directly to integrating equity into design. Most successful examples appear to be cities who require more extensive early outreach to shape the building program and build better relationships with the community.

> "*Changing design review alone will not fix the housing crisis we are experiencing. Historical and structural understandings of how systems of oppression impact development, affordable housing, and homelessness are needed, as well as policy and legislation that encourage developers to build more affordable housing and more housing that keeps families in their current neighborhoods.*"
>
> Paradigm Shift Seattle, 2022

What other opportunities emerged from stakeholders for process and programmatic improvements?

Stakeholder engagement was a consistent thread throughout the SLI response and RET convening process. As previously noted, both Paradigm Shift and Community Attributes conducted individual interviews as part of their contracts (see Appendices C and F, respectively).

Other sources of stakeholder input include:
- Feedback from BIPOC Stakeholder Committee members, who met individually with SDCI management.
- Four focused conversations with 17 SDCI staff members, conducted by BvP.
- Five focused conversations with 17 stakeholder committee members, conducted by BvP.
- Interviews with one DON staff for input on EDG process.
- Public comments, including letters from Seattle for Everyone and the American Institute of Architects (see Appendix H).

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[3] Kode, A. (2023). America, the Bland. New York Times. Accessed on January 24, 2023, from https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/20/realestate/housing-developments-city-architecture.html

BvP compiled results of all engagement – including 529 unique insights – into a database and conducted a qualitative analysis to determine key themes. This initial analysis of all stakeholder input was organized into six topic areas.

> Important to consider: Because their impacts on equity are not understood, these opportunities should not be considered or implemented without submitting them to a RET analysis.

1. Advancing Equity in City Systems
2. Design Guidelines
3. Land Use + Other Codes
4. City Review Processes
5. Design Review Boards
6. Outreach/Engagement

Appendix I provides details of key themes and initial opportunities for equity, process, and programmatic improvements. These initial opportunities for improvements were then vetted with select members of SDCI's Change Management Team, who provided feedback in Appendix J. Stakeholder committee members were then asked to review and prioritize the initial findings through an online survey. Survey results are available in Appendix K. Below are the top-line findings:

1. To improve design guidelines, consider:
   - **Rewriting design guidelines to simplify, eliminate redundancy, and improve clarity for applicant, staff, board, and community understanding/interpretation.** Use annotated photos or drawings to illustrate the intent of the guideline. Use a professional technical editor to ensure guidelines are clear, succinct, and not duplicative.
     - o To advance racial equity, add **targeted design guidelines in designated Equity Areas**. Here, allow community members to craft their own design guideline supplements that are detailed, specific, and equity-focused (in the spirit of the Central District guidelines).
       - ▪ Important to consider: there is an assumption that the design guideline rewrites include community input. Without that, the process would be inequitable.

2. To improve land use and other codes, consider:
   - **Exploring land use code changes that allow for more flexibility to develop and negotiate site-specific solutions.**
     - o Possible examples include: require larger setbacks in multifamily or mixed-use zones, then allow departures for projects that demonstrate design excellence.
   - **Embedding equity in land use code for more regulatory oversight**.
     - o Possible examples include: set a threshold for design review to apply to single-family zones.
   - **Setting minimum floor area ratio (FAR) thresholds** to prevent under developing lots and the loss of development potential for housing units.
   - **Increasing review thresholds** so that fewer developments are subject to design review.
     - o Important to consider: An inherent tension exists between objectivity and flexibility. Survey respondents were generally supportive of code changes that

increase objectivity and predictability, while also exploring changes that allow for more flexibility.
- o Any code changes should consider other type of controls like increased outreach and engagement requirements and/or updated design standards in zoning code to reflect certain design components that are tied to community priorities.

3. To improve City review processes, consider:
   - **Increasing the predictability of the review process**.
     - o Possible examples include: standardizing clear, effective design review corrections and reports to limit the amount of review time and micromanaging design guidance; reevaluating packet requirements based on the type of design review and reform associated requirements for design and graphic submittals; revising the examples of packets on SDCI's website to include examples that are inexpensively and realistically produced; placing limits on the number of design renderings required for submission and at every correction cycle; examine design review in the context of the broader.
   - **Increasing capacity for the design review program.**
     - o Possible examples include: hiring more design review staff to review all permits in a timely manner; hiring supervisors who have demonstrable experience with design review.

4. To improve design review boards, consider:
   - Further **professionalizing design review boards**.
     - o Possible examples include: providing a stipend for design review board members; increasing technical expertise (specifically architecture and engineering) for boards; creating a single, consolidated, citywide design review board to produce more efficiency, predictability, and consistency.
   - To advance racial equity, **create a process to recruit more BIPOC, displaced, and historically underrepresented** voices to serve on design review boards.
     - o Important to consider: the City has tried to do this for years, but because of historic racism and underinvestment in BIPOC communities, the success of these efforts have been very limited.
     - o If the City moves toward more professional boards, there needs to be a process to also include voices not represented on board (e.g., how does he City meaningfully include community voices, etc.?).
       - ▪ Broaden concept of expertise so it includes lived experiences.
     - o At a minimum, make the board go through extensive racial equity training.
       - ▪ Important to consider: if we move to centralize the board, we also need to figure out how to staff it. This would be a big budget, training, and operational lift.

5. To improve outreach and engagement, consider:
   - **Improving communication processes.**
     - o Possible examples include: rewriting all outreach and communication materials (notices, memos, etc.) so they are shorter, use plain language, and are easy to translate; revamping the City's website with clearer language, including language translation and contact information; extending the 300- foot meeting notice area,

particularly for large parcels that may have fewer adjacent residents or property owners.

- o To advance racial equity, **build community capacity to engage in design review**, particularly in neighborhoods with high disparities between race and opportunity of housing, health, and socioeconomics. Possible examples include: using Equity Area maps to target resources and capacity building to engage in design review; funding Community Development Authorities or other organizations to lead deep engagement in Equity Areas.

6. Undergirding all of this, SDCI needs to **formalize the design review program structure to meaningfully embed equity throughout the process.** Possible examples include: creating a design review program mission, vision, goals that explicitly accounts for institutional racial equity and shifting power; developing an equity accountability framework to ensure equity remains a priority throughout the design review program; convening a group of BIPOC community members to craft evaluation plan that ties vision and goals to equity accountability framework.

Again, we encourage you not to adopt or implement any process or programmatic changes without thoughtfully determining appropriate next steps. Regardless of whether they can be implemented at the staff level or require legislation, these opportunities may be best considered through a robust and meaningful community-oriented stakeholder engagement effort and/or subjected to a RET analysis to determine who benefits and who is burdened by potential changes.

APPENDIX A

STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE
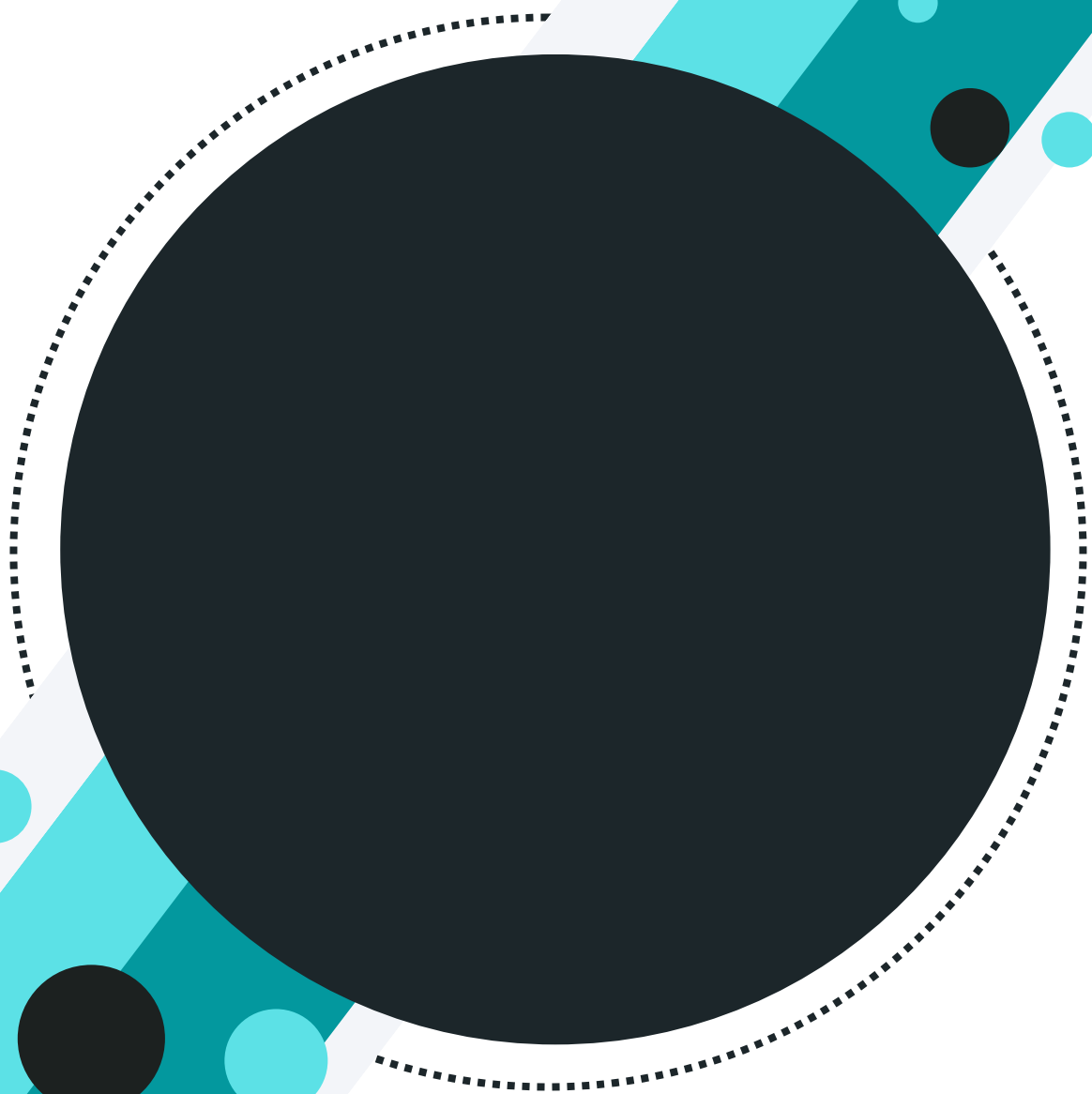
The stakeholder group includes affordable housing developers, market rate developers, design professionals, neighborhood organizations, and previous Design Review Board members. Stakeholders representing specific organizations are indicated in the list below.

Kate Smith, Housing Development Consortium
Chris Colley
Donna Moodie
Frank Miranda
Gladys Ly-Au Young, American Institute of Architects
Grace Kim
Hamdi Abdulle
Jamie Lee
John Feit
Justin Allegro
Maria Barrientos, Seattle for Everyone
Pat Foley
Patrick Gordon, Downtown Seattle Association
Roque Deherrera, Master Builders Association
Sharon Khosla
Tejal Pastakia, NAIOP – Commercial Real Estate Development Association
Todd Bronk, American Society of Landscape Architects
Todd Lee, Northwest Chapter of Urban Land Institute

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF RESIGNATION FROM PARADIGM SHIFT SEATTLE, 2022

Shelley and Magda,

We would like to thank you for your genuine collaboration during our time working together. You two are wonderful people and have made starting and ending our partnership as smooth as it could be under the circumstances. As we close out our contract, we want to provide some context in writing behind the request we made in June to end our contract early.

When we learned about this project back in March of 2022, we saw an opportunity to apply our diversity, equity, and inclusion knowledge and facilitation skills to support residents with providing a thorough and honest analysis of the Design Review program using the City of Seattle Racial Equity Toolkit (RET). We felt confident that there was alignment with our values and those of SDCI and the Council through our conversations and the goals laid out by SLI SDCI 004 A 00.

> *This Statement of Legislative Intent would request that the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) convene a stakeholder group and provide a report to the Council on Design Review Program outcomes.*
>
> *The stakeholder group should have organizational and community representation including, but not limited to, affordable housing advocates and developers, design professionals, SDCI staff, density advocates, and individual representatives or members from neighborhood organizations that participate in Design Review Board meetings. Membership in the stakeholder group should include BIPOC professionals and residents.*
>
> *The group would conduct a Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) analysis of the Design Review Program and report to the Council on the outcomes of that analysis. That would include an analysis of whether the **program creates barriers to participation for BIPOC residents, either as applicants, board members, or public participants, and whether the program creates or reinforces racial exclusion**.*

We signed our contracts in April to facilitate the stakeholder group. As the work got underway, there were a number of instances that revealed to us that the stated values and goals of SLI SDCI 004 A 00 were not the same values and goals in practice.

The instance that stands out the most was late additions to the stakeholder group made by the Mayor's office in April and May. These additions changed the group from a racially diverse group where BIPOC and White stakeholders were about 50/50 to a group with

more White stakeholders and that prioritized development professionals. Strong advocacy by Shelley and last minute recruitment of BIPOC stakeholders by us and the SDCI team was required to bring balance back to the racial diversity of the group. This last minute choice and scramble had ripple effects throughout the process.

BIPOC stakeholders that joined as a result of the late recruitment shared that the quick, and for some late, start to the work felt challenging. Several other stakeholders candidly and vulnerably shared with us in interviews that they didn't feel as though they could speak to the impact of Design Review on BIPOC community members. Stakeholders entered the process in good faith and with very little clarity or direction about the intended focus of this group. From our point of view, if the intent of the SLI was to analyze "*whether the program creates **barriers to participation for BIPOC residents**, either as applicants, board members, or public participants, and whether the program creates or reinforces racial exclusion*" the stakeholder group should have prioritized members who can speak intimately about this topic.

From where we sit, with our racial equity lens and experience in the field, the process of extending invitations to the stakeholder group prioritized political concerns. While there is no doubt that Design Review needs to evolve, it seems as though the desire to make changes was rooted in pressure primarily from the development community, and more specifically, in money and the current cost of the process.

As we continued meeting in May and June the misalignment between the aspirations and practice became more clear. Given the stated intention of the SLI to focus on barriers for BIPOC residents, a lens that is counter to our traditional ways of working that are rooted in and center whiteness, it was necessary to be aligned, clear, and explicit in that focus in all aspects. The lack of alignment and clarity prevented meaningful participation from everyone involved - from us as facilitators, to stakeholders, to City staff.

By early June, we had reached our threshold for wading through, and trying to correct/accommodate, these contradictions. For all the reasons named above, we couldn't continue to participate in this process from a place of integrity and in alignment with our values.

All of this being said, it is true that just one person can make a difference and it was the two of you that made it for us. We hope this is received with that in mind. We welcome staying connected and hope the best for you, your families, and this work.

- Sofia & Ti'esh
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Sofia Voz (she/her/hers)

APPENDIX C

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW REPORT BY PARADIGM SHIFT

Paradigm Shift Seattle Stakeholder Interview Report
for Design Review Statement of Legislative Intent

INTRODUCTION

The Seattle City Council (Council) issued a [Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI)](#) requesting that the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) report on Design Review Program outcomes, process improvements, and equity. In response to the request around equity and Design Review, SDCI and Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) gathered a group of stakeholders who will met throughout 2022 to give feedback on racial equity in the Design Review Program. This equity analysis will be a part of a larger final report to Council.

To accomplish this task, the stakeholder and SDCI were asked to conduct a [Racial Equity Toolkit (RET)](#) analysis of the Design Review Program. Our collective, Paradigm Shift Seattle, was hired by SDCI to support the facilitation of this process. The report that follows is our contribution to the SLI RET analysis. To learn more about Paradigm Shift Seattle, refer to Appendix A.

Paradigm Shift Seattle designed an interview process that engaged stakeholders with Step Three of the Racial Equity Toolkit: Determine Benefits and/or Burden in relation to the City of Seattle Design Review Program. To address Step Three, we asked participants how they observed and/or experienced racial equity and racial inequity in Design Review by focusing on some key tenets of equity: accessibility and inclusion, clarity and transparency, and the shifting and sharing of structural and cultural power. We used our understanding of the ways we can achieve racial diversity, inclusion, and equity in programs to determine these areas of focus.

What follows is a demographic overview of the stakeholders that were interviewed and their insight on these key tenets of equity. Our hope is that this report is an integral part of the continued work of the stakeholder group, SDCI, OPCD, and Council and informs shifts in city policy, and Design Review program structure, process, and practice.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

We conducted 20 total interviews. All 18 Design Review SLI stakeholders were interviewed and 2 City of Seattle staff members representing SDCI and the Office of Civil Rights were interviewed. Of this group of 20, 45% identify as BIPOC, 15.8% identify as Mixed Race, and 36.8% identify as White.

Racial Identity of Participants

Mixed Race 15.8%

BIPOC 47.4%

White 36.8%
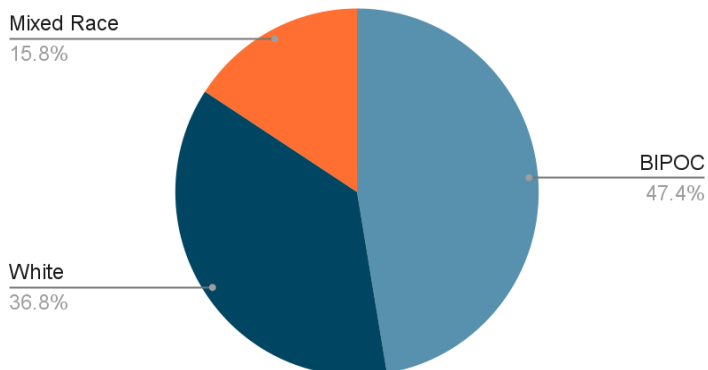
There is representation of community members, for profit and affordable housing applicants, affordable housing organizations, architects, past and present Design Review board members, and City of Seattle staff. Many participants held more than one of these roles in connection to Design Review. Here is a graph with more detail.

Of this racially diverse group with a range of experiences with Design Review, 60% have participated in all phases of the SDCI development process, with 95% having direct experience with Design Review meetings.

Participant Experience with Design Review
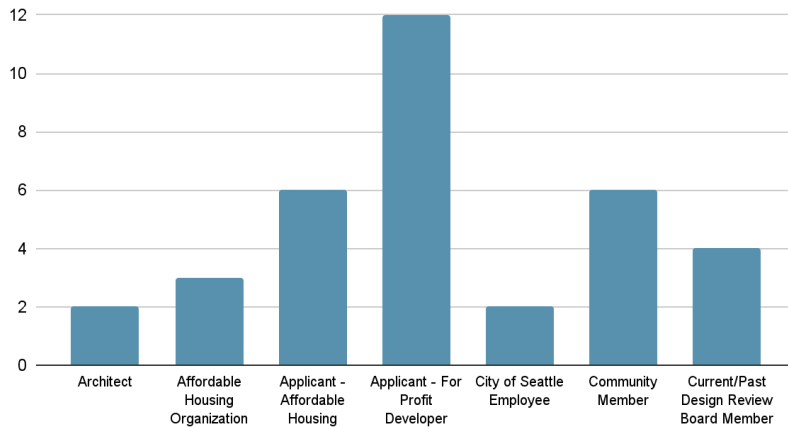
We asked stakeholders to identify their race and share their experience with Design Review based on the racial equity focus of the SLI and RET, and their different connections to Design Review because of the many different entry points into the Design Review program.

ABSTRACT

The clear sentiment from participants is that the current structure and practice of Design Review presents many barriers to achieving racial equity. There is acknowledgement from participants, across race and connection to Design Review, of growth over the years. At the same time, every stakeholder acknowledged that there is work to be done to align the stated intentions of Design Review and the way it is practiced and experienced.

There were no statistically significant findings along demographic lines when it came to topics discussed or themes. We did find that BIPOC stakeholders generally rated the key tenets lower than White stakeholders, however there was representation of BIPOC, White, and Mixed stakeholders at all points on the rating spectrum. Due to the lack of pattern along demographic lines, the topics and trends below are not separated by race or experience with Design Review.

Below, you will find trends and supporting quotes separated into the three buckets of racial equity we talked with stakeholders about: accessibility and inclusion, clarity and transparency, and shifting and sharing power. Quotes were edited for clarity, and we did not include quotes that contained personally identifiable information. Each quote represents an idea that came up from several different stakeholders.

TOPICS AND TRENDS

Accessibility and Inclusion

The first tenets that we explored in the interviews were accessibility and inclusion. **Accessibility** refers to the ability of all people, with all their varied identities and abilities, to access programs and activities. And once people have access, **inclusion** is the creation of programs and activities where individuals and groups feel welcomed, represented, respected, supported, and allowed to fully participate.

Interviewees were asked to rate the accessibility and inclusion of the current Design Review Process, using a racial equity lens. They were asked on a scale of 1-5, their observation or experience with accessibility and inclusion in Design Review with a 1 representing very low accessibility and inclusion, and a 5 representing very high accessibility and inclusion. The average rating was a 2.44 and responses ranged from 1 - 5 with ratings mostly between 1 - 3. Many respondents noted that their rating was different for different stakeholders, with lower ratings for community members and higher ratings for Design Review board members, applicants and development professionals, and city planners.

Topics: What did interviewees talk about?

Design Review Meetings and Process Design Review Board Applicants	Design Review Guidelines SCDI Communications and Outreach Development Industry

Trends: What was said about these topics?

- **Limited, passive outreach and not centering those most impacted by systems of oppression in the structure and process of Design Review meetings makes them inaccessible to community members.**

"The city's website as an architect is hard to navigate. If I'm just a community member that has nothing to do with design, forget about it. You're not going to know where to go. You're not going to know what to do… And it really is the main point of having these Design Review meetings, right? [That] they're open to the public, but how would you find that out?"

"From the vantage point of our community, our community does not have access to cars, some transit, they don't really like to leave the neighborhood … there's definitely no language access or opportunities. The meetings run long and pretty late into the evening. I ended up having to leave one of the meetings to go pick up my boss's daughter for her because it's not accessible for folks if they need childcare. The meetings are set up like Robert's Rules of Order. It can be very intimidating. It reminds me very much of presenting at city council, which is also intimidating. Meetings are very technical and jargony. I'm not saying that's not necessary, but I think that since this is the only venue for folks to give their opinion on projects, it can be seen as not welcoming, or a high barrier."

"The terminology being used in meetings is not friendly to those that are not knowledgeable of the process. There's a lot of language barriers and it's not clear how the public can or should provide comments."

"I can navigate [Design Review] because it's my job but it is a cumbersome, clunky process for people who are not within the process. I can see why people give up and don't know what it means."

- **Design Review guidelines, and technical language and acronyms used in Design Review Meetings create barriers for public participation, and therefore inclusion in Design Review meetings.**

"If you're a community member and you walk into a meeting and all of a sudden the planner starts talking design talk, or design speak, and then forces the applicant to respond in design speak. Pretty soon you're talking about faces and impediments and all of this kind of stuff. And you are a community member who just wants to understand what's going on across the street. And they're speaking a totally different language … So, I think we've strayed away from the topics that are intended to be spoken about. We've created this design-speak meeting between the architect and the planner and the board, and everybody else feels kinda left out unless you happen to be an architect or a developer who understands it."

"When you get into the meeting, the guidelines are just very technical. And, if you don't know how to talk about them, then you just feel like you're not heard."

"The entire structure of Design Review is set up around the Design Review guidelines that the city has. A by-product of a structure that prioritizes Design Review guidelines [is that] the language that gets used in these conversations is very professional. To the point where when you try to provide a comment or engage in an issue that doesn't use some of that language, you can feel less important or marginalized, or even just in the way. And sometimes the facilitators of these meetings will interject and say it's got to stay focused on architectural design. And it's like, I don't know that language, so how am I supposed to feel? You're not welcome."

- **The public comment function of Design Review does not meet the multiple needs of community members - to talk both about design and impacts of development - causing confusion and frustration.**

"The BIPOC community when they come in they're worried about how it's going to affect their community, not necessarily themselves. And you know, they do want good design. They do want good materials showing up in their neighborhood. They do want accessible buildings that feel welcoming at the street level and above."

"When we look at it from the folks in the Southeast, a lot of BIPOC folks talked less about parking and more about the disruption to businesses that were nearby saying, you know, when sound transit blew their line through MLK, I was really affected and I'm still affected. How is this project going to affect me? And then some questions and issues around affordability and unit mix, which unfortunately is similar to parking outside the purview of Design Review. So I think about ways the whole process could be more inclusive. I think we need to have opportunities for people to voice those concerns to the city and to the applicant and feel like they're heard."

Clarity and Transparency

The next tenets are the clarity and transparency of a system or process. **Transparency** requires that any information, processes, and roles within a system, be communicated in a way that is concise, easily available and easy to understand. **Clear and transparent** information and processes allow people with different values, experiences, and skills the ability to be successful and for there to be accountability within systems.

Interviewees were asked to rate the clarity and transparency of the current Design Review Process, using a racial equity lens. They were asked to use a scale of 1-5, with a 1 representing very low clarity and transparency, and a 5 representing very high clarity and transparency. The average rating was a 2.1 and responses ranged from 1 - 4. Many respondents noted that their rating was different for different stakeholders, with lower ratings for community members/non-design professionals and higher for stakeholders working within the industry.

Topics: What did interviewees talk about?

Design Review Meetings Design Review Process Design Review Guidelines	Roles within Design Review Community Member Impact City Staff

Trends: What was said about these topics?

- **Information about projects and Design Review is technical, a lot to take in, and hard to find.**

"The websites are good. The information is accessible. I think the city of Seattle has a fabulous website that clarifies a lot. But even I, with my experience, find that there are nuances to the process that are very subjective, that you'll never understand."

"The design guidelines are just way too intense and repetitive throughout the different categories. And so, you can comment on something specific in the design guidelines, but I think it's a very overwhelming list for the public to work through and understand."

- **Design Review is clear and transparent for developers, who are intimate with the process, and much less so for everyone else.**

"If you're not a design professional or somebody like the neighborhood walk that always follows every single project, you don't know how to access that. And even if we know how to access it, it's like, what does it mean? You can look at the a hundred page booklet, but what does it mean?"

"There's a lot of publications about it (design review). So is it clear and transparent? I think, yes. Does it lead to predictable outcomes? No. It becomes very quickly, very architectural discussion. And so when I think about the architecture, engineering and construction profession here and in the United States, it is still dominated by white men. So naturally it's going to be a conversation that's more inclusive for white folks or professionals that happen to be in it than it is for the concerned shop owner next door, or the concerned homeowner or renter next door to a big development."

"I think that for architects and designers, that's (the process) pretty straightforward. But for the people that are owners in these communities, maybe own retail shops or own the house across the street, they almost need to go get a lawyer to help them figure out how to make the right statements to make the biggest impact or have to have done it a few times themselves."

- **It is often not clear whether public comments are addressed or what, if any, impact they have on the final design.**

"Unfortunately, the community is the last one to be informed. And by then a certain course has been set up. And when conflicts arise is when the applicants are forced to make changes later than they would rather make….those changes earlier on. If the project process was all more transparent and open, because I think in the end, developers don't really care about what the project looks like or how big it is or what's in it. They just want to get it done on time…if you want a pink building, we'll give you your pink building. Just let me know. It can be finished on time. But the fact is they're (developers) are not the community. The community doesn't get a chance to say they want a pink building until the developers have already decided on a blue building."

- **Design Review guidelines are overly broad and can depend heavily on the planner and the Board- ambiguity makes the process subjective and decision making opaque.**

"We have a commercial project and we happen to have a wonderful planner. He understands what his role is, you know, and there is an enforcement of code. He is trying to be really respectful of the design review board. And he's actually managing the process in a way that says I, part of his responsibility is to have a dialogue with us. And we have a lot of dialogue with him. He always does it in the context of what did the board say in the EDG meeting? What did the board say in the design review meeting? How does that relate to the guidelines that we've got guided by? Other planners lead the board into areas outside of what I think are the guidelines. And, they have very strong opinions about design. It's not about the design, it's about the guidelines. So it's very dependent on the planner."

Shifting and Sharing Institutional and Cultural Power

The final component we addressed related to racial equity is related to power. **Shifting and sharing institutional and cultural power** from White stakeholders, decision-makers, narratives, institutions, and norms to BIPOC stakeholders, decision-makers, narratives, institutions, and norms creates diversity that accounts for historical and racist practices and systems, and how these dynamics create oppressive outcomes.

Interviewees were asked to rate how the current Design Review Process contributes to the shifting and sharing of power, using a racial equity lens. They were asked to use a scale of 1-5, with a 1 representing very low shifting and sharing of power, and a 5 representing a process that contributes greatly to shifting and sharing power. The average rating was a 1.71 and responses ranged from 1 - 4. Many respondents noted that their rating was different for different stakeholders, with lower ratings for community members/non-design professionals and higher for stakeholders working within the industry.

Topics: What did interviewees talk about?

Design Review Meetings Design Review Process City Staff	Applicants Development Industry White Community Members

Trends: What was said about these topics?

- **The majority of applicants, city planners, and community members at Design Review meetings are White.**

"By the time it's all said and done, its [DR] 95% white people, which I know from experience that having a diversity of backgrounds and diversity of thought creates much better and more creatively than an environment where everybody's the same. Everybody comes from the same background, it is boring. So I think from the initial point, is that from where we're starting from, it's very hard to do something different because we don't have enough diversity of thought going into our projects."

"What I've seen is that the board comments can often times be dominated by a white male and their opinion, and their interpretation of design ends up being the strongest voice. I have seen the board treat women applicants different than they do white men who were very articulate. I would say the same for just anyone BIPOC. There is certainly a white bias on how you should dress, how you should behave, how you should describe your project, how you should be articulate, which is totally unfair because everyone comes from different cultures. And I always think, why do they get to be the people in charge of interpreting the design guidelines? Because they have a clear bias what they think good design is."

"When the Design Review boards are set up a lot of time, the racial makeup or the representation on the boards are set up in a way that reflect the demographic population of the communities that they're set to represent. But because of historically racist housing policies, most of the demographic of those neighborhoods are majority white, they're 90, 95% white until you really get to south Seattle and those other sort of marginalized groups, which were pushed out by those racist housing policies, most of the representation that's on the design review boards are majority white. And because of that, it doesn't have that inclusion of different voices that really should be part of that process if we're really looking to shift that narrative of trying to have equal representation across the city. I think one of the biggest things that is lacking within Design Review boards right now is that the boards are representative of their communities, but it doesn't address the fact that those communities were created because of systemic issues that exist within housing."

- **Systemic racism shows up in Design Review**

"A Black developer just said this yesterday, so then I looked it up. The data in 2013, 4.4% of commercial real estate professionals were Black - in 2021, 5%. So from 4.4 to 5%, there's no growth. That's not growth…. If there is not a lucrative market, why would so many people of color be excluded from the real estate profession? You have to look at whose voices are we hearing right now. The sentiment is that it's a lucrative market, so why wouldn't people want to keep it lucrative for their own privilege. So I think that is really kind of the biggest challenge for black developers is to access this capital and loans."

"It's a big issue. It's a systemic issue. When I sit in design review process, when I sit in my own world of development and architecture and design and construction, I always look around the room going, boy, I sure wish there was less white in this room."

- **Inclusion of BIPOC people and voices at Design Review meetings depends on who's in power in the room.**

"It depends so much on people and personalities and the resources they have, but community members will always be at a slight disadvantage just because we're volunteers and it's not our job. You have two of the three parties which are paid and it is their job to engage this. The community is neither paid nor full-time. So there's inherently an imbalance there. Just from the way it's set up, which will always be present no matter what. So there's always gonna be imbalances there. "

"I find that if you are not, well-versed in the lingo, if your community member and the know all of the design guidelines and what their intent is, and if you speak in public, I would say the well, while the board chair is polite to be sure that you definitely get the feeling of being dismissed."

"The Design Review Board gets to make a recommendation, so they have the power when it comes to design review. Clearly there's a question of what their makeup is and how we're structuring that. We put all this effort into shaping the makeup of an advisory group for the Design Review process, how that's set up, have we spent the same amount of effort looking at who actually has the power in the decision making process which is based on attributes that we collectively decided we want? A couple of architects and a couple of a community members and some informal norms. And the questions that we asked that basically say, do you know a lot about architecture? And if you don't you're kicked right off of the process."

- **There's potential for Design Review to become more equitable through shifting and sharing power.**

"I think there are people at the City who are working on this, particularly who really do want to see that power shift happen. But I think there are also folks who are more comfortable with the institutional power being where it is, and don't necessarily want to go through the very difficult process of actually changing and process because it's not easy. Ultimately I think if we want to shift power from stakeholders into the hands of community and people, particularly people of color, it requires a lot of big change and a lot of intentional change, that just currently isn't accounted for through the design review process."

- **The misalignment of the Design Review programs' stated purpose with it's actual practice, and the complicated and vague Design Review guidelines, results in the Design Review process taking a lot of additional time and money.**

"I'm not someone who's advocating to get rid of Design Review at all. A lot of my colleagues would, I think. By and large, the city is better off because of Design Review. I do. I just don't think it should be a public process. We do everything we can to avoid Design Review because it takes so long. Not because we don't want better buildings, it just takes so long."

ANALYSIS

After two months and over 600 minutes of interviews, we'd like to use the analysis portion of this report to provide a high level overview of the benefits and burdens of the Design Review program, and offer our thoughts on next steps.

Overall, interviewees agreed that the concept of Design Review - a standard set of design guidelines followed in the building process with professional support - is necessary. Applicants see the value in the collaboration and partnership, community members can actively contribute to and influence the health, look, and quality of their neighborhoods, and the City of Seattle benefits from the inclusion, sense of belonging, and long-term quality neighborhood design that this process has the potential to generate.

However, using a racial equity lens, it is clear that the current implementation of Design Review is not working for, and is, in many ways, harming stakeholders. The public has varied experiences with Design Review that are predictable along race and class lines, where BIPOC residents are the most excluded from Design Review meetings and design decisions. In addition to being excluded, the public then lives with the cultural, health, and material consequences of inequitable development and design. This inequitable development and design, again, disproportionately impacts BIPOC residents. Without proper training and support, development professionals and applicants contribute to this dynamic, while facing increased costs and timelines due to vague and unclear Design guidelines and meeting processes. At the center of Design Review is the City that, on one hand, has SDCI, OPCD, and Design Review board volunteers striving and taking steps toward equitable change. And, on the other hand, City staff, Design Review board members, and elected officials that are, at best, well-intentioned and unskilled at doing their work equitably, and at worst, choosing urgency and capitalism over people under the guise of equity. From the White racial homogeneity of those involved throughout the process, to the inaccessibility of information and language needed for community members to engage and be heard, and missed opportunities to genuinely partner with developers and the public, the burdens of Design Review as it is outweighs the benefits.

With this context from stakeholders, we'd like to offer our recommendations for an equitable RET analysis of Design Review. Since the initial draft of this report was completed we've become aware of legislation coming out of the Mayor's office regarding Design Review. Our recommendations remain the same but we want to call back the racial equity toolkit to serve as an anchor as to why these recommendations are important. There are two requirements of the Racial Equity Toolkit that serve as anchors for these recommendations:

1. Prioritizing transformational change (decision-making processes) over merely relying on transactional change (products of decisions)
2. Analyzing how White supremacy culture contributes to these racial inequities and identifying what cultural changes need to be made

Specifically, our recommendations seek to combat a sense of urgency. A sense of urgency drives us to focus on timelines and getting it done now over investing in relationships and change that can transform systems and outcomes. It also leads us to not looking at the whole picture of contributing factors to success or failure. With this in mind, here are some things we recommend to improve equity in Design Review and City development.

- The Design Review program is one of many steps to building and development in Seattle. If the experience of Design Review is to become more equitable, the whole planning, permitting, building, and development process needs to change to become more equitable.
- Slow down the process of reviewing and making changes to the current Design Review program. It is clear the program needs to evolve and it will take the right people, openness, and time to ensure that change happens responsibly, and is replaced with a process that centers racial equity and community members.
- Gather more feedback from more voices, specifically BIPOC voices that are directly impacted by Design Review, about their experiences with racial equity and inequity in Design Review before changes are made to Design Review. While the stakeholder group was diverse and interviews were conducted, there were varying levels of ability to speak to racial inequity and equity in Design Review. Additionally, because of ongoing changes to this process stakeholders had fewer opportunities for input.
- There are multiple necessary stakeholders involved in Design Review. Changes in the Design Review program need to address all of their needs, while at the same time centering the needs of BIPOC residents. If these needs are not addressed in a new iteration of Design Review, then those needs should be addressed elsewhere within the planning, permitting, building, and development process.
- Prioritize those most impacted by inequitable building design to understand the challenges and next steps for Design Review. We offer that the most marginalized in this context are working class/poor, disabled, queer and trans, BIPOC families and people.
- Design Review is currently the only space for community input. We caution against doing away with Design Review, or replacing it with technical Design Review, without adequately and thoroughly addressing and systematizing where community members have the opportunity to have their voices heard in the planning, permitting, building, and development process.
- Changing Design Review alone will not fix the housing crisis we are experiencing. Historical and structural understandings of how systems of oppression impact development, affordable housing, and homelessness is needed, as well as, policy and legislation that encourages developers to build more affordable housing, and more housing that keeps families in their current neighborhoods.

In addition to our recommendations, stakeholders offered some as well. Those can be found in Appendix B.

CLOSE

Design Review impacts residents' day-to-day lives, the livelihood of small and large businesses, the culture of communities, and our city at large. The City of Seattle has power and influence to impact systemic racism through creating a Design Review process that is intentionally inclusive, accessible, clear, transparent and shifts power to BIPOC communities.

As Council and the Mayor's office consider changes to Design Review, we urge them to act in accordance with the RET that calls for action in alignment with BIPOC voices. Not doing so exhibits behaviors of paternalism and a sense of urgency that will continue to perpetuate racist and harmful systems.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Paradigm Shift Seattle is a BIPOC collective of anti-oppression consultants and facilitators. We believe that liberation through decolonization of body, mind, and practice are individual and communal pursuits. We support organizations in their accountability to anti-racist behaviors, systems, and policies for their staff and communities through tailored partnership. Some of our services include all-staff workshops, small group and individual coaching and consultation, and setting up and supporting affinity groups and equity teams. We take a reflective, relationship-first approach to offer strategic guidance and short and long-term organizational planning, while centering the bodies and voices of intersectional BIPOC people.

On this project, collective members Ti'esh Harper and Sofia Voz partnered with SDCI staff over 6 months to kick-off the stakeholder experience and conduct these interviews.

Appendix B

Throughout the interview process participants offered their thoughts on solutions to the burdens, or inequities, shared above. Below is a list of those suggestions:

- **The Central District Design Review Board and guidelines presents an example of more integrated community input**

"The whole process was set up with the idea that the distinct neighborhoods within the city would have different guidelines. Each neighborhood has its own set of guidelines. I'm not sure that's been visited since the very beginning and neighborhoods have changed and the city has become more diverse. And, I'm not sure that's reflected in the guidelines. I think there's a lot of remedial work that needs to be done in terms of saying, are we really represented in the guidelines, the intentions of the neighborhoods and the demographics, which I think really goes to the question of access and equity."

- **Support community in being able to participate more fully in Design Review**

"Intentional training in the neighborhood say, okay, we have this thing called design review and we would like the community to know more about it. And so maybe the city could do a series of like five sessions in every neighborhood and do them repeatedly like annually or something like that, so that people can understand it. Just giving people a chance to hear the words, to see some things that we're going to tell you and teach you about. And then here's how it shows up in a community meeting. And then they could show examples."

"Puget Sound Sage has been offering a program. That's kind of like a intro for developers. I have to imagine that there are community groups that would be willing to sort of train and kind of make people aware of the process. And maybe that's where it needs to, like the city needs to partner with those groups to fund them so that they provide some sort of training… I do feel like there needs to be some way of preparing the community members to step into the roles, to have those meaningful roles, whether it's convening the people or brokering the conversations."

- **Provide training for Design Review Boards and more clear guidelines**

"So if the city could do, I think, a better job of maybe explaining what our role as board members really is that it isn't about choosing columns. It isn't about redesigning the project for the applicant. It really should be looked at a little bit more on, you know, focus on design guidelines. Like maybe there should be a whole thing about let's go through the design guidelines for the people that wrote them and explain what they really are trying to move. Right? So that the board can enforce it because at the end, that's really the board's job is to identify the design guidelines that are of the highest importance for this project on this site and ensure that the project is meeting or exceeding those expectations."

- **Create different tracks for different types of housing**

"And I think if you want to do a building and if you want to address the housing crisis, here's how you fast track something. When it's an amenity to our housing crisis, or it's going to offset our housing crisis. And if you're on the longer haul, here's how that goes. We have to do something to start encouraging more affordable housing to be built. And I think one of the ways is to have different, timelines so that things can be fast tracked if they're actually going to solve or contribute to the solution of the housing crisis that we have. And then I think as far as design goes, there should be a standard of design."

"One of the biggest opportunities that we have when it comes to these kinds of processes is understanding that there are some projects, particularly low income projects that shouldn't have to go through these same steps as luxury multi-use buildings. And so, in understanding that there are expedited ways that you could do like an administrative design review that would just be looked over by staff instead of allowing for public comments so that we could expedite building low-income housing a little bit faster. At the same time, there's also a chance that some of these more luxury apartments that are taking advantage of building in lower income areas can also push that dial of gentrification towards pushing people who have lived in those neighborhoods out, which is, you know, what happens in neighborhoods in the Central District and Columbia City. Even if we do need more housing, there needs to be steps within this process that take into account the effects of gentrification and how they affect, especially these historically marginalized neighborhoods that exist, where they have the most people of color."

- **Provide coaching for applicants of color**

"Instead of sending it back to them, actually coach them and help them through the process and be more collaborative and team effort to that. It's in their best interest as a service, and it's in the best interest of the person that's coming to them for that approval for the project to happen. And so work together to get it there."

- **Community input needs to extend beyond parameters of Design Review and come earlier in the process**

"I think that a big thing that we see is people who are frustrated because their neighborhood is being basically taken over. They're being removed from their existence in neighborhoods, and there is quite a plethora of activities that lead up to it. But all of a sudden this is the last step and they show up and they're not welcome because it's the wrong place for them to show up."

- **Design Review as currently executed should be removed as a step in the building process, and replaced with technical DR**

"I think [Design Review] needs to stay to some extent, right? There has to be some oversight over design because good design can actually make a difference. Like, with the building of a housing building, where you put your circulation, where you put your windows, those kinds of things really affect the health and quality of those units. And so there does need to be some serious oversight on design and materiality. And I feel like that really should come down to architects that have, or designers that have a background in that kind of work and background with community, which w who understand what, what healthy environments look like. And they should just work with a planner and they should be paid to help them review that project for those issues."

- **The system of building and design needs to be re-imagined with a focus on racial equity (including and beyond Design Review), and only then will we know if/how Design Review fits**

"I feel like the system is so broken that it is kind of hard to look and say, you know, if we had more open EDG meetings, it would be great. I think there's a real confusion about who's invited and who's welcome and at what points and when and to what impact."

"It's not going to be easy and we're probably going to trip a couple of times. This should not be the end change. It should be an evolution of change. The stakeholder group should be phase one and built into this report should be a self check-in with the city, as city politics change and city leaders and leaders in the planning, design and development groups change at the city. There should be check-ins over the next three years to make sure that the ideas that were put forth by the stakeholder group to shape the design review process get revisited. And not in 20 years when it's broken and people are frustrated."

- **Community needs more genuine opportunities to give input on what is being built in their neighborhoods**

But then there should be a big community meeting too, that has an open house that brings out a style. It brings the people that are going to be able to answer the questions that they have about parking, about the amenities spaces that are going to be allowed, about affordability. Those people are not at the [current] meetings and that's what people want to know about. And if there can be a public meeting that goes alongside of this design review process, that's happening with the planner and the architect that's being paid, you know, and maybe there's a third party…..who knows better how to get the word out than the city does."

APPENDIX D

PERMIT TIMELINES REPORT
BY SDCI STAFF
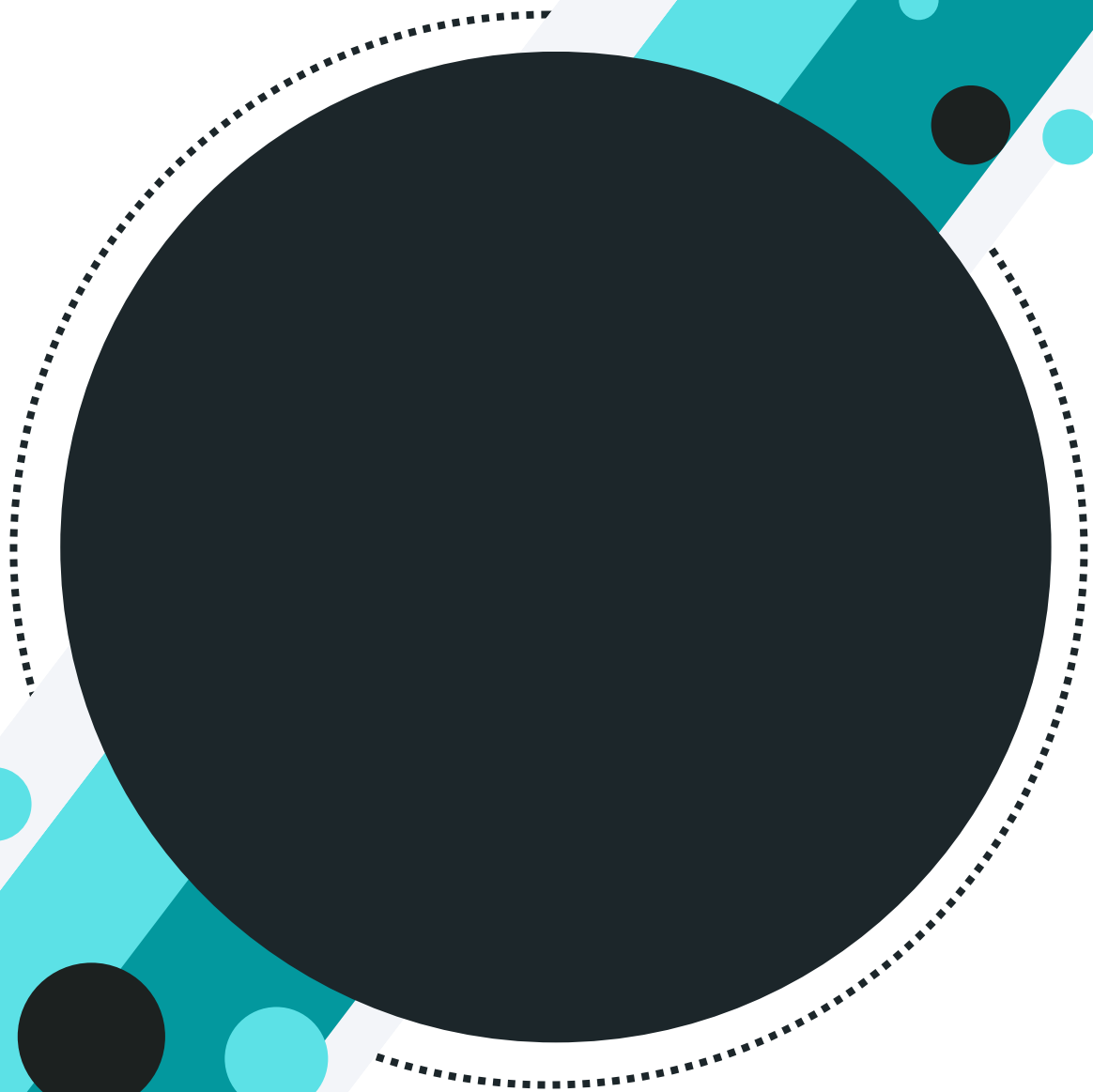
Executive Summary

The following report provides a snapshot of permit times between July 2018- December 2022, corresponding to when the current Design Review policy went into effect in 2018. Permit timelines vary by type and complexity of project, as such, this report distinguishes between:

- Streamlined Design Review (SDR) – small developments, mostly townhouses (Staff review)
- Administrative Design Review (ADR) – mid-size developments and affordable housing (Staff review)
- Full Design Review (FDR) – larger and more complex developments (Design Review Board review)

This report also includes other Master Use Permits (MUPs) which do not include Design Review, for additional comparison and greater understanding of overall permit timelines.

The purpose of this report is to respond to the City Council Statement of Legislative Intent dated November 16, 2021, and the specific request to provide "Design Review Program outcomes since the program was modified in 2017, including review times by design review type and project complexity."

This report quantifies:

- Overall calendar time from Early Design Guidance (EDG) intake to MUP Decision (ADR and FDR) or Construction Permit approval (SDR)
- Overall calendar from EDG intake to MUP issuance (ADR and FDR) or Construction Permit issuance (SDR)
- Overall calendar time for MUPs without design review
- Percent of the time that permits are with SDCI vs. with the Applicant

SDCI identified a sample and analyzed a total of 295 design review permits, including:

- 158 Streamlined Design Review (SDR) permits (EDG and Construction Permit)
- 74 Administrative Design Review (ADR) permits (EDG and MUP)
- 62 Full Design Review (FDR) permits (EDG and MUP)

SDCI identified 245 Master Use Permit records without design review for comparison.

Overall, the data showed that SDR and ADR had shorter review times compared to FDR times (Table 1 and Table 2). In addition to the Design Review Board public meetings which may add time to FDR projects, there are other possible reasons for this difference in time:

- SDR and ADR projects are smaller in size and usually less complex
- FDR projects are larger in size and tend to be more complex with additional coordination between different departments and agencies and more complex code requirements

SDCI analyzed the amount of time that design review permits spent with SDCI compared to the amount of time spent with the Applicant. Applicants affect the overall permit timeline at steps such as:

- Scheduling intake appointments

- Submitting required items
- Paying permit fees
- Responding to correction letters

The overall calendar time includes time spent with the Applicant and with SDCI. However, SDCI has no influence on the time permits spend with Applicants. Overall calendar time was similar to the design review permit times described in a past study conducted by others[1]. SDCI confirmed that this past study by others included time that permits spent with Applicants as well as time spent with SDCI.

Measuring overall calendar time of all steps from EDG through MUP issuance (ADR and FDR) or for EDG through Construction permit issuance (SDR) showed (Tables 6 and 7):

- FDR: 739 days (24.3 months)
- ADR: 641 days (21.1 months)
- SDR: 465 days (15.3 months)

For projects without design review, no EDG phase is required. Non-Design Review MUPs generally had shorter overall calendar review times. However, MUPs with greater complexity (including SEPA Determination of Significance and Contract Rezone permits) took close to the amount of time for ADR and FDR permits (Table 11):

- Non-design review MUPs from MUP intake to issuance ranged 155-652 overall calendar days
- Complex non-design review MUPs from MUP intake to issuance ranged 613-652 overall calendar days

The permit time spent only with SDCI measures the overall calendar time minus time when the permit in the Applicant's control. For EDG through MUP decision (ADR and FDR) and EDG through Construction permit issuance (SDR), the data showed the percent of the time with SDCI was consistent across all three types of design review permits (Tables 8-10):

- FDR: 66% of the overall calendar time was only with SDCI (490 days/16 months)
- ADR: 65% of the overall calendar time was only with SDCI (408 days/13.4 months)
- SDR: 61% of the overall calendar time was only with SDCI (285 days/9.23months)

For projects without design review, the range of time that MUPs spent with SDCI was comparable to the percent of time for design review projects (Table 12):

- Non-design review MUPs ranged from 47%-79% of the overall calendar time with SDCI
- Design Review permits ranged from 61%-66% of the overall time with SDCI
- Of the Design Review permits, Full Design Review required the most time with SDCI reviewers during review (Table 12).

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[1] https://seattleforeveryone.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/06/Seattle-Design-Review-Evaluation-041421.pptx

The EDG phase is unique to design review. SDCI examined how much time EDG requires in the overall calendar time (Tables 3 and 4):

- For ADR projects, EDG took 22% of the total permit time from EDG to MUP issuance
- For FDR projects, EDG took 23% of the total permit time from EDG to MUP issuance
- For SDR projects, EDG took 19% of the total permit time from EDG to Construction Permit issuance

Some applications include long periods of time between the completion of the EDG phase and the next step of review. The time between EDG completion and submittal of the MUP (ADR and FDR) or Construction permit (SDR) is a combination of the Applicant's choice and the availability of SDCI intake appointments (Table 5):

- FDR: 46 days
- ADR: 74 days
- SDR: 21

Some MUPs are appealed to the Seattle Hearing Examiner or the Shoreline Hearings Board. When an application is appealed it can add several months to the permit process. The schedule and steps for an appeal are outside of SDCI's and the Applicant's control. For comparison, the analysis included both the time to an issued MUP (which may include an appeal) and the time to a published MUP decision (excluding appeals).

In summary, both Design Review and non-Design Review permit timelines appear to be affected by complexity such as:

- The number of reviews on a permit (Ex. land use, zoning, mandatory housing affordability, incentive zoning, city light, public utilities, sustainability, housing, ECA, geotechnical, shoreline, tree, transportation, and historic reviews)
- Coordination with other departments and/or agencies
- Code requirements

The data showed that complex permits such as Full Design Review MUPs and Contract Rezones (for non-Design Review permits) take the most time. Full Design Review MUPs and complex non-design review MUPs take comparable overall calendar time for a permit, even though non-design review MUPs are exempt from the EDG phase of review.

Permit timeline studies conducted by others have often combined the time that permits spend with both SDCI and the Applicant, as well as time spent on steps outside of SDCI or Applicant control (such as appeals). These past studies show numbers that are closer to the overall calendar times in this study (15 months to 24.3 months). The overall calendar times include time that is in the Applicant's control and beyond SDCI's control.

The total amount of time SDCI spends on design review projects ranges from 15 months to 24.3 months, which is comparable to complex permits without design review.

Background

What impacts permit timelines?

There are many factors to consider when looking at permit times including project complexity. For example, Streamlined Design Review and Administrative Design Review projects are smaller in size and tend to be projects of less complexity. Full Design Review projects may include full block developments, tower projects, and overall are larger projects with greater impact on the built environment. As such, Full Design Review project often include more reviews, complex requirements, and additional coordination between different departments and agencies.

Master Use Permits (MUPs) frequently require the following reviews. When required, each review must be resolved before SDCI can publish a MUP decision.

- Land Use (design review, environmental review, and others)
- Zoning
- Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA)
- Incentive Zoning
- Seattle City Light
- Seattle Public Utilities
- Sustainability
- Housing
- Environmentally Critical Areas (ECA)
- Geotechnical
- Shoreline
- Trees
- Transportation
- Historic Preservation

SDCI requirements and Applicant behavior both affect the overall calendar time for permit reviews. This report analyzes total calendar time, including time when permits are "with SDCI" and time when permits are "with the Applicant."

Time when permits are "with SDCI" include:

- Preparing public notice
- Assigning reviews
- Conducting reviews
- Writing design review reports or decisions
- Processing permits for issuance

Time when permits are "with the Applicant" include time spent waiting for:

- Applicant to schedule a permit intake appointment
- Applicant to submit required materials for permit intake
- Applicant to paying fee
- Applicant to install and confirm a public notice sign on site

- Applicant to submit responses to corrections

Some things are beyond the control of either SDCI or the Applicant, such as appeals and Code required public notice periods.

When a MUP appeal is filed with the Hearing Examiner or Shoreline Hearings Board, SDCI has no authority over timeframe or scheduling as appeals are managed by the Hearing Examiner's office or Shoreline Hearings Board. Appeals can add several months between the time a MUP decision is published and the issuance of the MUP.

Code required public notice can affect EDG and MUP permit times. Public notice periods are required by the Land Use Code for:

- Early Design Guidance (SDR, ADR, and FDR)
- Master Use Permit application (ADR and FDR)
- Design Review Board meetings (FDR) and other public meetings
- Master Use Permit decision appeal periods (ADR and FDR)

Design Review Types

Three paths for design review currently in the City of Seattle:

- **Streamlined Design Review:** Type I Decision (not appealable to the Seattle Hearing Examiner) reviewed by SDCI staff. Includes Early Design Guidance only and then straight to Construction permit. Includes public comment but not a design review public meeting.
- **Administrative Design Review:** Type II Decision (appealable to the Seattle Hearing Examiner) reviewed by SDCI staff. Includes Early Design Guidance, Master Use Permit / Recommendation, Construction permit. Reviews completed by city staff. Includes public comment but not a design review public meeting.
- **Full Design Review:** Type II Decision (appealable to the Seattle Hearing Examiner) reviewed by Design Review Boards. Includes Early Design Guidance, Master Use Permit / Recommendation, Construction permit. Reviews completed by city staff using recommendations from the Design Review Board. Includes public comment and public meeting(s).

Methodology

This report provides a snapshot of permit times between July 2018- December 2022. The start date corresponds to when the current Design Review regulations went into effect in July 2018. A permit sample was identified from a total of 539 permits, including:

- 158 Streamlined Design Review (SDR) permits
- 74 Administrative Design Review (ADR) permits
- 62 Full Design Review (FDR) permits.

In addition, 245 other Master Use Permit (MUP) records were analyzed for permit times (Figure 1). MUPs may include multiple types of reviews, including or excluding design review. The MUPs in this sample excluded design review and included the following types of reviews:

- Administrative Conditional Uses
- Contract Rezones
- Environmental Critical Areas
- SEPA, Shoreline
- Special Exceptions
- Temporary Use
- Variances

Design Review Types	Number of Permits
Streamlined Design Review	158
Administrative Design Review	74
Full Design Review	62
Other MUPs	245
Total	539

Figure 1

Findings

The next sections provide findings outlined as follows:

- Section 1: EDG prior to MUP timelines
- Section 2: EDG through MUP (ADR and FDR) or Construction Permit (SDR) timelines
- Section 3: Percent permits are with SDCI vs. with the Applicant
- Section 3: Non-Design Review permit timelines

Section 1:

EDG timelines prior to MUP

Overall, Streamlined Design Review and Administrative Design Review had shorter review times compared to Full Design Review times (Table 1 and Table 2).

Regarding the percent of time in EDG phase of the total Master Use Permit issuance timeline, both ADR and FDR were about 15% of the total permit time with FDR slightly higher at 16% of the total permit time (Table 3).

Streamlined Design Review does not require a Master Use Permit and instead moves straight from EDG complete to Construction Permits. As such, the percentage of EDG to the overall issuance was analyzed using different metrics (EDG/Construction permit Issuance, rather than EDG/Master Use Permit issuance). The EDG phase for Streamlined Design Review projects accounted for 19% of the overall permit time. (Table 4)

The amount of time between EDG complete to submittal for either Construction permits (SDR) or master use permits (ADR and FDR) ranged from under one month to over two months with 21 days for SDR, 74 days for ADR, and 46 days for FDR. This time frame represents time solely with the Applicant but may be affected by the availability of SDCI intake appointments (Table 5).
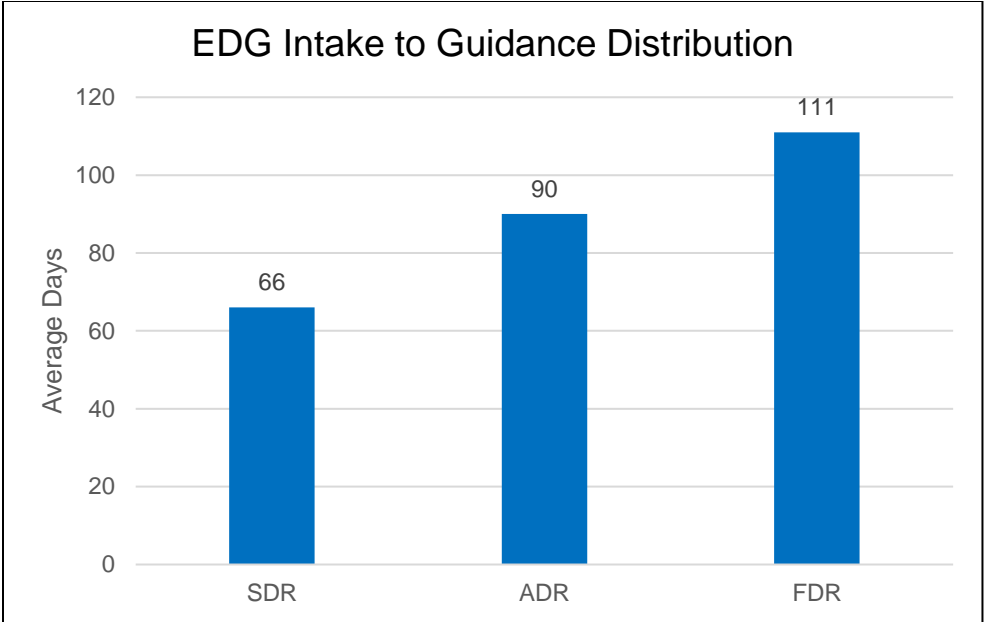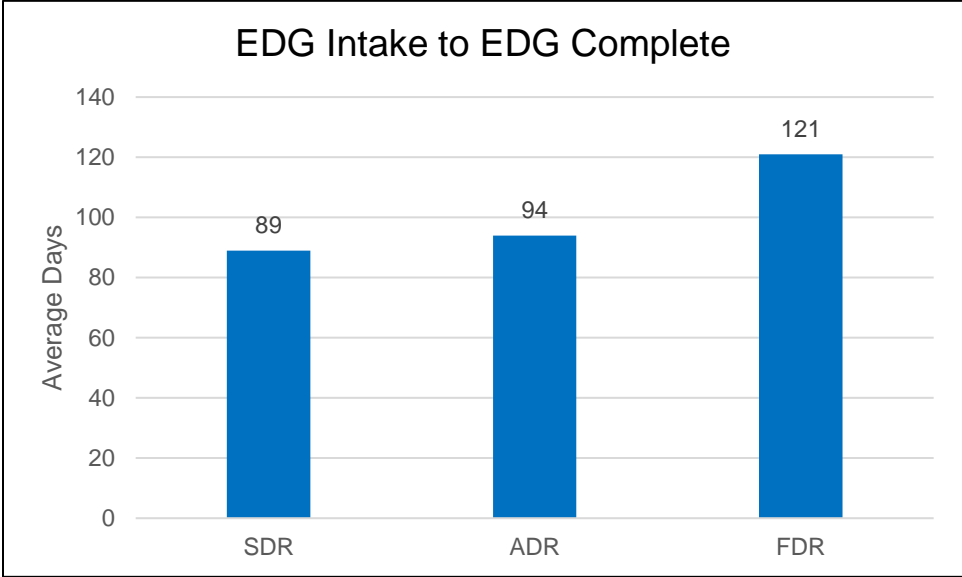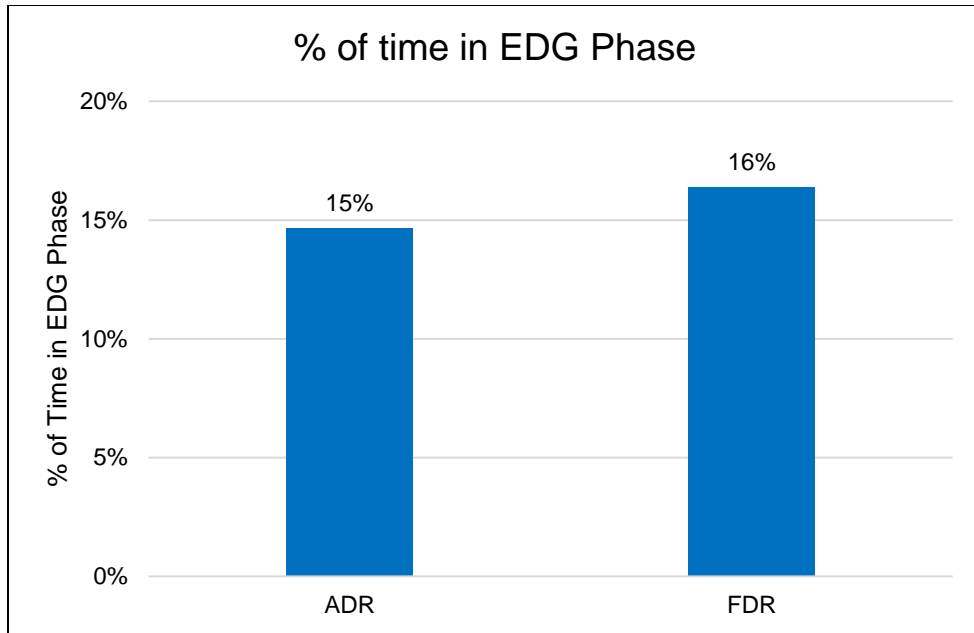
Table 1

Table 2

Table 3

*percent of time in EDG phase compared to total time from EDG intake to MUP issuance
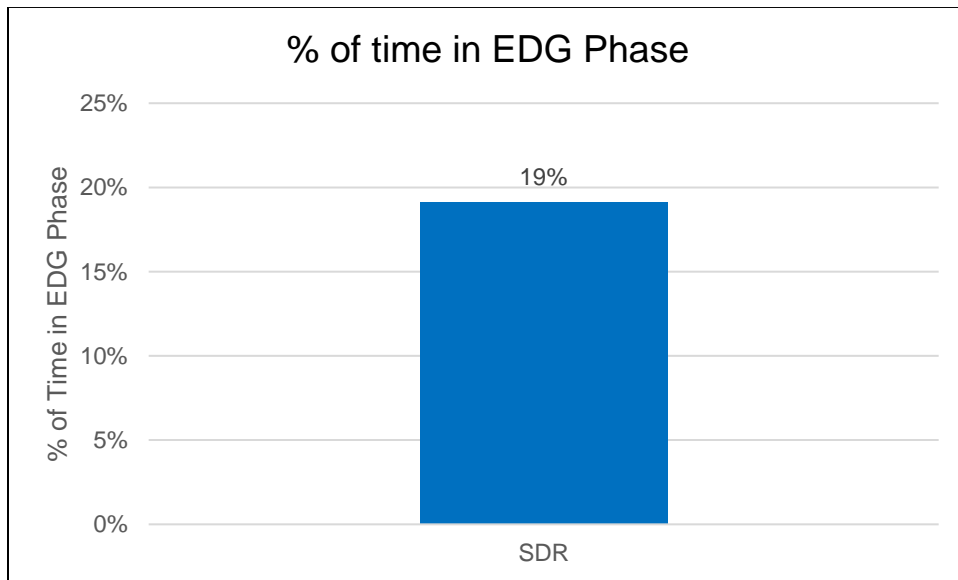

Table 4

*percent of time in EDG phase compared to total time from EDG intake to Construction Permit issuance. Streamlined Design Project do not require Master Use Permits.

EDG Report Distribution to Construction Permit Intake/MUP Intake*
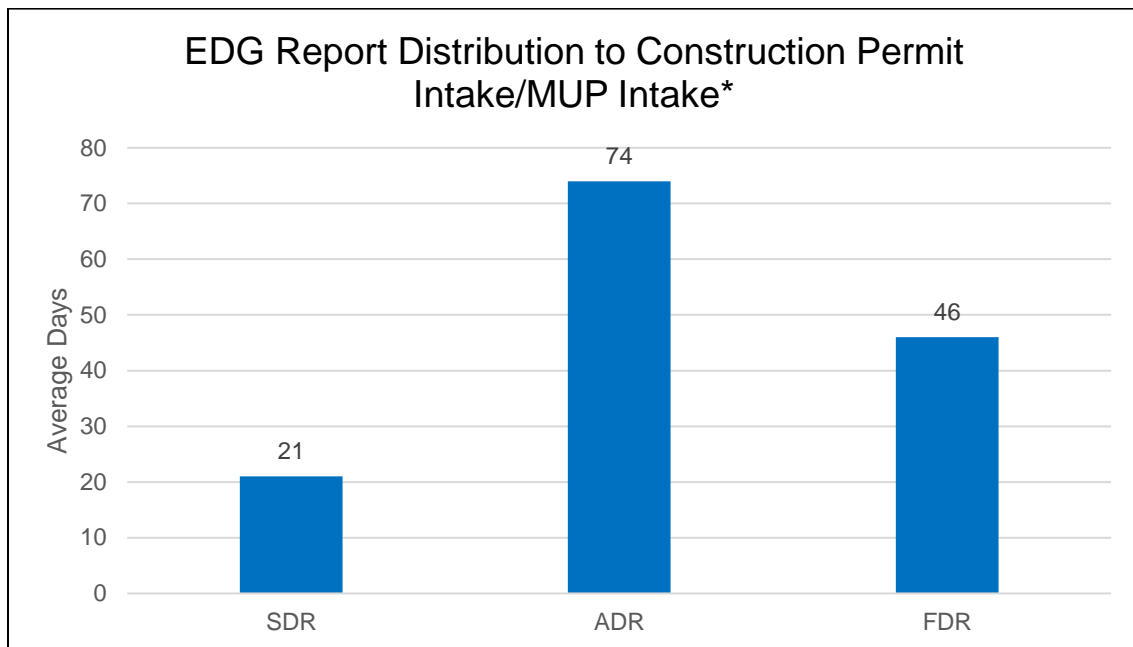
Table 5
* SDR process moves from EDG to Construction Permit.
ADR and FDR processes move from EDG to MUP.

Section 2:

EDG through MUP (ADR and FDR) or Construction Permit (SDR)

Overall permit times appear to reflect project and review complexity with times increasing from SDR to FDR with 465 days for SDR, 641 for days for ADR, and 739 days for FDR (Tables 6 and 7).

MUP appeals add time between the MUP Decision and the MUP issuance steps, which is outside of SDCI or the Applicant's control. The time from EDG intake to MUP Decision published measures time that is within SDCI and the Applicant's control. The average time from EDG intake through MUP Decision published was an average of 604 days for ADR and 739 Days for FDR (Table 6).

Land Use review is one of many reviews on a Construction Permit. For SDR applications, the time from EDG intake to Land Use approval of the Construction permit was an average of 352 days (Table 7).
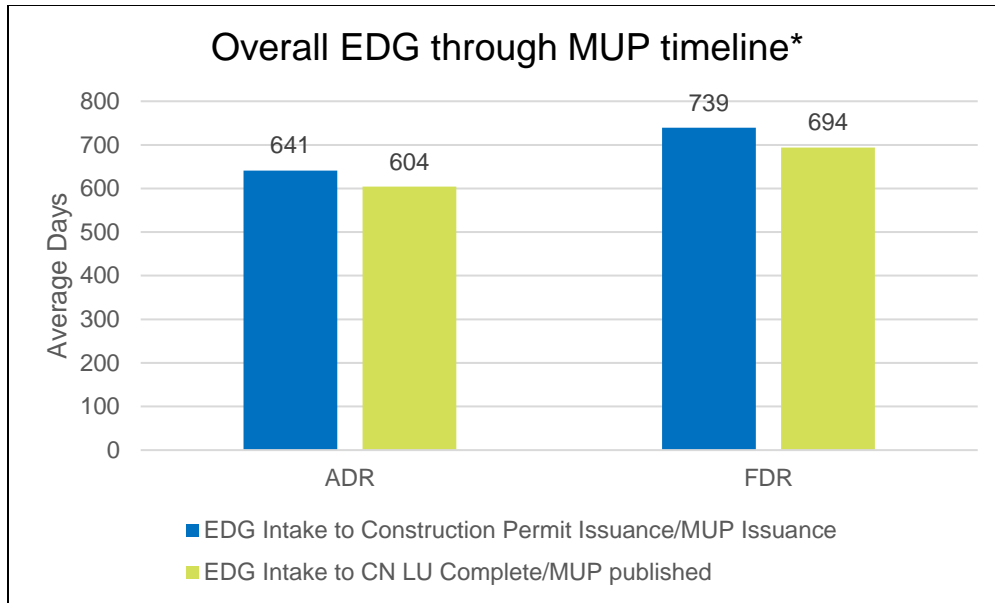
Table 6

*Once the MUP decision is published there is a 14-day appeal period with possibility of appeal. SDCI conducts final reviews prior to MUP issuance if there are no appeals. The Applicant is required to pay any outstanding fees prior to MUP issuance.
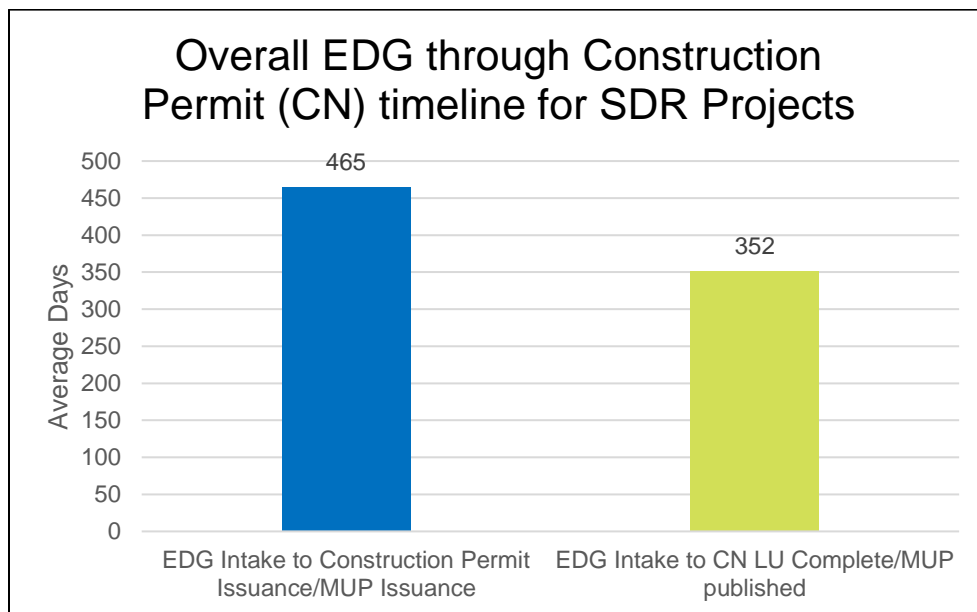
Table 7

Section 3:

Percent permits are with SDCI vs. with the Applicant

The percent of time with SDCI vs. time with the Applicant was consistent across all three types of Design Review with a narrow range of 61-66% with SDCI and 34-39% with the Applicant. SDR had 61% of the overall permit time to be with SDCI and 39% with Applicants. SDCI accounted for 64% and Applicants accounted for 36% of the overall permit time for ADR projects. SDCI accounted for 66% and Applicants accounted for 34% of the overall permit time for FDR projects.

Table 8

Table 9

FDR % of Time with SDCI vs. Applicant: EDG to MUP Issuance

34%

66%

■ % of time with SDCI   ■ % of time with Applicant
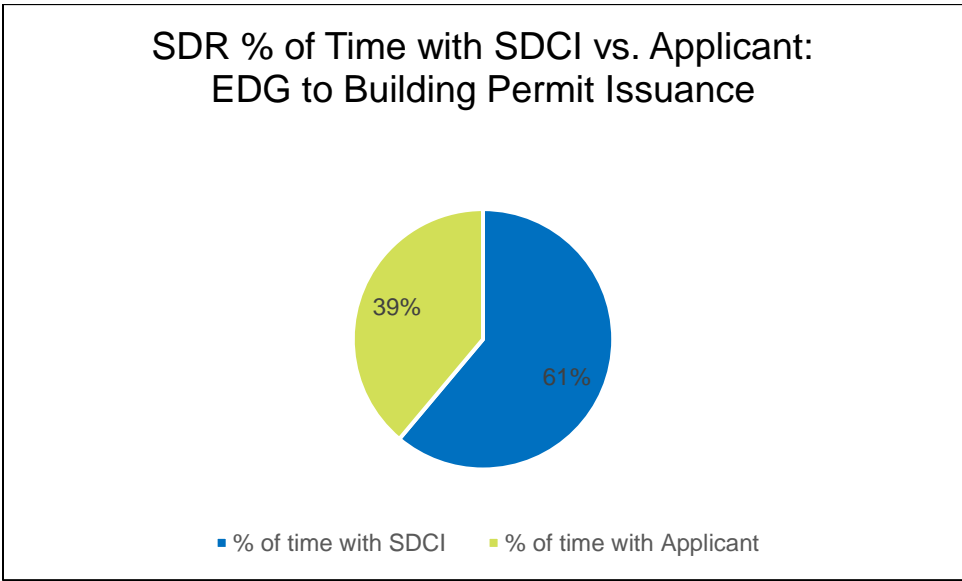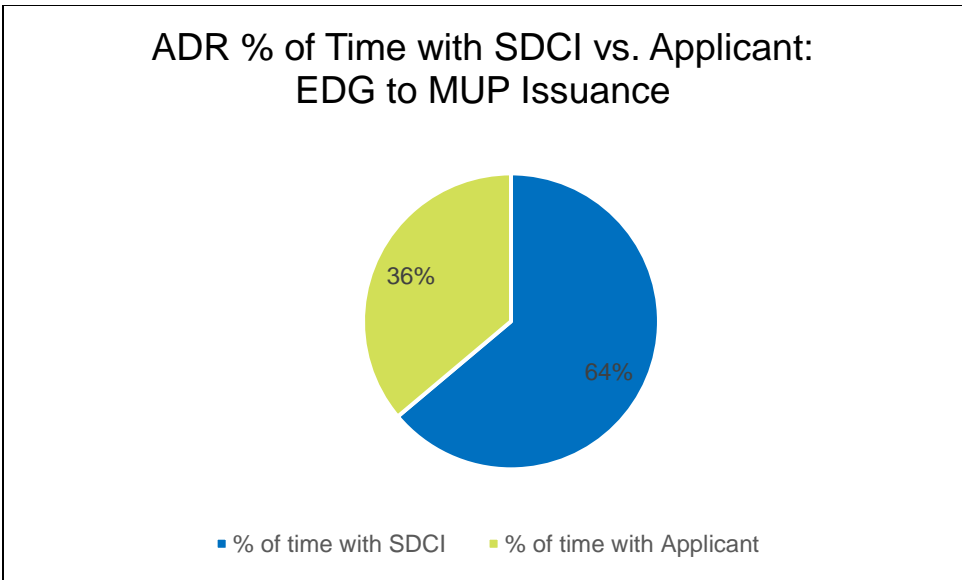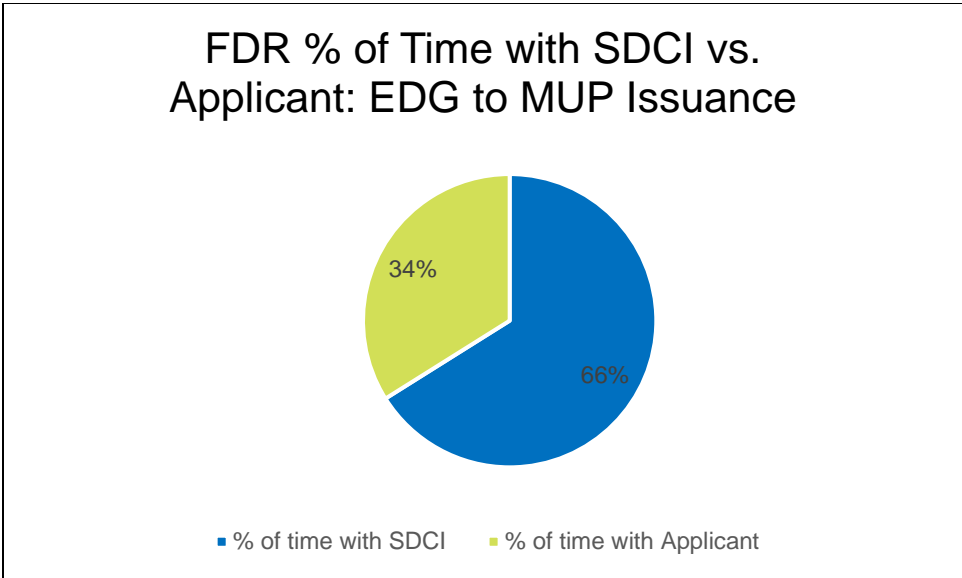
Table 10

Section 4:

Non-Design Review Permit Timelines

The majority of non-Design Review Type II permits had shorter review times. However, the non-Design Review Type II permits with greater complexity (including SEPA Determination of Significance and Contract Rezone permits) were closer to the amount of time for ADR and FDR permits. The range for the percent of time with SDCI and Applicants for non-Design Review Permits had a larger range than Design Review Permits:

- 47%-79% with SDCI and 14%-53% with Applicants for Non-Design Review permits
- 61%-66% with SDCI and 32%-39% with the Applicants for Design Review permits

Total Days from MUP Intake to Issuance for Non-Design Review MUPs

Category	Average Days
Variance MUPs	155
Temporary Use MUPs	195
Special Exception MUPs	234
Shoreline MUPs	280
SEPA-II (Determination of...	613
SEPA DNS	363
ECA MUPs	472
Council Action (Contract Rezone),...	652
ACUs	241
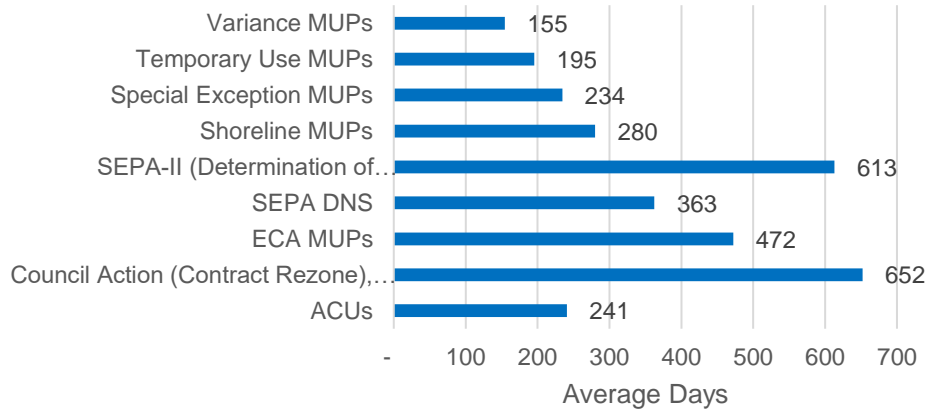
Table 11

% of time with SDCI vs. time with the Applicant

Category	%with SDCI	% with Applicant
Grand Total for all non-Design Review MUPs	65%	35%
Total Variance MUPs	79%	21%
Total Temporary Use MUPs	83%	17%
Total Special Exception MUPs	68%	32%
Total Shoreline MUPs	63%	37%
SEPA-II (Determination of Significance/EIS)	47%	53%
Total SEPA DNS	56%	44%
Total ECA MUPs	48%	52%
Council Action (Contract Rezone), SEPA-II (Determination of Non...	72%	28%
Total ACUs	86%	14%
FDR	66%	34%
ADR	68%	32%
SDR	61%	39%

Design Review Permits (FDR, ADR, SDR)

Table 12

APPENDIX E

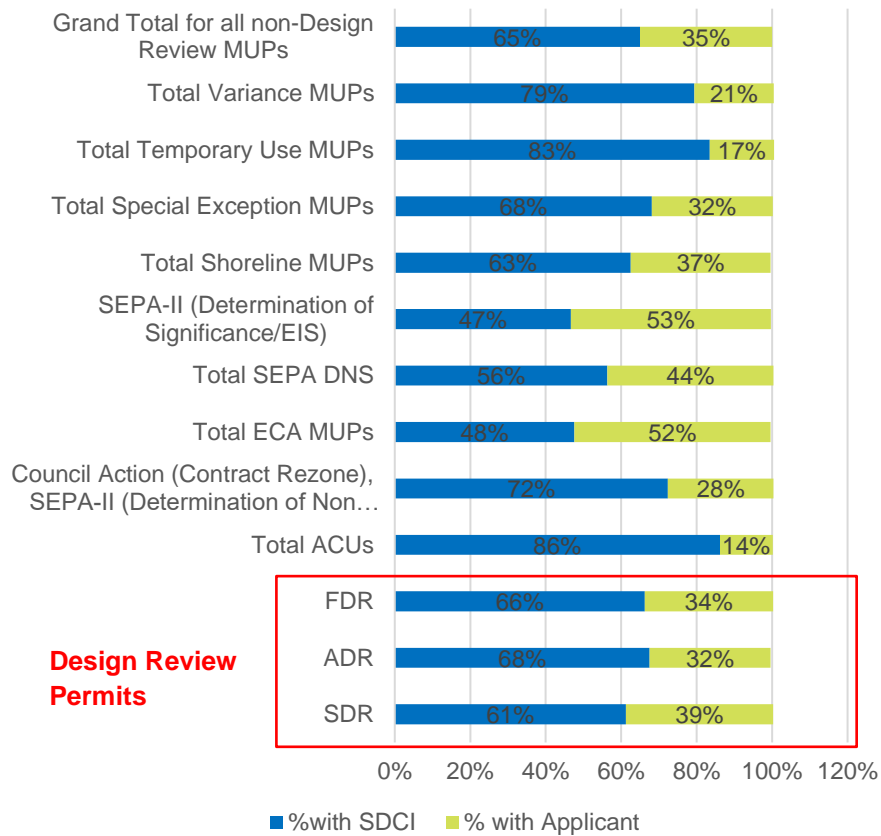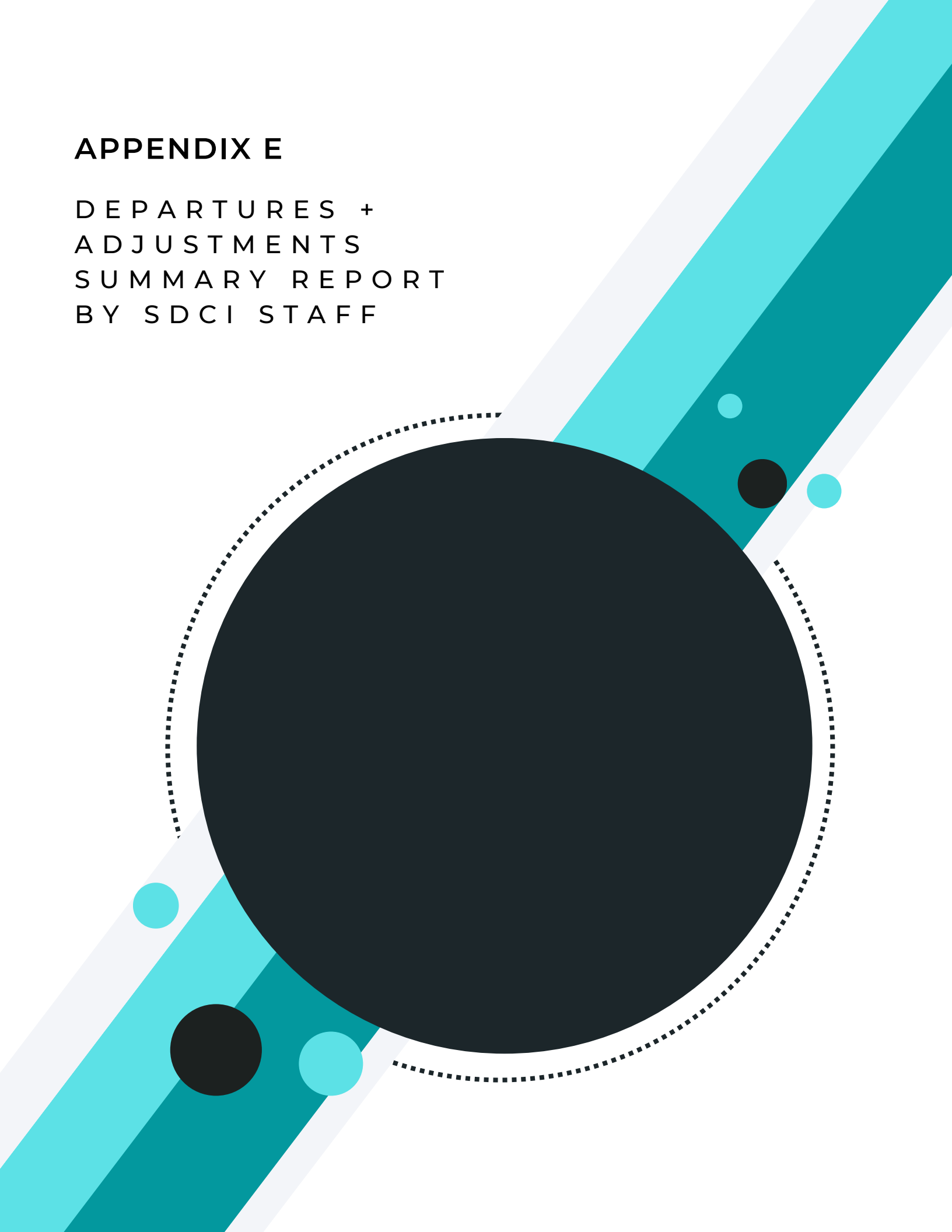## DEPARTURES + ADJUSTMENTS SUMMARY REPORT BY SDCI STAFF

Executive Summary

Design review departures and adjustments provide flexibility in the application of development standards. Design Review acknowledges the unique site conditions present for each development proposal and allows applicants to modify certain code requirements, providing flexibility for innovative design solutions that are unique to the site and the context.

Administrative Design Review and Full Design Review allow departures from a broad range of Land Use Code requirements. Streamlined Design Review allows "adjustments," which are smaller modifications of a limited number of code requirements. Departures and adjustments may be granted by SDCI if the design with the departure/adjustment better meets the intent of the adopted Design Guidelines (SMC 23.41.012 and 23.41.018.F).

The purpose of this report is to respond to the City Council Statement of Legislative Intent dated November 16, 2021 and the specific request to provide "An analysis of departures sought through the program that quantifies the number and percentage of projects, by design review and project type, seeking departures, identification of departures sought, and whether those departures were granted."

This report quantifies:

1) Requested departures/adjustments vs. granted departures/adjustments
2) Types of departures/adjustments requested
3) Potential of departures/adjustments to increase building floor area, which allows applicants to recover some of the costs of going through Design Review and other permitting processes

SDCI identified a sample and analyzed a total of 68 permits, including 19 Streamlined Design Review (SDR) Building permits, 21 Administrative Design Review (ADR) Master Use Permits (MUPs), and 28 Full Design Review (FDR) MUPs. Sixty-nine percent of the sample permits included departure or adjustment requests.

The most common type of departures and adjustments across all permit types were related to setback and separation requirements. Setbacks and separation between buildings are used to mitigate the height, bulk, and scale of the new building; provide access to light and air; accommodate green space and usable outdoor space; and better help new development fit into the existing neighborhood context.

Design review granted a significant majority (91%) of the departures and adjustments of these development standards, using the Design Guidelines to evaluate unique site conditions.

Departures and adjustments can be used to provide both flexibility and increase profits or offset permit review costs of new development through reduced setbacks and separations, reduced modulation, and increased façade length. These departures and adjustments may allow larger buildings and simplified building envelopes with lower construction costs than would be possible with a Land Use Code-compliant design, within the permitted Floor Area Ratio limits. Eighty-five percent of the sampled permits included requests for these types of departures and adjustments (figure 10).

In summary, the Design Review process provides a mechanism for design flexibility through departures and adjustments, while meeting the intent of the Land Use Code and adopted Design Guidelines.

Background

What are departures and adjustments?

Departures and adjustments provide flexibility in the application of development standards for Master Use Permits to modify certain code requirements (specified under SMC 23.41.012 and SMC Section 23.41.018.D.3), thereby providing greater flexibility and potential for innovative design solutions to each unique site. For example, a project may include increased or reduced front setbacks to match existing building patterns on the surrounding block, resulting in a more sympathetic design to the existing neighborhood character.

How are departures and adjustments granted?

Applicants may request departures or adjustments through the Design Review process, including Streamlined Design Review (adjustments), Administrative Design Review (departures), and Full Design Review (departures).

- **Streamlined Design Review:** Type I Decision (not appealable to the Seattle Hearing Examiner) reviewed by SDCI staff. Adjustments are smaller modifications and are only available for a designated set of Land Use Code development standards. (Requirements found in SMC Section 23.41.018.D.3)
- **Administrative Design Review:** Type II Decision (appealable to the Seattle Hearing Examiner) reviewed by SDCI staff. Departures are possible for modifications to a large list of Land Use Code development standards. (Requirements found in SMC 23.41.012)
- **Full Design Review:** Type II Decision (appealable to the Seattle Hearing Examiner). Departures are reviewed by Design Review Boards. Departures are possible for modifications to a large list of Land Use Code development standards. - (Requirements found in SMC 23.41.012)

SMC 23.41.012 and 23.41.018 state that departures and adjustments may be granted if the design with departure better meets the intent of the adopted Design Guidelines. Some examples of how a design with departure can meet this criterion are:
- The departure helps reinforce an architectural concept
- The departure allows for more usable open space
- The departure allows a better response to adjacent development

SDCI can grant departures to modify Land Use Code requirements including:
- Setbacks
- Building modulation
- Transparency or blank facades at the street level facade
- Amenity area

- Landscaping
- Overhead weather protection

Projects with requested departures are required to include graphics in their Design Review proposals, illustrating the proposed design compared to the code compliant design. This allows the public, Design Review Boards, and SDCI staff to evaluate how the proposal better responds to unique site conditions and better meets the intent of the adopted Design Guidelines.

Departure example: A departure to allow larger than permitted front setbacks provided flexibility to address the unique site conditions and allowed the design to emphasize the existing landmark on site, as seen in image above (MUP 3031140-LU).

Methodology

A permit sample was identified from Administrative and Full Design Review Master Use Permits (MUPs) and Streamlined Design Review permits between July 1, 2018 and April 28, 2020. July 1, 2018 was the effective date of design review legislation (Ord 125429), which implemented significant changes to design review processes. April 28, 2020 was the effective date of COVID-19 related emergency legislation, which allowed some projects to convert from Full to Administrative Design Review and made some projects exempt from design review (Ord 126072). SDCI chose to exempt samples before or after these dates, since those would not be representative of the normal current design review requirements. The sample included issued MUPs (the decision point for granting any departures) and Building Permits (the decision point for granting any adjustments).

SDCI used the Design Review calendar of published notices of design review proposals and identified 334 design review records/permits that met these criteria. SDCI took a sample of these records, including representation in each of the following categories:

- Design Review type (Administrative, Full, and Streamlined Design Review types)
- Design Review Board area
- Use:
  - Affordable housing
  - Market rate residential or mixed-use
  - Townhouses
  - Congregate housing or assisted living
  - Office or hotel
  - Other uses

The full list of uses, types of design review, and summary of samples are available in Appendix A.

This process resulted in a sample size of 68 permits, comprised of 19 SDR, 21 ADR, and 28 FDR permits (Figure 1).

Design Review Types	Number of Projects
Streamlined Design Review	19
Administrative Design Review	21
Full Design Review	28
Total	68

Figure 1

Findings

The next sections provide findings outlined as follows:

- Section 1: Requested departures/adjustments vs. granted departures/adjustments
- Section 2: Type of departures/adjustments requested
- Section 3: Potential of departures/adjustments to increase building floor area

Each of the three sections is then further broken down into overall results and results by Design Review Type (SDR, ADR, FDR).

Section 1:

Requested Departures and Adjustments Overall

Overall, 69% of the permit sample requested departures or adjustments (figure 2). Ninety-one percent of the requested departures or adjustments were granted by SDCI, following a recommendation for approval by staff or by the Design Review Board (figure 3).
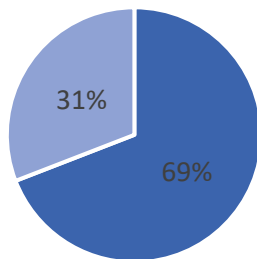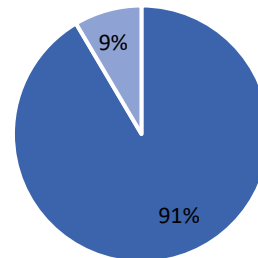
Figure 2

Figure 3

Requested Departures and Adjustments by Permit Type

Projects pursuing Administrative Design Review and Full Design Review had higher percentages for requested departures with 81% and 75%, respectively (figure 4). Only 47% of Streamlined Design Review projects requested adjustments (figure 4).

SDCI granted one hundred percent of the requested departures within this sample of Administrative and Full Design Review permits, and 56% of the requested adjustments for Streamlined Design permits (figure 5).
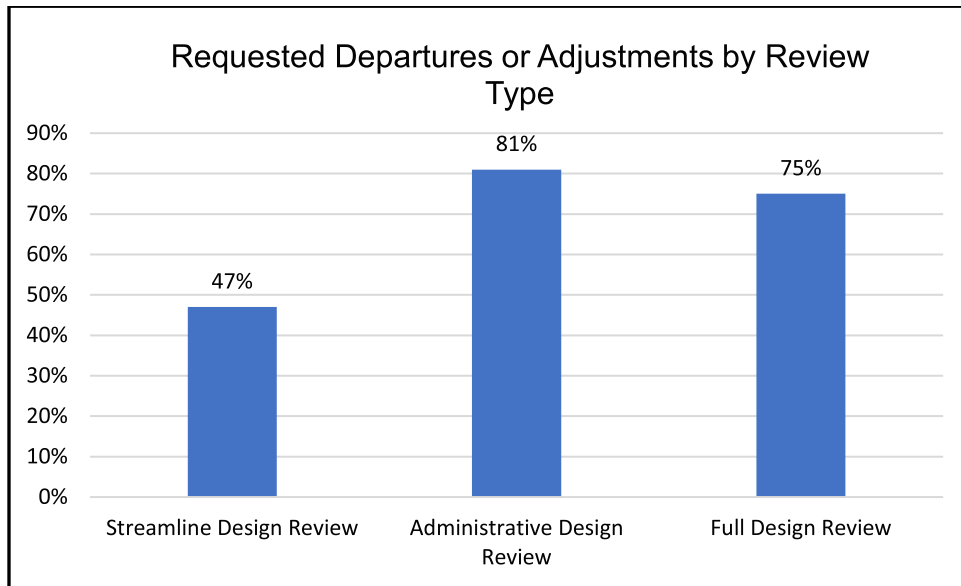
Figure 4
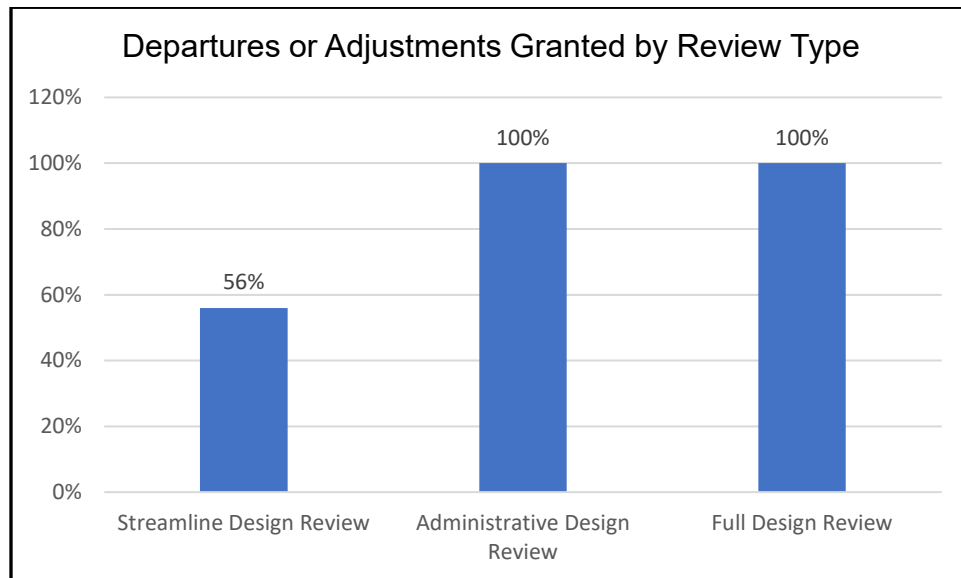
Figure 5

Section 2:

Types of Requested Departures and Adjustments

SDCI staff analyzed departures and adjustments by 1) type of departures requested overall and 2) for each design review type. Setbacks and separation departures requests were significantly more common than all other requested departures or adjustments in this sample with 32% of permits requesting departure and adjustment related to these standards (figure 6). The second highest percentage of departures and adjustments related to façade length and modulation with 13% of permits requesting departure and adjustment related to these standards (figure 6). The third highest percentage of departures and adjustments related to driveways, parking, and loading requirements with 12% of permits requesting departure and adjustment related to this standard (figure 6).
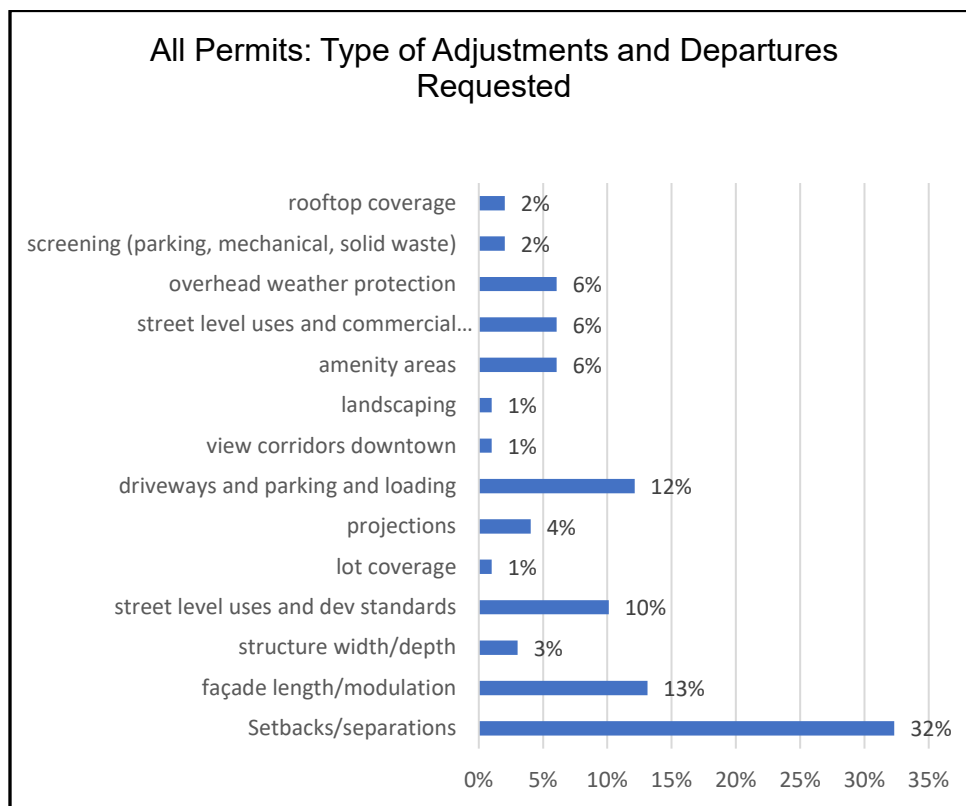
Figure 6

Streamlined Design Review Adjustments by Type

Thirty-two percent of SDR permits in this sample requested adjustment related to setbacks, separations, façade length and modulation, making up the largest adjustment requests for this permit type (figure 7).

SDR Permits: Requested Adjustments

Category	Percent
landscaping	5%
street level uses and dev standards	5%
structure width/depth	5%
façade length/modulation	16%
Setbacks/separations	32%
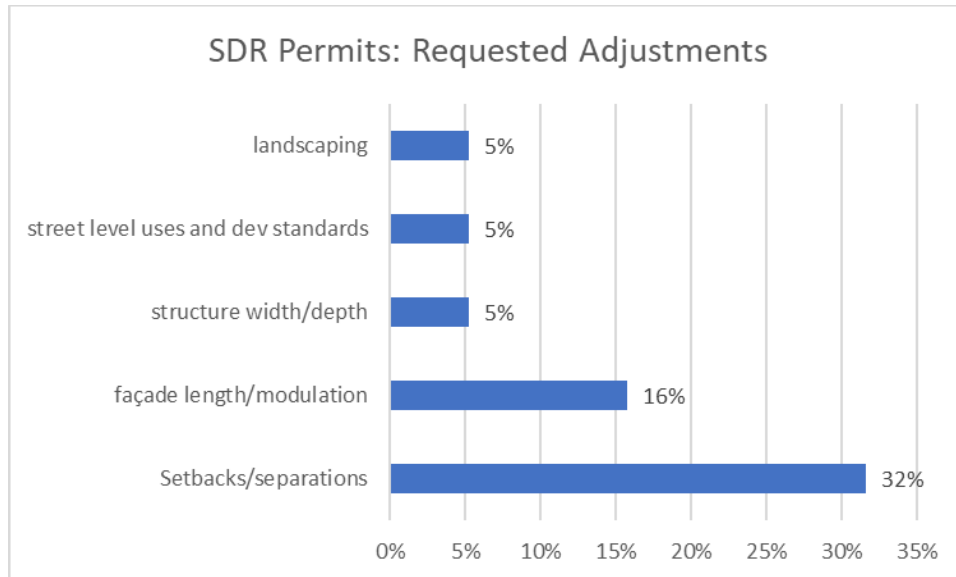
Figure 7

Administrative Design Review Departures by Type

Setbacks and separation departures requests were significantly higher than all other requested departures or adjustments with 57% percent of ADR permits in this sample requesting related departures, followed by street-level uses and amenity areas (29%), and façade length and modulation (24%) (figure 8).

ADR Permits: Requested Departures

Category	Percent
overhead weather protection	10%
street level uses and commercial…	29%
amenity areas	29%
landscaping	0%
street level uses and dev standards	0%
driveways and parking and loading	19%
projections	14%
structure width/depth	0%
façade length/modulation	24%
Setbacks/separations	57%
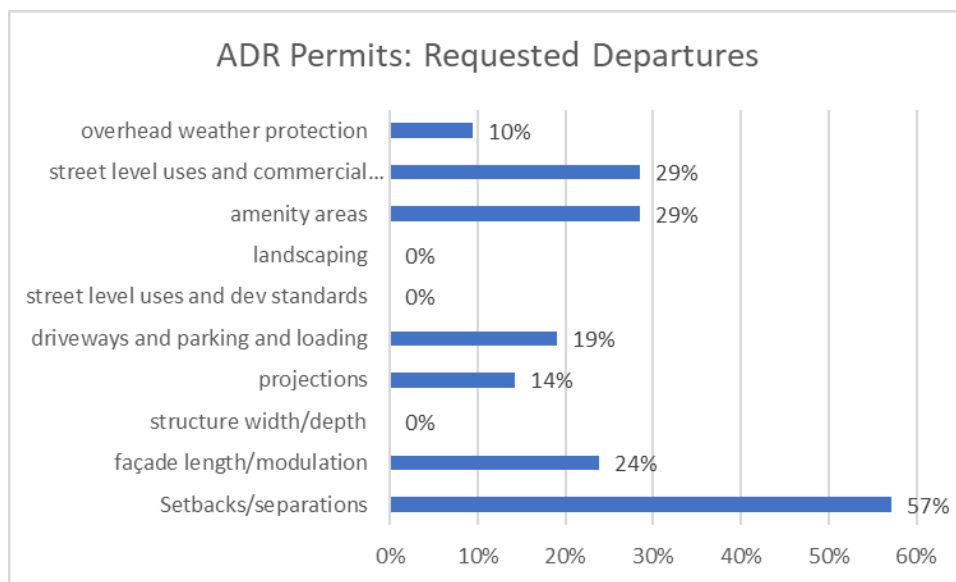
Figure 8

Full Design Review Departures by Type

Setbacks and separation departures requests were the highest percentage of requested departures for Full Design Review projects with 50% of FDR permits in this sample requesting departures related to these standards. This was followed by departures related to street-level uses and development standards (32% of permits), and driveways, parking, and loading (29% of permits) (figure 9).
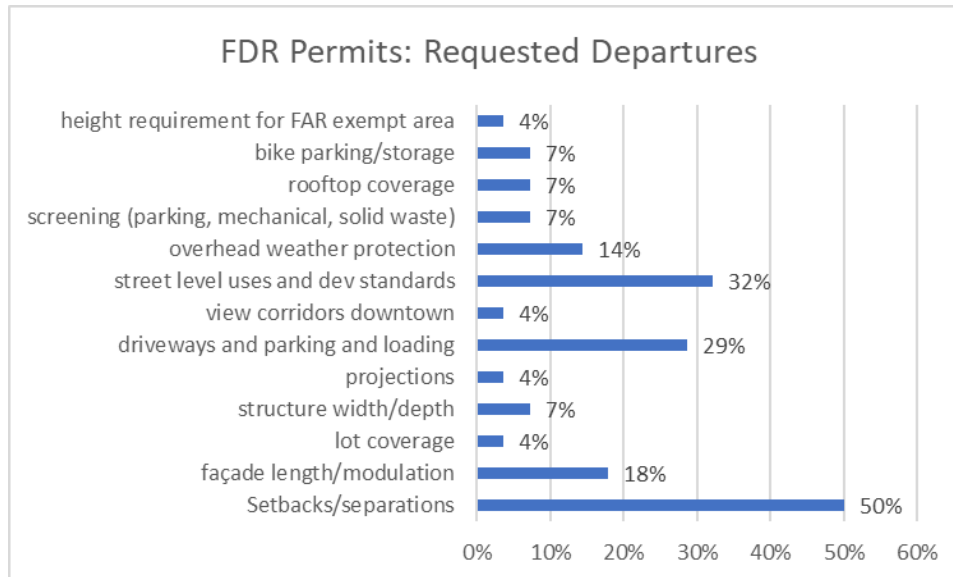
Figure 9

Section 3:

Potential to Increase Building Floor Area

Some departure and adjustment types have the potential to increase floor area or simplify the construction of the building envelope, both of which can allow increased profitability and reduce or offset the overall cost of design review and other permitting processes. These departures and adjustments allow reduced setbacks and separations, reduced modulation, and increased façade length. There is a limit to how much a building floor area may be increased through departures or adjustments, since Floor Area Ratio limits are not eligible for departures or adjustments. Departure and Adjustment types that would not or would be unlikely to add to floor area include changes to street-level uses and street-level development standards; modified landscaping and amenity requirements; reduced overhead weather protection; and screening.

Overall, 85% of permits with requested departures and adjustments in this sample have the potential to increase floor area of buildings (figure 10). Fifteen percent of departures and adjustments would not or are not likely to increase floor area (figure 10).
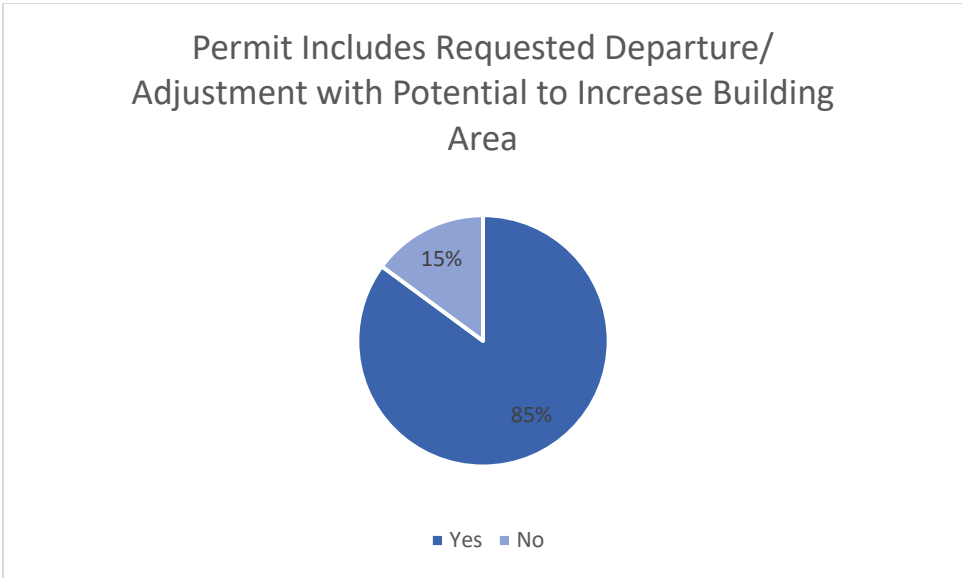
Figure 10

Potential to Increase Building Floor Area: Streamlined Design Review

Seventy-eight percent of the permits with requested Streamlined Design Review adjustments in this sample have the potential to increase floor area of proposed buildings with the requested adjustments (figure 11). Twenty-two percent of adjustments in this sample would not increase or are unlikely to increase floor area (figure 11).
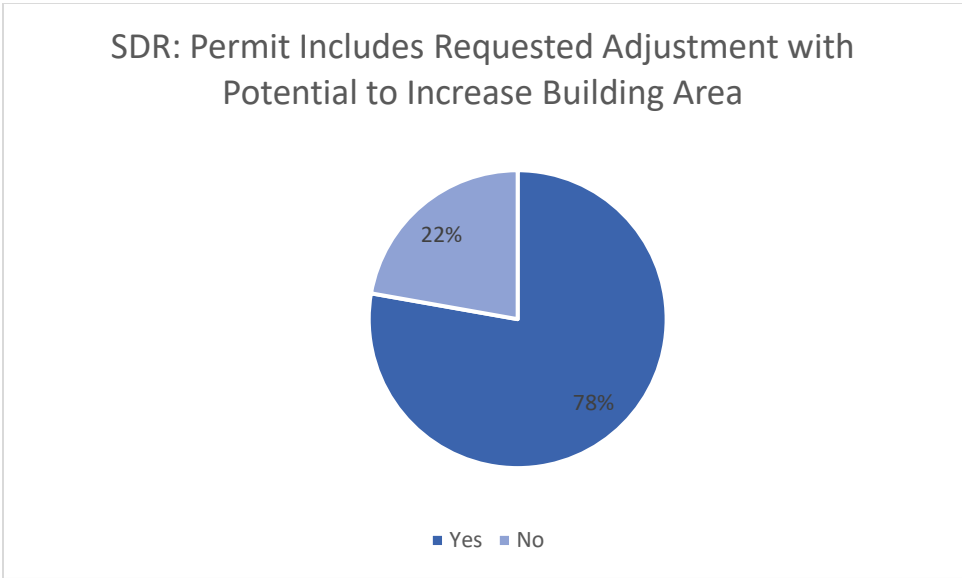
Figure 11

Potential to Increase Building Floor Area: Administrative Design Review

Eighty-two percent of permits with requested departures in the ADR sample have departures with the potential to increase floor area (figure 12). Eighteen percent of these permits include departures that are unlikely increase floor area (figure 12).

ADR: Permit Includes Requested Departure with Potential to Increase Building Area

18%

82%

■ Yes ■ No

Figure 12

Potential to Increase Building Floor Area: Full Design Review

Ninety percent of permits with requested departures in the Full Design Review sample have departures with the potential to increase floor area (figure 13). Ten percent of these permits include departures that are unlikely to increase floor area (figure 13).
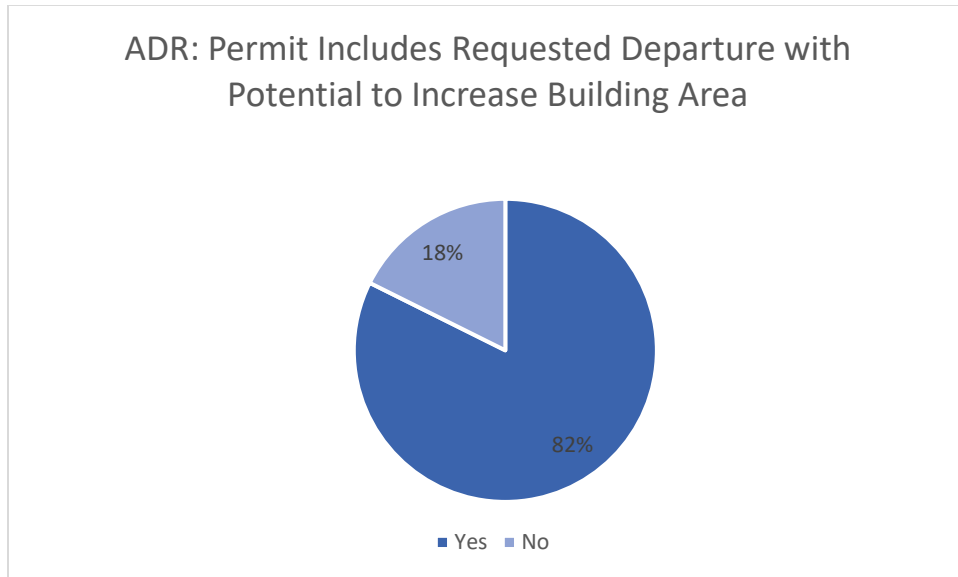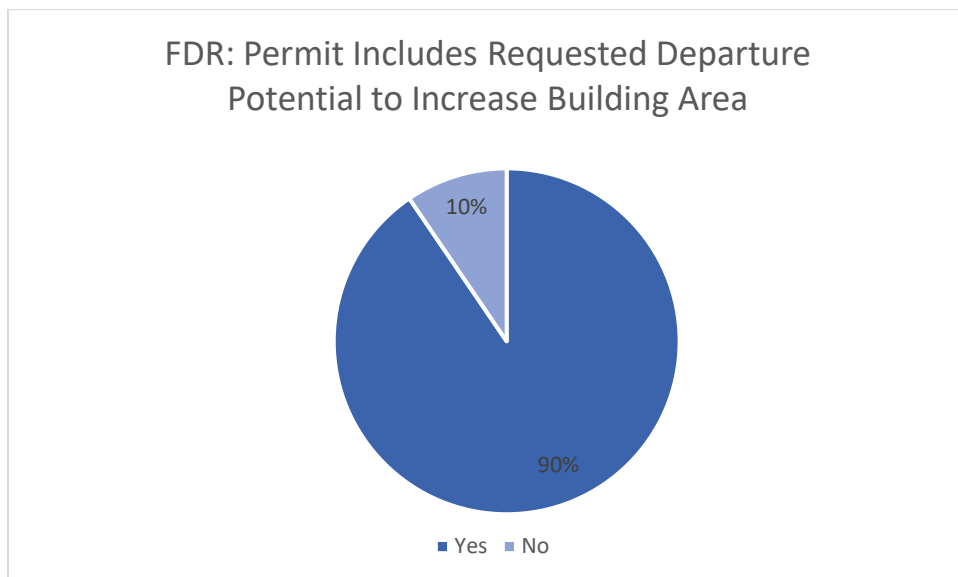
FDR: Permit Includes Requested Departure Potential to Increase Building Area

10%

90%

■ Yes ■ No

Figure 13

Appendix A:

Design Review Departures and Adjustments

Sample and Summaries

Use	Design Review Type	Sample Size*	Note about Sample Size	Number of records with departures/adjustments requested	Percent of records with departures/ adjustments requested	Number of records with departures/ adjustments granted	Percent of records with departures/ adjustments granted (if requested)
Townhouses	Streamlined Design Review	7		5	71%	1	14%
Townhouses*	Streamlined Design Review *due to 2019 rezoning from SF	7	only 7 examples within criteria	1	14%	0	0%
Other uses (not Townhouses)	Streamlined Design Review	5	only 5 examples within criteria	3	60%	3	100%
Total	**Streamlined Design Review**	**19**		**9**	**47%**	**5**	**56%**
Affordable Housing	Administrative Design Review**	8		7	88%	7	100%
Market rate residential or mixed use	Administrative Design Review**	7		5	71%	5	100%
Townhouses	Administrative Design Review**	6	none in Central and Downtown areas	5	83%	5	100%
Total	**Administrative Design Review**	**21**		**17**	**81%**	**17**	**100%**
3-8 story residential and mixed use	Full Design Review	8		5	63%	5	100%
9+ story residential and mixed use	Full Design Review	6	No examples in some areas	6	100%	6	100%
Congregate Housing or Assisted Living	Full Design Review	3	only 3 examples within criteria	2	67%	2	100%
Office orHotel	Full Design Review	6	No examples in some areas	4	67%	4	100%
Townhouses	Full Design Review	5	No examples in some areas	4	80%	4	100%
Total	**Full Design Review**	**28**		**21**	**75%**	**21**	**100%**
Total for all uses and all Design Review Types		**68**		**47**	**69%**	**43**	**91%**

* Sample Size was taken from projects between 7/1/2018 (effective date of Design review legislation Ord 125429) and 4/28/2020 (effective date of emergency legislation affecting Design Review process Ord 126072), for issued MUPs or Building Permits (decision point for granting any departures/adjustments)

**Projects subject to ADR only due to emergency legislation Ord 126072 were removed from the sample, since they were reviewed under both ADR and Full DR and experienced additional delay due to COVID-19 halting public meetings, before the emergency legislation was enacted: therefore they are not a good representation of average process for either type of design review.

SLI requires, "An analysis of departures sought through the program that quantifies the number and percentage of projects, by design review and project type, seeking departures, identification of departures sought, and whether those departures were granted;"

Summary of Adjustments Departures by **Type of Design Review**

All Projects, All Design Review Types: Adjustments and Departures	Total Projects seeking adjustment/ departure		Total Projects granted adjustment/ departure if requested		Adjustment/ Departure may increase building area
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
setbacks/separations	32	47%	30	94%	Yes
façade length/modulation	13	19%	12	92%	Yes
structure width/depth	3	4%	3	100%	Yes
street level uses and dev standards	10	15%	10	100%	Not likely
lot coverage	1	1%	1	100%	Yes
projections	4	6%	3	75%	Yes
driveways and parking and loading	12	18%	12	100%	Possibly
view corridors downtown	1	1%	1	100%	Yes
landscaping	1	1%	0	0%	Not likely
amenity areas	6	9%	6	100%	Not likely
street level uses and commercial depth/height	6	9%	5	83%	Possibly
overhead weather protection	6	9%	6	100%	No
screening (parking, mechanical, solid waste)	2	3%	2	100%	No
rooftop coverage	2	3%	2	100%	Not likely
bike parking/storage	2	3%	2	100%	No
height requirement for FAR exempt area	1	1%	1	100%	Possibly

SDR Adjustment	Total SDR Projects seeking adjustments		Total SDR Projects with adjustments granted		SDR Adjustment may increase building area
	Number	%	Number	%	
SDR samples with any adjustment	9	47%	5	56%	Possibly
setbacks/separations	6	32%	4	67%	Yes
façade length/modulation	3	16%	2	67%	Yes
structure width/depth	1	5%	1	100%	Yes
street level uses and dev standards	1	5%	1	100%	Not likely
landscaping	1	5%	0	0%	Not likely

ADR Departure	Total ADR Projects seeking departure		Total ADR Projects with departures granted (if requested)		ADR Departure may increase building area
	Number	%	Number	%	
ADR samples with any adjustment	17	81%	17	100%	Possibly
setbacks/separations	12	57%	12	100%	Yes
façade length/modulation	5	24%	5	100%	Yes
structure width/depth	0	0%	0	n/a	Yes
projections	3	14%	2	67%	Possibly
driveways and parking and loading	4	19%	4	100%	Possibly
street level uses and dev standards	0	0%	0	n/a	Not likely
landscaping	0	0%	0	n/a	Not likely
amenity areas	6	29%	6	100%	Not likely
street level uses and commercial depth/height	6	29%	5	83%	Not likely
overhead weather protection	2	10%	2	100%	Not likely

Full DR Departure	Total Full Design Review Projects seeking departure		Total Full Design Review Projects with departures granted		Full DR Departure may increase building area
	Number	%	Number	%	
FDR samples with any adjustment	21	75%	21	100%	Possibly
setbacks/separations	14	50%	14	100%	Yes
façade length/modulation	5	18%	5	100%	Yes
lot coverage	1	4%	1	100%	Yes
structure width/depth	2	7%	2	100%	Yes
projections	1	4%	1	100%	Possibly
driveways and parking and loading	8	29%	8	100%	Possibly
view corridors downtown	1	4%	1	100%	Possibly
street level uses and dev standards	9	32%	9	100%	Not likely
overhead weather protection	4	14%	4	100%	Not likely
screening (parking, mechanical, solid waste)	2	7%	2	100%	Not likely
rooftop coverage	2	7%	2	100%	Not likely
bike parking/storage	2	7%	2	100%	Not likely
height requirement for FAR exempt area	1	4%	1	100%	Possibly

Adjustment Type	Total SDR Projects seeking adjustments		Total SDR Projects with adjustments granted		SDR Adjustment may increase building area	Towhouses seeking this adjustment		Townhouses granted this adjustment		Towhouses (rezoned from SF)* seeking this adjustment		Towhouses (rezoned from SF)* granted this adjustment		Other uses seeking this adjustment		Other uses granted this adjustment		Code sections	Related zone
	Number	%	Number	%		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%		
SDR samples with any adjustment	9	47%	5	56%	Possibly	5	71%	2	40%	1	14%	0	0%	3	60%	3	100%		LR
setbacks/separations	6	32%	4	67%	Yes	3	43%	2	67%	1	14%	0	0%	2	40%	2	100%	23.45.518	LR
façade length	3	16%	2	67%	Yes	2	29%	1	50%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	1	20%	1	100%	23.45.527	LR
structure width/depth	1	5%	1	100%	Yes	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	1	20%	1	100%	23.45.527	LR
street level uses	1	5%	1	100%	Not likely	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	1	20%	1	100%	23.47A.005	NC
landscaping	1	5%	0	0%	Not likely	1	14%	0	0%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	23.45.522	LR

Design review required due to rezoning from SF to LR in 2019

ADR Departure	Total ADR Projects seeking departure		Total ADR Projects with departures granted (if requested)		ADR Departure may increase building area	Affordable Housing seeking departure		Affordable Housing granted departures		Market rate development seeking departure		Market rate development granted departures		Townhouses seeking departure		Townhouses granted departure		Code sections	Related zone
	Number	%	Number	%		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%		
ADR samples with any adjustment	17	81%	17	100%	Possibly	7	88%	7	100%	5	71%	5	100%	5	83%	5	100%		
setbacks/separations	12	57%	12	100%	Yes	4	50%	4	100%	3	43%	3	100%	5	83%	5	100%	23.45.518	LR, MR
façade length	5	24%	5	100%	Yes	1	13%	1	100%	1	14%	1	100%	3	50%	3	100%	23.45.518, 23.45.527	LR, MR
structure width/depth	0	0%	0	n/a	Yes	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a		
projections	3	14%	2	67%	Possibly	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	3	50%	2	67%		
driveways and parking	4	19%	4	100%	Possibly	2	25%	2	100%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	2	33%	2	100%	23.45.536.B.2, 23.53.025.D, 23.54.030.B.2, 23.54.030.D.3	LR, MR
street level uses	0	0%	0	n/a	Not likely	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a		
landscaping	0	0%	0	n/a	Not likely	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a		
amenity areas	6	29%	6	100%	Not likely	3	38%	3	100%	2	29%	2	100%	1	17%	1	100%	23.47A.024, 23.45.522.A,	NC, C, LR, MR
street level uses and commercial depth/height	6	29%	5	83%	Not likely	5	63%	5	100%	1	14%	0	0%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	23.47A.005.C.1, 23.47A.005.D.1, 23.47A.008.A.3, 23.47A.008.B, 23.48.040.C, 23.48.740.A	NC, C, SM
overhead weather protection	2	10%	2	100%	Not likely	1	13%	1	100%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	1	17%	1	100%	23.45.518.H.1	LR, MR

Detailed Summary of **Full Design Review** Departures

Full DR Departure	Total Full Design Review Projects seeking departure Number	%	Total Full Design Review Projects with departures granted Number	%	Full DR Departure may increase building area	3-8 story Residential and Mixed-Use seeking departure Number	%	3-8 story Residential and Mixed-Use granted departure Number	%	9+ story Residential and Mixed-Use seeking departure Number	%	9+ story Residential and Mixed-Use granted departure Number	%	Congregate/Assisted Living seeking departure Number	%	Congregate/Assisted Living granted departure Number	%	Office/Hotel seeking departure Number	%	Office/Hotel granted departure Number	%	Townhouses seeking departure Number	%	Townhouses granted departure Number	%	Code sections	Related zone
FDR samples with any adjustment	21	75%	21	100%	Possibly	5	63%	5	100%	6	100%	6	100%	2	67%	2	100%	4	67%	4	100%	4	80%	4	100%		
setbacks/separations	14	50%	14	100%	Yes	5	63%	5	100%	2	33%	2	100%	1	33%	1	100%	3	50%	3	100%	3	60%	3	100%	23.45.518, 23.47A.014, 23.48.435, 23.75.140, 23.49.056.B, 23.49.058	LR, MR, HR, NC, C, SM, Downtown
façade length/modulation	5	18%	5	100%	Yes	1	13%	1	100%	1	17%	1	100%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	3	50%	3	100%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	23.45.518, 23.48.646, 23.49.058	LR, MR, HR, SM, Downtown
lot coverage	1	4%	1	100%	Yes	0	0%	n/a	n/a	1	17%	1	100%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	23.49.158	Downtown
structure width/depth	2	7%	2	100%	Yes	0	0%	n/a	n/a	1	17%	1	100%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	1	17%	1	100%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	23.49.164, 23.49.058	Downtown
projections	1	4%	1	100%	Possibly	1	13%	1	100%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	23.45.518	LR, MR, HR
driveways and parking and loading	8	29%	8	100%	Possibly	0	0%	n/a	n/a	2	33%	2	100%	1	33%	1	100%	2	33%	2	100%	3	60%	3	100%	23.54.030.B.2, 23.54.030.D, 23.54.030.G, 23.54.035, 23.47A.032	Parking and Access - multiple zones
view corridors downtown	1	4%	1	100%	Possibly	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	1	17%	1	100%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	23.49.024	Downtown
street level uses and dev standards	9	32%	9	100%	Not likely	2	25%	2	100%	2	33%	2	100%	1	33%	1	100%	2	33%	2	100%	2	40%	2	100%	23.48.040, 23.48.470	C, NC, SM, Downtown
overhead weather protection	4	14%	4	100%	Not likely	0	0%	n/a	n/a	3	50%	3	100%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	1	17%	1	100%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	23.48.640.A.5, 23.49.018, 23.75.140	SM, Downtown, MPC-YT
screening (parking, mechanical, solid waste)	2	7%	2	100%	Not likely	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	1	33%	1	100%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	1	20%	1	100%	23.47A.012, 23.47A.016	C, NC
rooftop coverage	2	7%	2	100%	Not likely	0	0%	n/a	n/a	1	17%	1	100%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	1	17%	1	100%	0	0%	n/a	n/a	23.49.008	Downtown
bike parking/storage	2	7%	2	100%	Not likely	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	2	40%	2	100%	23.54.015	Parking and Access - multiple zones
height requirement for FAR exempt area	1	4%	1	100%	Possibly	0	0	n/a	n/a	0	0	n/a	n/a	0	0%	n/a	n/a	1	17%	1	100%	0	0	n/a	n/a	23.49.11.B	Downtown

APPENDIX F

COST IMPACT OF DESIGN REVIEW ANALYSIS BY COMMUNITY ATTRIBUTES

SDCI Design Review Process
Assessment of Potential Housing Price Impacts

January 2023

INTRODUCTION

Background and Purpose

There is a long history of design review in the City of Seattle. The design review process is intended to ensure better design outcomes for development projects throughout the city.

This report serves as SDCI Response to Design Review Statement of Legislative Intent by gathering input from some stakeholders to examine reasons for potential housing price impacts.

This report does not consider or analyze the racial equity impacts of the current Design Review Program or any of proposed changes to the current program; that analysis is being done separately.

This report includes an updated evaluation of the program in the context of previous reports, 2018 Design Review Program updates and legislative shifts related to COVID-19 in 2020, as well as developer/stakeholder engagement.

A specific focus of this summary report is to advance an understanding of possible costs and benefits of the design review process and the implications for development outcomes. Community Attributes Inc. ("the consultant team") contracted with SDCI to create this assessment.

Organization of this Report

The remainder of this report is organized as follows:

- **Executive Summary** provides a high-level overview of the scope of the assessment, including any known gaps in information, notable limitations in data, and the level at which different lenses of observation are represented.

- **Preliminary Findings and Implications** summarizes the key takeaways and their implications from the analysis and stakeholder engagement conducted.
- **Data Review and Analysis** highlights the current state of design review in the city and evaluates how these different elements of design review interface with market-rate and affordable development projects.
- **Comparison of Design Review in Seattle and Other Cities** evaluates design review costs in Seattle in the context of design review programs in a few peer cities. This analysis is complementary to design review in other cities with case studies, being done separately by City of Seattle staff.
- **Stakeholder Engagement** summarizes interviews conducted with stakeholders regarding the design review process and related costs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The scope of work for this work directed the consultant team to review available data, review outside studies of the design review process in Seattle and in other cities, and to assess the costs associated with taking a project through design review. This includes the following:

- Review and analysis of any data available from the City of Seattle, as collected by SDCI, OPCD, or other departments
- Review of any available third-party reports assessing the City of Seattle's design review process
- Review of case studies summarizing design review processes and outcomes in other cities, as compiled by SDCI staff
- Review of any available third-party reports assessing other similar design review processes in other cities, including for cities included as case studies
- Up to six (6) interviews with real estate developers with experience taking projects through the design review process in Seattle (referred to as the "stakeholders" in this report)

It is important to note that this report is subject to limitations:

- The availability of past studies and reports that form comparisons between design review programs in different cities is difficult to contextualize as design review processes vary significantly
- Specific elements of the design review process in the City of Seattle are distinct from the process in most other cities.
- Available studies do not provide a full, balanced perspective when evaluating costs and benefits.
- An inability to decouple design review from broader permitting and procedures. Stakeholders engaged were scoped to primarily represent the perspective of those with a real estate development background.
- A definitive, quantitative evaluation of costs and housing price impacts related to design review is illusive given the sample size of engaged developers and the anecdotal nature of stated costs and benefits that are subject to the biases of a limited sampling of stakeholder perspective.
- Varied perceptions of what constitutes "better/good design" or "positive design outcomes", which may differ for individuals and groups depending on their relationship to new development
- Does not quantify the time and cost associated with incomplete or unresponsive corrections and the role of the applicant in longer-than-expected processes
- The stakeholder engagement (interviewing developers familiar with Seattle's design review permit process) was not intended to provide a full balance of perspectives and instead focuses on guidance in the

scope of work to acquire insight into the costs related to the design review program

This summary report includes a qualitative assessment of the costs of the design review process and the potential impact on housing costs, considering all the data sources and analyses referenced above. The assessment will be provided to the Design Review Statement of Legislative Intent stakeholder group gathered by SDCI, to help inform their recommendations for racial equity improvements to the SDCI design review process.

Overview of Findings

1. Information presented in previous studies[1][2][3], assessments of available data, findings from engaged stakeholders, and early efforts to quantify impacts indicate that there is likely to be some level of cost to projects that go through design review, but it is illusive to quantify this. This is partly because of an inability to decouple design review from broader permitting and procedures and the inability to secure hard data (such as pro forma financial statements for real development projects) related to the detailed breakdown of costs of development projects given proprietary considerations.

2. The types of costs that may be involved in a design review application include:
   a. The costs for the original design by architects and engineers in preparing a packet
   b. Prep time and meeting time to engage planners and Design Review Boards
   c. Additional rendering and preparation given added rounds of review
   d. Any factors that influence project timeline and associated financing debt.

3. Development costs that may be influenced by design review are likely to be much less significant than land/site purchase and preparation as well as construction costs associated with the availability of labor and materials (e.g., heightened shipping costs in WA state for materials that come from further away).

4. Although original design costs may be less for more moderately sized projects, they represent a larger share of the overall project cost and would likely yield a more sizable impact.

5. According to the above observations and cost-related statements given by interviewed stakeholders, the costs directly attributable to the design review process are small relative to the costs for land acquisition, labor, and materials.

6. If the share of project costs attributable to design review is relatively low, it is unlikely to have a significant direct influence on housing supply.

7. Possible cost savings if projects were not subject to design review would likely have a minimal impact on the square footage or the number of housing units than might otherwise be pursued on an individual project basis.

8. It is important to note that any additional costs associated with design review have to do with projects that are not pursued due to added timelines and debt burden and significant adjustments to materials, rather than directly attributing this to design review on an individual project basis. If a developer finds it

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[1] Walker Macy. (2017) Design Overlay Zone Assessment (DOZA) on behalf of the City of Portland.
[2] Hinshaw, M., and Morris, M. (2018) Design Review: Guiding Better Development. *Planning Advisory Service, Report 591.*
[3] "Industry Perspective," 2021. https://seattleforeveryone.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/06/Seattle-Design-Review-Summary-Key-Themes-of-Interviews.pdf

difficult to navigate the process, they may pursue development opportunities elsewhere.

9. Stakeholders interviewed by CAI offered the following recommendations to update Seattle's current design review program:

    a. Develop a better way to involve the community than the current Early Community Outreach step
    b. Increase technical expertise (specifically architecture and engineering) for both Boards and review staff
    c. Remove EDG as a process step, or otherwise reduce design review process steps
    d. Encourage departures and reward innovative designs
    e. Reduce the number of design guidelines
    f. Work with Department of Neighborhoods (DON) to communicate with neighborhoods, provide regular briefings about development in the community
    g. Consider offering a pre-EDG meeting with DON/SDCI/Applicant team, to address public concerns early in the development process
    h. Seattle should establish an open forum for community discussion about development (not technical, tied to design guidelines, or any specific development)
    i. Work with community groups for better community engagement
    j. Pay design review board and other board/commission members

Data Review and Analysis Findings

1. Recent permit data from SDCI showed an overall increase in application activity was observed from 2018 through the early part of 2020, but the impact of both the COVID-19 pandemic and updates to the program are difficult to evaluate. Projects are likely to have been in the pipeline and observed spikes of activity may be aligned with projects hoping for construction during times of the year with drier weather.

2. Since 2018, only 6% of the 129 projects going through design review were in the downtown district, while outlying neighborhoods captured more of the projects – COVID-19 impacts have been felt significantly in downtowns.

3. As summarized in the 2020 report by ECONW that was commissioned by the Downtown Seattle Association, allowances for projects to opt-in to administrative review (ADR) as a response to emergency COVID-19 legislation face perceptions among report participants in the development community who did not perceive there to be a significant difference between ADR and full design review (FDR) due to their assessment of the variable discretion individual planners exercise when evaluating projects. This report also indicated that the 2018 updates to the Design Review program resulted in process

improvements for smaller sized and affordable housing projects but did not indicate there were significant added benefits such as time or cost savings for medium to large scale projects, based on input from report participants.

4. Of the 198 projects that were eligible to go through ADR with the April 2020 emergency COVID legislation, 68 of the eligible FDR projects chose to convert to ADR under that legislation.

Comparison of Design Review in Seattle and Other Cities Findings

1. Design review practices vary widely between municipalities, but the City of Seattle is generally in line with best practices to tailor the review process to development conditions with defined thresholds for different levels of review, identifying relatively clear pre-application and submittal procedures, and outlining steps in the process.

2. Seattle's design review process is distinct among most of its peers as it is one of only a few large U.S. cities that utilizes citizen review boards for nearly all mixed-use and commercial development.

3. Peer cities generally rely on staff for most design review functions.

4. Peer cities generally do not have the ability to establish departures from certain code standards in return for better design.

5. Peer cities do not usually include Early Design Guidance (or comparable review) as a design review step.

6. CAI reviewed past studies that indicated concerns with and some benefits of Seattle's and other design review processes. Concerns with design review boards and commissions included a perception of lack of board/commission training, consistency between boards/commissions, boards/commissions not representative of the community, boards/commissions disregarding some community input, unclear process, and board/commission requirements that were perceived to increase development costs. Benefits of design review boards and commissions included better community dialogue, boards that offer multiple informed perspectives, and a process that works well when all parties can engage (development, board, public).

Preliminary Stakeholder Engagement Findings

The seven interview respondents ("stakeholders") recognized that the intent of the design review process has value, and its purpose is generally understood and appreciated. Most stakeholders indicate that ADR involves a thorough review of projects adherence to design guidelines as staff has time to conduct their review, while the Design Review Board is given limited time and context to evaluate projects and FDR is less well perceived as resulting in better design outcomes.

These data are limited by the sample size of stakeholders interviewed, but interviewees offered the following preliminary estimates of costs incurred during the design review process:

Types of Costs

- Preparation of Master Use Permit (MUP) packet – including original architectural renderings and design work (Stakeholders engaged in this project indicated this could be $15-20,000 on a $2 million multi-plex project to $75,000 on a larger 75-150 unit project)
- Meeting time with planners as part of administrative review (One stakeholder in this project estimated this to be $13-15,000)
- Subsequent revisions to original renderings (Stakeholders in this project estimated this to add $15,000 on a $2 million project or $50,000 on a 75-150 unit project for each additional round of review).
- Adjustments to design and materials that impact project costs (Not estimated)

Scale and Context of Possible Costs

- Stakeholders in this project indicated that the cost to a project attributable to design review is small relative to land purchasing and construction costs, and it combines with other regulatory hurdles to influence direct costs and project timelines.
- Most respondents indicated that there is a more significant impact on moderately sized development projects with fewer than 15 units as opposed to large projects with more than 75 units.
- Respondents indicate that much of the costs relate to interest on debt to finance a development project that can range from 6% to upwards of 10% monthly and this can add up significantly if a project takes longer due to multiple rounds of review.

Benefits and Cost Savings

- Respondents did not indicate that there is a cost savings related to design review but spoke to benefits related to a positive influence on some elements of a project design and maintaining a minimum level of good design among outside developers.

Possible Impacts on Housing

- Respondents varied in their perspective on the possible implications on housing supply, type, and price. Though many indicated that the relatively simple administrative design review in other jurisdictions may shift housing to these locations, it is more difficult to enter a new market as a developer, and influences on project financing for both

market rate and affordable housing projects can impact whether projects are pursued in the city.

Stakeholder Recommendations for Adjustments to Design Review

1. Develop a better way to involve the community than the current Early Community Outreach step
2. Increase technical expertise (specifically architecture and engineering) for both Boards and review staff
3. Remove EDG as a process step, or otherwise reduce design review process steps
4. Encourage departures and reward innovative designs
5. Reduce the number of design guidelines
6. Work with Department of Neighborhoods (DON) to communicate with neighborhoods, provide regular briefings about development in the community
7. Consider offering a pre-EDG meeting with DON/SDCI/Applicant team, to address public concerns early in the development process
8. Seattle should establish an open forum for community discussion about development (not technical, tied to design guidelines, or any specific development)
9. Work with community groups for better community engagement
10. Pay design review board and other board/commission members

This data review and analysis highlights the current state of design review in Seattle, provides an overview of different elements of the design review process, evaluates how these different elements of design review interface with market-rate and affordable development projects, and assesses the number of projects advancing through design review by geography.

Current State of Design Review in Seattle

Design review is the process through which the City of Seattle applies adopted design guidelines to multi-family and commercial development to ensure projects relate to the surrounding context and aesthetic quality while providing a forum for citizens and developers to collectively work toward better urban design.[4],[5] The City of Seattle deploys these standards through a series of design guidelines at the city and neighborhood scale. Overall, these guidelines are organized around three themes: context and site, public life, and design concept. Context and site guides how a specific project interacts with the surrounding built and natural environment and assets.[6] Public life describes how a development impacts the community's livability, walkability, and attractiveness.[7] Design concept focuses on elements of a project that are "more than the sum of its parts," and are "essential components of a livable and sustainable city."[8] Citywide and downtown guidelines apply to all of Seattle, while eight design review districts oversee discrete guidelines applicable to 23 neighborhoods.[9]

Cities have deployed some form of design review dating back to the early 20th century. Seattle was one of the first cities to establish a broad-based design commission to review capital projects in 1968.[10] In 1972, Portland, Oregon created the first design commission that expressly reviewed private development. The City of Seattle followed suit with its neighborhood design review process in the mid-1990s.[11] The City most recently revised the program in 2018 to better include public input early in the process, address inequities in areas with historic redlining or impacts related to institutional racism, and modify design review thresholds, among other aims. These

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[4] "Design Review," MRSC.

[5] "Design Review Guidelines for Downtown Development," City of Seattle.

[6] "Design Review – Design Excellence," City of Seattle.

[7] Ibid (See prior footnote wherever "Ibid" occurs).

[8] Ibid.

[9] "Design Review – Design Guidelines," City of Seattle.

[10] Hinshaw, M., and Morris, M. (2018) Design Review: Guiding Better Development. *Planning Advisory Service, Report 591.*

[11] Hinshaw and Morris, 2018.

revisions included a goal to simplify and streamline the process for development, particularly affordable housing proposals.

The key components of the 2018 update included raising the threshold of projects that require more intensive review and placing more affordable housing proposals in administrative design review instead of full design review. This update also instated the requirement for all applicants to conduct community outreach before submitting permit applications.

In April 2020 and in response to state- and city-wide state-of-emergency proclamations resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, Seattle City Council passed emergency legislation that allowed projects subject to full design review to opt into administrative design review for six-month period.[12] Full design review requires meetings with and input from design review boards, whereas administrative review is completely done by city staff.

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[12] Council Bill 119769, Seattle City Council, April 2020.

Overview of the Design Review Process

There are five phases of Seattle's design review program for Full Design Review. They include:

1. **Pre-submittal and early community outreach**. This stage is intended to aid developers in submitting complete design review applications and hear community feedback early in the process. Applicants can learn more about additional city planning, permits, or zoning that apply to their project and fall outside the scope of design review, including street improvement permits or applicable incentive programs or zoning. Developers also conduct community outreach overseen by the Department of Neighborhoods that must be completed before SDCI can review a project application. This outreach ensures that developers notify the community of a project as well as provides an opportunity for the community to engage with the developer about the project that are not isolated to specific design guidelines.[13]
2. **Early design guidance (EDG) review**. The design review board chooses which of the City's design guidelines are the most important for the design team to address based on contextual factors and initial project programming and massing. Project designers present at least three alternative concept designs that fit with the height and density of the project and site. This step is intended to shape the design early in the development process and provide a concurrence point on significant design aspects of the project to avoid additional cost or time during the Master Use Permit.
3. **Master use permit (MUP) application**. The design team incorporates the findings from the EDG review and then applies for a MUP. This application includes more detailed design, which SDCI reviews for design review and any other required MUP reviews like zoning and environmental review.
4. **Recommendation (REC) review**. At the second design review board meeting ("Recommendation meeting"), the board determines how well the project's updated and more comprehensive design meets the priorities identified during EDG review. The board makes a recommendation to the director of SDCI, which may include departures from the land use as requested by the applicant that improve the design of the project.
5. **Decision**. The director issues the MUP decision after all the MUP reviews are approved, incorporating the board's recommendations. If four of the board members agree on a recommendation, the director must include those items in the decision unless they are outside the

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[13] Director's Rule 4-2018, Requirements for Early Community Outreach, City of Seattle.

purview of design review or conflict with other City requirements. Anyone may appeal a decision to the Office of the Hearing Examiner.[14]

Projects may undergo one of four design review paths that include:

- **No review**. Typically projects of less than 8,000 square feet of gross floor area are not required to undertake any design review process[15]
- **Streamlined design review (SDR)**. Smaller projects typically over 8,000 square feet of gross floor area, like townhouses, will undertake a streamlined process in which city staff review a proposal and consider public comment. A project can go from EDG directly to building permit application.
- **Administrative design review (ADR)**. Administrative review includes the same five phases as a full review but does not require a project to go before a Design Review Board. All project information is reviewed by and recommendations made by city staff.
- **Full design review (FDR)**. Large commercial or multi-family projects undergo a full design review of five phases.

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[14] "Design Guidelines Primer," City of Seattle.
[15] Projects that are 5,000 to 8,000 square feet of gross floor area are subject to review if they are in a location that was rezoned from Single Family or Neighborhood Residential within a five-year period.

Exhibit 1 outlines the phases of design review a project must undergo.

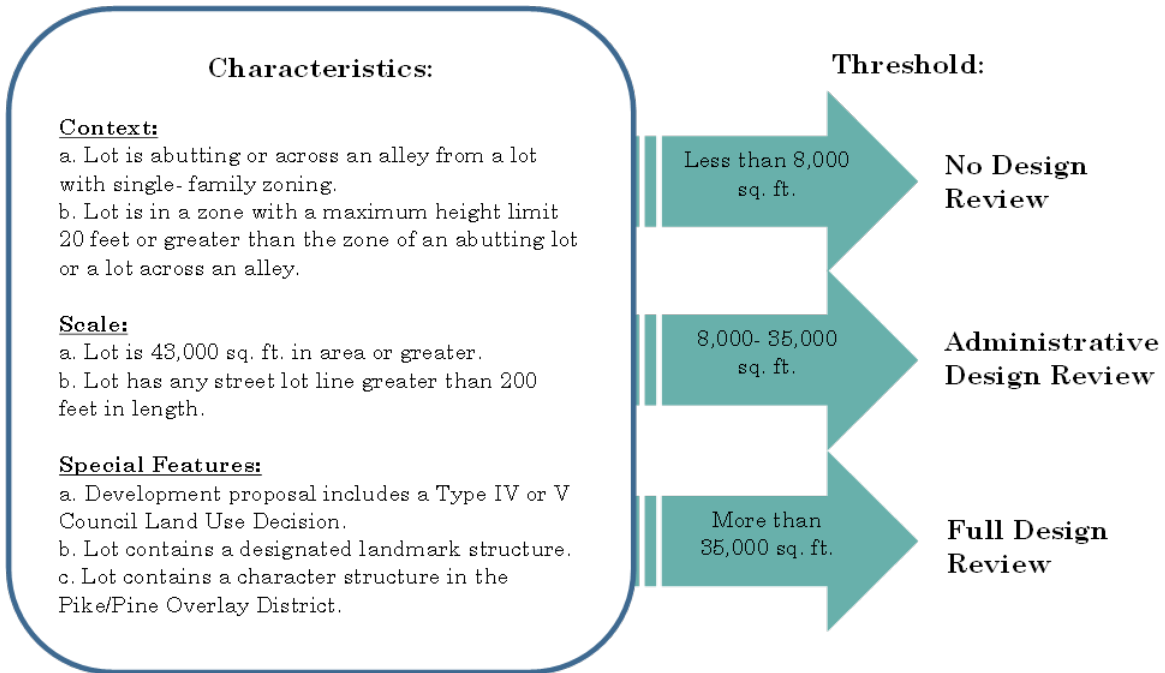**Exhibit 1. Design Review Phases by Type of Review.**

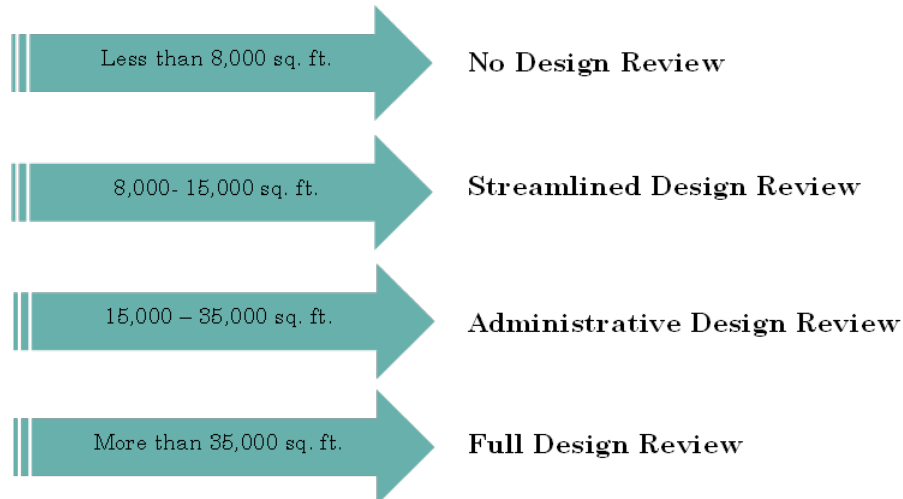| Review Type	Pre-Submittal	EDG Review	MUP App.	REC Review	SDCI Decision	Example
No Design Review [16]	Sometimes	No	Sometimes	No	Yes, if a MUP is required	3 story building with 20 SEDU apartments
ISDR	Yes	Yes	No	No		10 Townhouses
ADR	Yes	Yes – City staff	Yes	Yes – City staff	Yes	8-story, 87-unit apartment building
FDR	Yes	Yes – Design Review Board	Yes	Yes – Design Review Board	Yes	45-story, 455 unit apartment with retail

Source: City of Seattle.

The site and project character and size of a project determine the level of design review it must undertake, described in **Exhibit 2**. Certain context, scale, and special features of a project site and proposed development will trigger design review based on the size of the project area. Other projects that do not meet those site and project characteristics but meet a certain project area threshold will also be required to undergo design review.

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[16] A development may be exempt from design review, but still require a Pre-Submittal conference, MUP application, and SDCI decision.

Exhibit 2. Design Review Thresholds, City of Seattle

Characteristics:

Context:
a. Lot is abutting or across an alley from a lot with single-family zoning.
b. Lot is in a zone with a maximum height limit 20 feet or greater than the zone of an abutting lot or a lot across an alley.

Scale:
a. Lot is 43,000 sq. ft. in area or greater.
b. Lot has any street lot line greater than 200 feet in length.

Special Features:
a. Development proposal includes a Type IV or V Council Land Use Decision.
b. Lot contains a designated landmark structure.
c. Lot contains a character structure in the Pike/Pine Overlay District.

Threshold:

Less than 8,000 sq. ft. → **No Design Review**

8,000- 35,000 sq. ft. → **Administrative Design Review**

More than 35,000 sq. ft. → **Full Design Review**

Additional Project Thresholds:

Less than 8,000 sq. ft. → **No Design Review**

8,000- 15,000 sq. ft. → **Streamlined Design Review**

15,000 – 35,000 sq. ft. → **Administrative Design Review**

More than 35,000 sq. ft. → **Full Design Review**

Source: City of Seattle.

Note: Projects that are 5,000 to 8,000 square feet of gross floor area are subject to review if they are in a location that was rezoned from Single Family or Neighborhood Residential within a five-year period.

Analysis of Design Review in Seattle

Since the program was updated (July 1, 2018 up to April 28, 2020), 621 projects have undergone at least one phase of the design review process such as Early Design Guidance or Design Recommendation review (**Exhibit 3**). Close to half (46% or 283) of projects require a full design review. Nearly one-

third (198 total) require an administrative review. Of those 198 ADR projects, 35 converted from FDR to ADR under the April 2020 emergency Council legislation, a total of 8% of all ADRs.

Exhibit 3. Type of Design Review, 2018 to Present
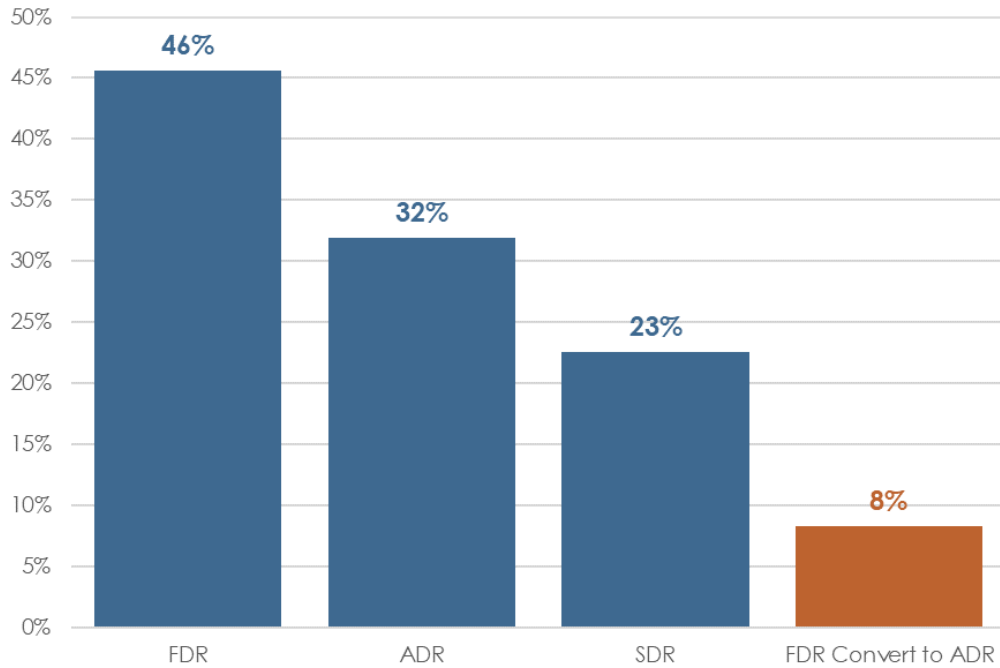
Source: City of Seattle.

Of the eight design review districts measured during this time, the northeast district (comprised of the neighborhoods of Green Lake, Lake City North District, Northgate, Roosevelt, University, and Wallingford) accounted for 21% of all design review projects with 129 projects, as shown in **Exhibit 4**. The northwest district, which includes Ballard, Greenwood/Phinney, and Northgate, accounted for 17% of projects, and the east (Capitol Hill, Pike/Pine, and Yesler Terrace) and southeast (Mount Baker, North Beacon Hill, Othello) districts accounted for an additional 15% and 14% of projects, respectively. Projects in some of these neighborhoods must meet both Citywide and neighborhood-specific design guidelines. Only 6% of projects occurred in the downtown district (Belltown and downtown). Projects in Belltown must meet both Downtown and Belltown neighborhood-specific design guidelines.

Exhibit 4. Location of Design Review Applications, 2018 to Present
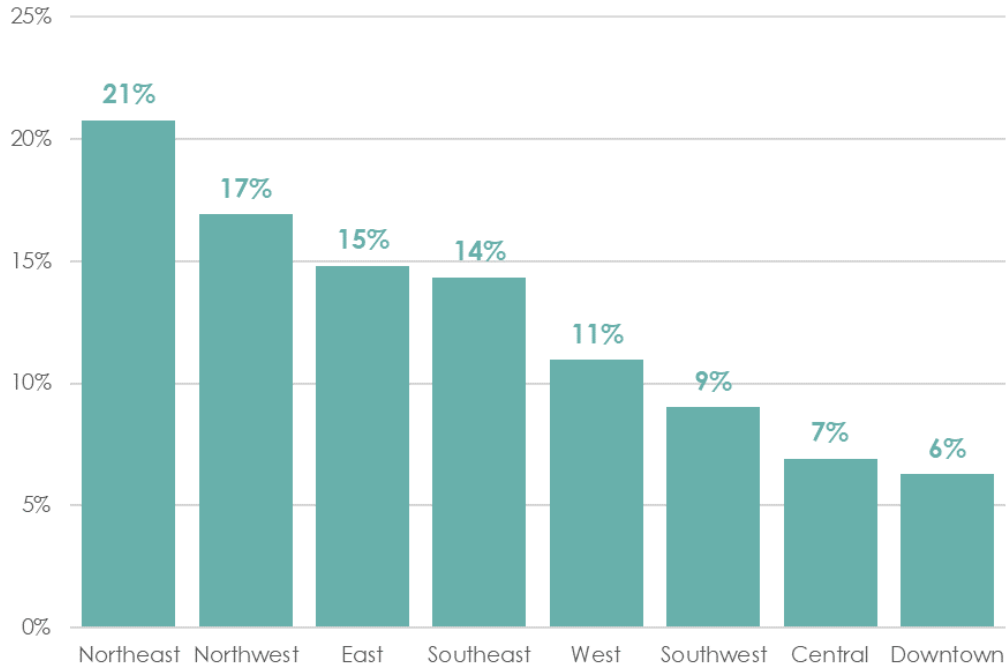
Source: City of Seattle.

The 2018 program update ensured affordable housing developments were subject to ADR, with the option to opt into FDR. Data gathered in June 2022 showed that of the projects that had a design review milestone such as Early Design Guidance or Recommendation review between July 2018 and April 2020, only 13 affordable housing developments had an issued permit (**Exhibit 5**). This accounts for 2% of all those developments between July 2018 and April 2020. 608 of 621 total projects (98%) measured during that time were for market rate housing.

Exhibit 5. Type of Housing Development with Design Review Milestone, July 2018 to April 2020

Affordable Projects
Market Rate Projects

2%

621
Total

98%
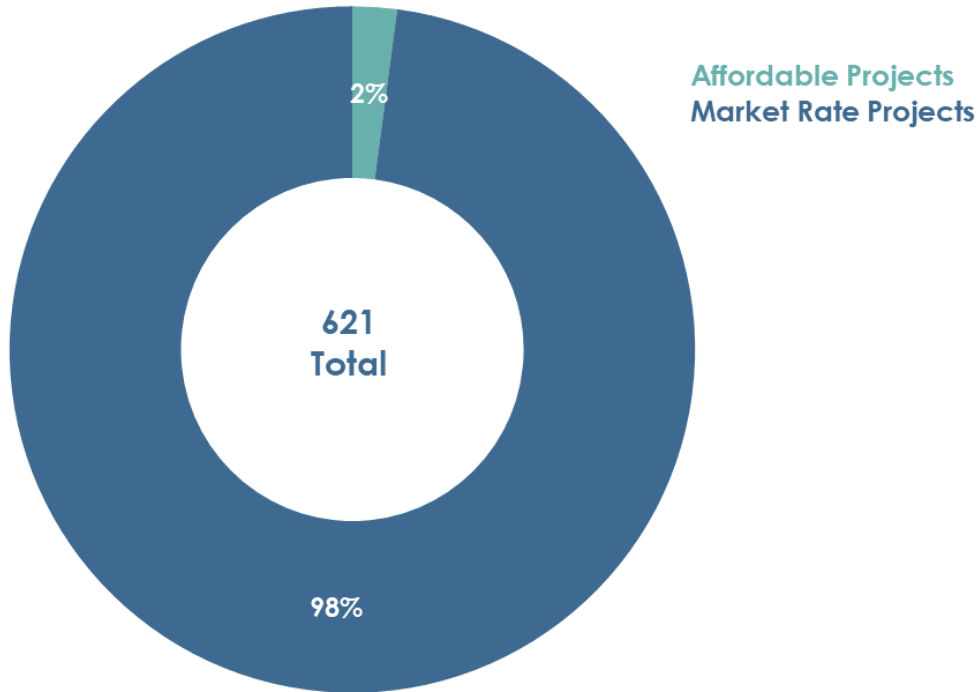
Source: City of Seattle.

Design review is intended for multi-family and commercial developments, which represent the most common land use of projects which undertake design review (**Exhibit 6**). The most common land use types include townhouses and mixed-use developments, accounting for 32% and 31% of projects, respectively. The next most common land uses are multi-family residential development and small efficiency or efficiency dwelling units (SEDU/EDU), accounting for a cumulative 38% of projects. Small efficiency dwelling units generally measure under 400 square feet and are included as part of a multi-unit building. SEDU/EDUs can be in the style of a micro-apartment, with a bathroom and kitchen or kitchenette in the unit, or dormitory style, in which multiple units share a bathroom, kitchen, or living space.

Exhibit 6. Design Review Projects by Use Type, July 2018 to April 2020
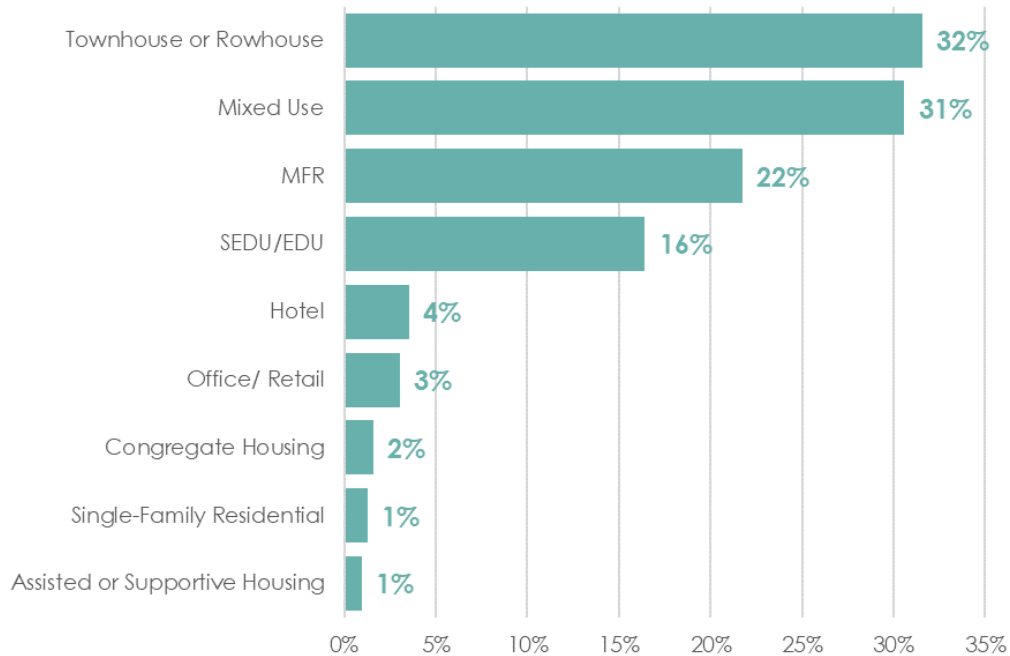
Source: City of Seattle.

SDCI staff has tracked applications for design review since the program's July 2018 update through to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, shown in **Exhibit 7**. An increase in design review milestones was observed over this period, with significant spikes of activity in Spring 2019 and Winter through Spring 2020. The actual impact of the pandemic is difficult to evaluate given projects already in the pipeline and observed spikes of activity may be aligned with project planning to initiate work in anticipation of Code changes. However, the overall increase in applications may reflect increased flexibility for applicants to opt into administrative design review as part of the emergency legislation in 2020.

Exhibit 7. Applications With a Design Review Milestone, July 2018 to April 2020
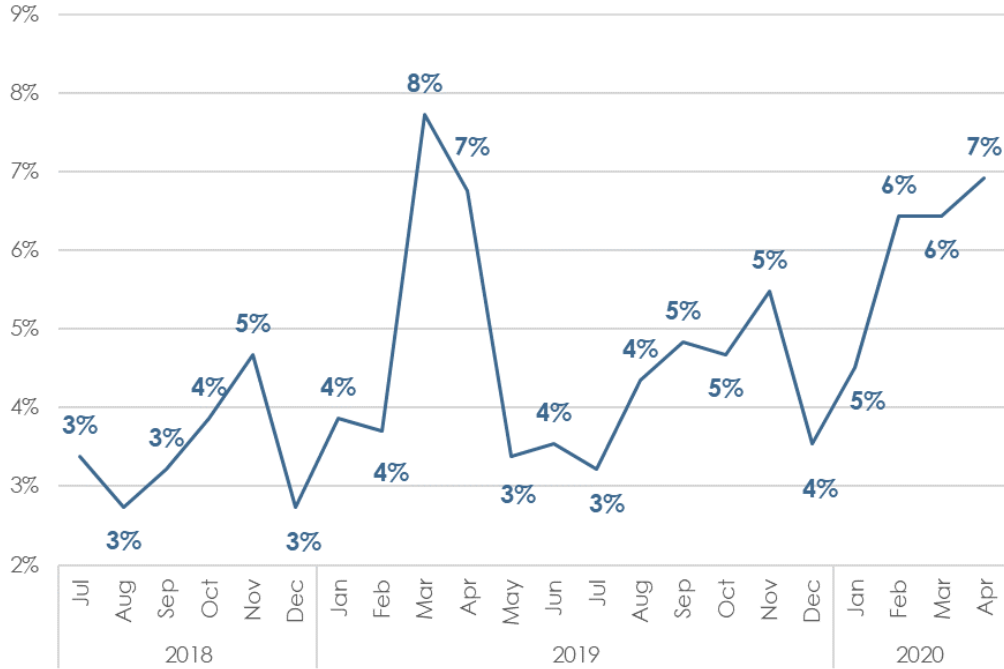
Source: City of Seattle.

Of the projects sampled as part of a recent study by SDCI requesting permits in the city between July 2018 and April 2020, 69% requested departures or adjustments and 91% of those requests were granted and 100% were granted through ADR and FDR while 56% were granted among streamlined design permits.[17] The largest share of these adjustments or departures related to setback and separation changes (32%) and 85% of the departures were found to have potential to increase building floor area.[18]

DESIGN REVIEW AND CITY COMPARISON

This review compares the approach to design review in Seattle to identified peer cities listed in the next section. This analysis is complementary to case study work being done separately by City of Seattle staff. Ongoing work by the city to develop case studies and identify best practices may rely on more recent information and/or studies from cities not included in this report.

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[17] City of Seattle, 2022. Memo to Land Use Committee. Attachment 2: Design Review Departures and Adjustments Summary Report.
[18] Ibid.

Nationwide Design Review Commonalities

Following the 2018 Design Review Program update, stakeholders reported that the process has generally improved for smaller sized and affordable housing projects. In its 2020 review of Seattle Design Review Program, ECONorthwest interviewed local development and design professionals who largely reported that they have not experienced time or cost savings and work mostly on medium to large scale projects. Participants in that report expressed perceptions that there is not a significant time or cost savings as part of ADR in comparison to full design review (FDR) due to their assessment of the variable discretion individual planners exercise when evaluating projects.

Two independently crafted analyses of design review include case studies of Seattle's program. The first is an examination of design review nationwide and published in the American Planning Association's Planning Advisory Service Report 591.[19] This study outlines the foundations of design review in the United States and includes case studies of ten cities with a range of design considerations, land use demands, and regulatory frameworks. In addition to Seattle, these cities include:

- Austin, Texas
- Denver, Colorado
- Portland, Oregon
- Cleveland, Ohio
- Bellevue, Washington
- Chapel Hill, North Carolina
- Lenexa, Kansas
- Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
- Bozeman, Montana

The second is an audit of the City of Portland, Oregon's design review program completed by the consultant firm Walker Macy, in which it identifies five peer cities and conducts a comparative analysis of these and Portland's programs.[20] In addition to Seattle, these cities include:

- Austin, Texas
- Denver, Colorado
- Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- San Francisco, California

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[19] Hinshaw and Morris, 2018.
[20] Walker Macy. (2017) Design Overlay Zone Assessment (DOZA) on behalf of the City of Portland.

The following section includes findings and comparative analysis of these case studies along with data and background on Seattle's design review program from additional sources.

Current design review practices vary widely between municipalities as they are typically based on a city's zoning and development history, current development needs and trends, and statutory language includes a variety of combinations of procedures, design standards, and decision-making bodies.[21] As a result, there is no national standard practice of design review, and cities that adopt a design review process do so in their own unique way. In a 2017 audit of Portland's design review process that examined programs in peer cities, Walker Macy found, "it does not appear that any city has a system that works perfectly; they all have flaws. But all of these cities are attempting to guide the character and quality of private development in intentional ways."[22]

However, there are commonalities across design review programs. According to an American Planning Association-published analysis of design review, there are six essential elements of every municipal design review program. Details of each element vary widely between jurisdictions, and there are many ways in which a jurisdiction can and should tailor its review process to its development conditions and needs. The six elements include:

1. **Triggering mechanisms**: project characteristics that require it to be reviewed.
2. **Submittal requirements**: information and items that applicants need to submit at each step.
3. **Preapplication**: steps or information an applicant needs to complete or acquire prior to formal application.
4. **Review of proposal**: steps involved in design review.
5. **Record of decision**: documentation and notice.
6. **Appeal**: administrative appeals. [23]

Characteristics of Design Review in a Nearby City: Bellevue

The consultant team examined design review in one city near Seattle: Bellevue. It is important to consider context when comparing between design review procedures and outcomes among cities nearby to Seattle as they have historically faced more limited growth and permit activity and Seattle's position as the largest metropolitan city increases the complexity of

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[21] Walker Macy, 2017.
[22] Walker Macy, 2017.
[23] Hinshaw and Morris, 2018.

administering design review. For example, Bellevue experienced approximately 10% of the population growth of Seattle between 2010-2019. Seattle's development has all been "infill" due to geographic limitations and previous development, where Bellevue has undeveloped land. As a result, Seattle's density is approximately twice that of Bellevue's.

City of Bellevue staff conduct a professional review of development proposals for mostly commercial and high-density housing districts, as well as downtown.[24] There are no citizen review boards or commissions, and all final decisions are made by the director of Development Services Department. The 8-10 staff members who conduct these reviews have no other planning responsibilities, complete continuing education related to design review, have a variety of backgrounds, and are expert in dealing with developers and the community.[25] The public has multiple ways to provide input, including through public notice, mailings, and large on-site signs. While there was initial public pushback to the program, Hinshaw and Morris report that "much of the opposition has moved on" and that several thousand new residents "view a dense and diverse downtown as desirable."[26] It has expanded its design review to 12 new zoning districts with their own design guidelines focused on transit-oriented nodes, public amenities, multi-modal transportation infrastructure, and ecological restoration. Most recently, in 2017 the City of Bellevue adopted new perimeter districts around downtown that will serve as a buffer zone to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Development stakeholders interviewed in ECONorthwest's 2020 review of Seattle's design review program reported that the City does not provide expected timelines for different stages and actions in the review process, resulting in ambiguity and longer-than-expected processes. Stakeholders cited Bellevue as a less risky and easier development process due to its clear and objective standards.[27] The Development Services Department publishes an annual oversight report that includes the average days and weeks to secure a permit in a variety of building types. **Exhibit 8** outlines the timeline and total projects of various development types from June 2021 to June 2022. This data focuses on the timeline for commercial projects.

Exhibit 8. Timeline of Development Projects, City of Bellevue, 2021-2022

Major Commercial Projects

Total Projects	Average Days to Permit	Average Weeks to Permit
27	431	61.6

[24] City of Bellevue Municipal Code Part 20.30F: Design Review.
[25] Hinshaw and Morris, 2018.
[26] Ibid.
[27] "Industry Perspective," 2021.

Medium Commercial Projects		
Total Projects	*Average Days to Permit*	*Average Weeks to Permit*
11	107	15.2

Minor Commercial Projects		
Total Projects	*Average Days to Permit*	*Average Weeks to Permit*
50	224	31.9

Design Review		
Total Projects	*Average Days to Permit*	*Average Weeks to Permit*
9	433	61.9

Source: City of Bellevue.

CAI considered examining design review in Tacoma, another city near Seattle. However, the City of Tacoma currently does not have a design review program that is comparable to City of Seattle's. Tacoma requires design review only for projects involving historic properties or properties located within designated historic districts, which could be compared to Seattle Department of Neighborhoods Historic Preservation requirements but is not comparable to Seattle's design review program.[28] Tacoma's review for these projects is a comparatively simple review that typically lasts for a few weeks, although some more complex projects can require additional review. Tacoma is currently undergoing the development of a general Design Review Program that it expects to launch in 2023.[29]

Unique Aspects of Design Review in Seattle

The six elements of design review [30] are interpreted in a variety of ways among the peer cities identified in the APA and Walker Macy reports as listed in the previous section. Seattle's design review process is distinct among most of its peers as it is one of only a few large U.S. cities that utilizes citizen review boards for nearly all mixed-use and commercial development. [31,32] Peer cities generally rely on staff for most design review functions and do not have the ability to establish departures from certain code standards in return for better design. These reports found that most cities that use design review for private development opt for review by city staff. Seattle's peers generally rely on staff for most design review functions. As credentialed

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[28] Design Review, City of Tacoma.
[29] Current Initiatives and Projects: Urban Design Program, City of Tacoma.
[30] Hinshaw and Morris, 2018
[31] Walker Macy, 2017.
[32] "Design Review: Department Recommended Program Improvements for Public Review," Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, March 2016.

professionals, staff has "authority to establish conditions on development proposals."[33]

Most design review programs also permit reviewers a high degree of discretionary authority over proposals. This approach allows "both staff and review boards to apply professional judgment, along with adopted standards and guidelines, to design review and conditions of approval."[34]

Early Design Guidance (EDG) is another aspect of Seattle's design review process that isn't found in other cities. Some cities have an early site plan review that may be comparable but may not include the same steps as Seattle's EDG process. The purpose of Seattle's EDG process is to "identify concerns about the site and the proposed project, receive comments from the public, review the design guidelines applicable to the site, identify guideline priorities, and explore conceptual design or siting alternatives."[35] Walker Macy's report calls Seattle's EDG review an effective tool to inform the development team on a specific project's design priorities and offer early direction.[36]

One of the other ways in which Seattle's program is different from many cities is in its design review boards' authority to recommend departures from certain code standards in return for better design. Recent analysis by the city indicated that these departures are from code sections that dictate the building envelope, highlighting how such departures have resulted in larger buildings with more potential developer profitability than permitted under a stricter code application.[37] It found, "allowing other modifications provides for greater flexibility and more efficient use of a building envelope. Often, there are multiple departures requested. The boards may use this to leverage higher quality public amenities and materials."[38]

Perceptions of Design Review in Seattle and Other Cities

The past studies reviewed by CAI included a variety of perceptions about design review boards and commissions in Seattle and other cities.

Seattle developers interviewed by ECONorthwest reported that they experience challenges with the "unlimited" and "not-clearly defined"

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[33] Hinshaw and Morris, 2018.
[34] Walker Macy, 2017.
[35] Seattle Municipal Code 23.41
[36] Hinshaw and Morris, 2018.
[37] Memo with subject "Response to City Council Statement of Legislative Intent on Design Review" to Seattle City Council on June 30, 2022 (Page 13-18 permit sample of design review projects scheduled for Early Design Guidance or Recommendation review between July 1, 2018 and April 28, 2020).
[38] Ibid.

discretion of Seattle's design review boards, and perceived these issues lead to additional time and unexpected costs.[39] Those interviewed felt that this results in an inconsistent process across boards and neighborhoods and limits the procedural guidance given from the city to the design review boards.

The Walker Macy review of the design review process in Portland found that the Design Commission, which reviews projects in the Central City, has facilitated a positive community dialogue around new development: "The Type III process has benefitted from a public discourse and the multiple, informed perspectives by citizen volunteers serving on the Design Commission."[40] The study also found that the process was less effective in areas outside central Portland. Specifically, the study noted that the guidelines and/or the Design Commission "apply less readily to other areas of the City that have new patterns of development or are transforming", "do not reflect the many different established neighborhoods, with their own distinct qualities, histories, demographics, and cultures", and "can be both daunting and confusing" to stakeholders or the public.

While Seattle requires a range of industry experience and community representation on design review boards, some participants interviewed with the ECONorthwest study believe that the boards are not representative of their communities.[41]

Interviewees for the ECONorthwest report also indicated that experience in design, development, and construction does not necessarily bound board members' review of projects to practical or essential recommendations. The report participants indicated that they receive design suggestions that are "cost prohibitive or structurally impractical," but are required to consider them in subsequent design versions.[42] The City clarified that the Seattle Municipal Code authority identifies Design Review authority, which prevents the Boards from going outside of the purview of Design Guidelines; they cannot discuss or consider cost or structural issues, nor base guidance or decisions on the perceive merit of the project or its programming.

Participants interviewed with the ECONorthwest study also stated that boards are sometimes perceived to be selective of community feedback and support to include in formal review. They described instances in which boards discount community support for a project or note that certain community voices are weighted differently than others.[43] Boards are tasked

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[39] "Industry Perspective," 2021. https://seattleforeveryone.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/06/Seattle-Design-Review-Summary-Key-Themes-of-Interviews.pdf
[40] Walker Macy, 2017.
[41] "Public Statement," 2021.
[42] "Industry Perspective," 2021.
[43] Ibid.

with considering all design-related public comment. Community comments may go beyond design-related comments.

This feedback highlights some of the competing complaints with Seattle's design review process: sometimes applicants want the Boards to consider topics outside of design review when they perceive it as beneficial, but they do not want the Board to consider topics outside of design review when it is perceived as adding cost or time.

Instructive examples from other cities indicate that good communication around project design is a two-way street. The design review process requires timely and thorough responses from all parties: Boards/Commissions, the City, and the development team. Specifically, Walker Macy indicated that, while "regulatory tools and techniques are necessary to maintain consistency, due process and fairness[…], any system of democratic decision-making still comes down to the interaction between multiple people." More specifically:

> *"Although Portland has a reputation of effective local governance, design review seems be on the edge of this tipping point. This points out a need for procedural rules that provide transparency, fairness, clear expectations, and specific references to adopted decision criteria. It also requires a willingness of design and development representatives to pay attention to the perspectives of the appointed review body. Finally, all parties engaged in design review, whether staff, appointed citizens, applicants, designers, or the public, must understand what is actually on the table in for deliberation. Design review is not the only regulation guiding development; it works in concert with many other regulations, some of which are quantitatively established by law -- such as height and allowable floor area."[44]*

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[44] Walker Macy, 2017.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

CAI requested an interview with 12 developers, including representation from affordable housing developers, large multi-family developers, and builders focused on moderately sized multi-family developments. Of these, CAI interviewed seven ("stakeholders"). Some of these 'stakeholders' are also part of the Stakeholder Group focusing on the Racial Equity Toolkit response to the Design Review Statement of Legislative Intent.

This engagement was not intended to provide a full balance of perspectives and instead focuses on guidance in the scope of work to acquire insight into the costs related to the design review program. Interviewees were asked to evaluate the City of Seattle design review program and discuss its relationship with development costs and housing outcomes. Interview questions focused on the following subjects:

- Qualitative assessments of the developer experience with the design review program, including consistency in the application as well as changes over time.
- Evaluation of the relationship between the design review process and development costs with breakdowns for different design review levels, project phases, types of costs, and prospective cost savings or wider benefits.
- Implications for development outcomes focusing on the supply of housing, comparisons with design review in other nearby cities, and outcomes for disadvantaged communities.
- Recommendations for additional information to be gathered and adjustments to the design review program that could reduce costs and ensure cost savings are realized for housing supply, affordable housing, or other community benefits.

Interview responses are listed below. The responses are summarized across all stakeholders to ensure confidentiality so that respondents could have unfiltered observations related to the program. The responses are organized into overall observations, possible impacts of design review on development costs, described benefits of the program, implications for housing, comparisons to other jurisdictions, and recommended reforms to the program.

Interview Responses

Overall Observations

Respondents recognize that the intent of the design review process has value, and its purpose is generally understood and appreciated. Most respondents indicate that ADR involves a thorough review of projects adherence to design guidelines as staff has time to conduct their review, while the Design Review

Board is given limited time and context to evaluate projects and FDR is less well-perceived as resulting in better design outcomes.

Some felt that the purview of design review has expanded too far, and this has made it more complex to navigate and less collaborative over time. However, there was a mixed response in evaluating adjustments over time as most respondents indicated that there are more challenges related to the inconsistency of adherence to specific design guidance and the variability in skill level or interest-specific selections of what guidance to apply among city staff. A key concern was expressed regarding how city review often will lead with opinions as opposed to adherence to design guidelines and that there has been an inconsistent application of guidance between different city planners. Some respondents expressed how early design guidance often is not consistent with the design guidelines themselves or lacks clarity that is much more difficult to carry over into the design review process. A desire for more clarity on expectations related to design features or other amenities that might benefit the community at the outset of projects is desired from multiple respondents (e.g., publicly accessible open space).

Respondents indicated the emergency legislation to allow the shift from FDR to ADR involved a significant shift alongside moving from in-person to virtual meetings. This caused additional delays and impacted applicants' understanding of how to navigate the process.

Specific Responses on Overall Observations:

- Development applicants that understand how to navigate the process are mostly able to pre-empt related timeline challenges and avoid having to revisit significant design options if they have been operating in the City of Seattle through multiple project phases. As one interviewee stated it, "design review can be a landmine for new developers."
- One respondent indicated that it is hard to make bad design better through design review and public preferences often inform the advance of design improvements more than the design review process itself.
- It is important to highlight how design review interfaces with other requirements by the city in hampering project delivery. "The city is only as good as its worst review."
- Respondents indicated that there is value in having a public process related to design and early engagement of communities in neighborhoods, but that there is a step before design review that is necessary due to the nuance and jargon related to design guidelines. The required Early Community Outreach is a step in this direction, but the inability of non-professionals to participate in the discussion makes it difficult for effective engagement and it is challenging to get

feedback from a representative group of the community as well as those facing racial or other disparities and barriers to engagement.

- Respondents perceived that the design review process to be taking more time than it did before and point to some of this being related to the requirement for additional outreach. Interviewees were supportive of the outreach meeting, but thought a large public process was unnecessary unless it is a sizable project with public plaza, art, or other impacts on the neighborhood beyond the immediate site.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Possible Impact of Design Review on Costs

Direct Costs

Interviewees discussed multiple challenges in evaluating the direct costs of design review and establishing a direct dollar value or share of project costs as it is usually evaluated as part of large MUP. Respondents did indicate that packets for review are increasing in their complexity and level of visualization, and these added requirements have a cost that is passed on from architect to developer. The cost challenges described by interviewees mostly related to inconsistency in how guidance can be applied to projects and what influence that can have on a project timeline or complexity. For larger projects, design review is combined into a project reserve for broader permitting costs and fees and respondents indicated that design review costs are minimal relative to level of costs for construction and land purchasing. Costs may be more prohibitive for projects with fewer units if they face the same delays as a larger project and are unable to recoup these expenses given the rate of return on the lower number of units.

Interest on Debt

Interviewees indicated that monthly carrying costs can be particularly burdensome if there are multiple rounds of design review. This risk for financing lenders and the developers themselves can influence whether projects are pursued, particularly among moderate-sized projects.

Project Timeline

Many indicated that design review gets associated with the long timeline and bureaucratic hurdles of the broader permitting process across departments. However, some respondents indicated that there are specific instances where there have been multiple rounds of revised design upon which staff then direct an applicant to revert to the original design with slight adjustments.

Specific Responses on Costs:

All Projects

- One respondent outlined a scenario where the project sponsor is required to meet with a planner for 2-3 meetings, the process could cost close to $13-15,000 for ADR. This is not a meaningful cost for larger projects. The challenge is when there are significant backlogs, and it takes 9-10 months to get a meeting scheduled.
- Others highlight how the timeline of design and construction can be impacted by project delays - "yes, there is the financing issue, but you're also paying the architects. You can lose you General Contractor because they can't delay their deliverables as long as is needed. It's a whole lot of work to go back to the RFP process."
- Strict evaluations of usable materials can create additional cost. One respondent indicated that fiber cement material can be effective in the Seattle climate if detailed well, but there is a bias against certain material usage.
- Another respondent indicated that there is an assumption that developers can make significant adjustments on cost for materials or weather delays, but the finance sector has an influence on how much flexibility there is - "The normal perspective is that development can be done with lower returns, but developers are beholden to investors underwriting standards and are required to deliver projects with minimum levels of revenue return."

Small-Mid-Sized Projects
- One respondent estimated that design review could be 5-10% of a total project cost given an added 5–7-month timeline on a townhome.
- Projects can have a 10% monthly carrying cost and a full MUP through FDR could result in up to $2M in cost if it reaches 18 months, with 4 months added on to the original timeline if appealed by an individual resident that seeks to stop the project. Every month of delay can add $15-20,000.
- Costs associated with DR are not usually a function of what it does, but a function of time and predictability. We plan on a project timeline of 10 months for a project without design review and 15-17 months for a project with design review. We plan on it taking 5-7 months more. Costs to finance bridge loan are around $10K per month. on an infill townhome project.

Larger Projects
- For a 100+ unit project there could be a 10% to 25% additional fee on top of the original design if there is a significant design change initiated in response to the city or public feedback.
- Initial architectural renderings can cost $75,000 and monthly carrying costs can be 6% to 7% with $50,000 for each significant round to revisit the design. An additional three to four rounds can increase project costs significantly.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Benefits of Design Review

Design Outcomes

Respondents indicate the DR process can be effective in maintaining a minimum level of good design, but it requires a tight adherence to the baseline guidelines at the start of a project. Interviewees also indicated that there are not enough departures from the zoning code being allowed in order to fulfill design guidelines that will yield more innovative outcomes. This is likely due to fear over what influence this might have on the broader DR process. Developers have indicated that the process has had a positive influence on some elements of a project, while there is frustration when a full redesign of a building is recommended despite applicants attempts to adhere to design guidelines.

Cost Savings

Conceptually, design review could lead to cost savings for individual development projects (e.g. through reduced life cycle costs, lower vacancy rates). However, respondents interviewed for this project indicated that Design Review is unlikely to bring about cost savings. One respondent indicated there may have been a case where savings could occur from engaging in an administrative review as opposed to a large public process.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Possible Impact of Design Review on Housing

Housing Supply

Respondents indicated that design review is stacked on to other city process that collectively can influence whether projects are pursued by developers or not. There appeared to be general agreement that the impact of design review is hardest felt among developers with moderate numbers of housing units, while larger projects can write in costs or have capacity to manage the financing and staffing needs that may shift as they are engaged in the design review process.

Type of Housing Units

Although design guidelines do not require a size or mix of housing units, respondents indicated that the size of units can be greatly influenced by design review and there should be attention to the influence specific guidelines might have on square footage of units related to accommodating families as well as larger numbers of residents.

Affordability

Respondents indicated that it is essential to maintain and enhance exemptions for affordable housing developers. Publicly funded projects were indicated to be tied to tight schedules and impacts to this schedule can affect available funds that can be used in advancing affordable housing projects, particularly if the process extends beyond a 12-month period. Respondents varied in their view regarding the depth of evaluations to confirm income or using alternatives to median income related to affordable housing provision in market rate housing projects. Affordable housing projects are part of a group of projects given "Priority 2" status and respondents noted that this group of projects has experienced significant backups. Such projects were exempted from design review during COVID-19 and the city indicates these backups may relate to the conversion of multiple projects from FDR to ADR and other limitation outside of design review. Respondents indicated that they will seek departure approvals to gain more units and the city has found that the departures from a strict adherence to code compliance allowed through the design review process can result in increased building size.

Specific Responses on Housing:

- One interviewee had a general view that design review does impact the price of housing - "it absolutely increases the price of housing."
- One respondent indicated that smaller developers could face staffing constraints and pursue and deliver less projects ultimately reducing the number of housing units built within a market cycle - "It's also a capacity constraint that prevents us from delivering as many units as we could, it creates and artificial supply constraint."
- Another developer indicated that design review may discourage some development in Seattle relative to its neighbors - "The heightened feasibility of development in neighboring jurisdictions without such zoning or design review is likely to impact housing production negatively among those that do adopt it."
- Although design review is not the only influence, one respondent indicated that no department is really looking at whether development will not happen given the collection of regulations and codes and perception is that there is going to be a fallout where there will be very few projects coming online among more moderately sized projects and this shift might yield one less unit per project.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Comparison to Other Jurisdictions

There appeared to be consensus among the interviewees that the design review process in Seattle is slower and does not yield the best benefit as compared to other nearby jurisdictions such as Bellevue and Shoreline that integrate design review into their administrative process. The interviewees felt that there is a core group of developers with experience in the local

market that are committed to impressively designed projects and can navigate the process, while those out of town can jump in with a lack of understanding of the process and advance projects that are designed poorly. Respondents indicated that other jurisdictions rely on a prescriptive code, and it can sometimes be a challenge to update this for alternative development options, but that the process for doing this is more consistent and handled well administratively.

Specific Responses on Other Jurisdictions:

- One respondent felt that staffing and design board expertise varies, and this lack of predictability may discourage development in Seattle relative to its neighboring cities - "The individual approach by one planner as part of ADR or the culture and professional expertise on design review boards for different parts of the city as part of FDR can be inconsistent. This means that developers may gravitate toward those areas where there is a more predictable passage to approval, whether that is in or out of the City of Seattle."
- Others noted differences between Seattle and neighboring cities – "There is a night and day difference in terms of having a smooth process between Seattle and nearby cities like Shoreline, and the level of good design outcomes is essentially the same."
- Another felt that the approach in neighboring jurisdictions is as effective in securing design outcomes on projects while it is easier to navigate through the process - "There is a shorter list of boxes to check in most other jurisdictions and buildings are designed that are just as beautiful and fit with community with or without design review, however, not all jurisdictions are a good steward if a particularly bad cost-cutting developer is involved."

Stakeholder Perspectives on Recommended Reforms

Staffing & Board

All interviewees noted that the biggest factor in improving the Design Review process relates to staffing capacity and consistency in skillset. Increases of technically trained staff in architecture and engineering are needed to handle load and complexity of projects. Some respondents indicated that the caliber of expertise represented on the design review boards needs to be improved so that they have the technical expertise to advance clear guidance. As currently structured, some respondents indicated that equally weighting well-informed professional insight alongside less technically informed perspectives can be difficult to navigate or identify clarity on requested design outcomes that meet community need.

Specific Responses on Staffing and Board:

- There are a lot of non-professionals that are hired to have expertise in areas where they are not well trained.

Process

One respondent requested removing Early Design Guidance (EDG), others advocated for reducing the steps in the design review process. This is a particular pain point for architects attempting to meet client schedules, while further delays can occur with misalignments as the design team gets further along and early review is adjusted or not communicated effectively.

Respondents spoke to encouraging departures and rewarding design innovations and creativity, particularly in urban districts facing complex constraints.

Guidelines

Generally, there appears to be consensus that there are too many design guidelines, and it would be best to have a smaller selection of consistently applied guidelines citywide. There is disagreement as to the level that the guidelines can or should honor adjustments by district (e.g., downtown, International District, Central District, and other highly urbanized or culturally specific neighborhood needs). Some respondents recommended resolving inconsistencies in applying design guidance by establishing a clearly specified set of the key 10-15 guidelines that should be prioritized as opposed to leaving staff to hand select from the wider pool of guidelines when their merit may be less meaningful to achieve design outcomes.

Specific Responses on Guidelines:
- One respondent indicated that design review can result in better outcomes among sizable projects like a $5 million project, but that has a diminishing return and can be particularly burdensome for more moderate-sized projects and the threshold for detailed review should be set to a higher number with respondents indicating this should be the gross square footage for a 10- or 16-unit project as compared to the existing threshold.
- A few respondents discussed a desire to maintain or enhance additional design and development style guidance in specific neighborhoods with commentary related to meeting culturally specific needs. Many respondents indicated that design review is not what makes a project have good design overall among developers that are experienced in the local market.

Engagement

There is a desire to improve how engagement activities interact with design review to address community concerns earlier and ensure that the weight of a single voice is evaluated in the context of broader community input.

Specific Recommendations on Engagement:
- Leveraging the Department of Neighborhoods to establish quarterly briefings to the community regarding the development process to increase an understanding regarding the stage at which design review is enacted as compared to zoning and permitting of projects.
- Considering a pre-EDG meeting between the applicant, staff, and Department of Neighborhoods to address public concern at project outset. This was recommended as an addition or revision to the existing Early Community Outreach step to engage the above parties.
- Establishing a more open quorum for discussion with the community that is not as technical or specific to individual design guidelines. This recommendation was in reference to a broad need to increase residents' capacity to engage in the discussion related to design as opposed to reference to a specific applicant's project.
- Start with community engagement supported by community groups that are offering to hold meetings for previewing project designs.
- Establish design review boards and other advisory boards as paid rather than volunteer positions.

APPENDIX G

BEST PRACTICES: DESIGN REVIEW IN OTHER CITIES REPORT BY SDCI STAFF
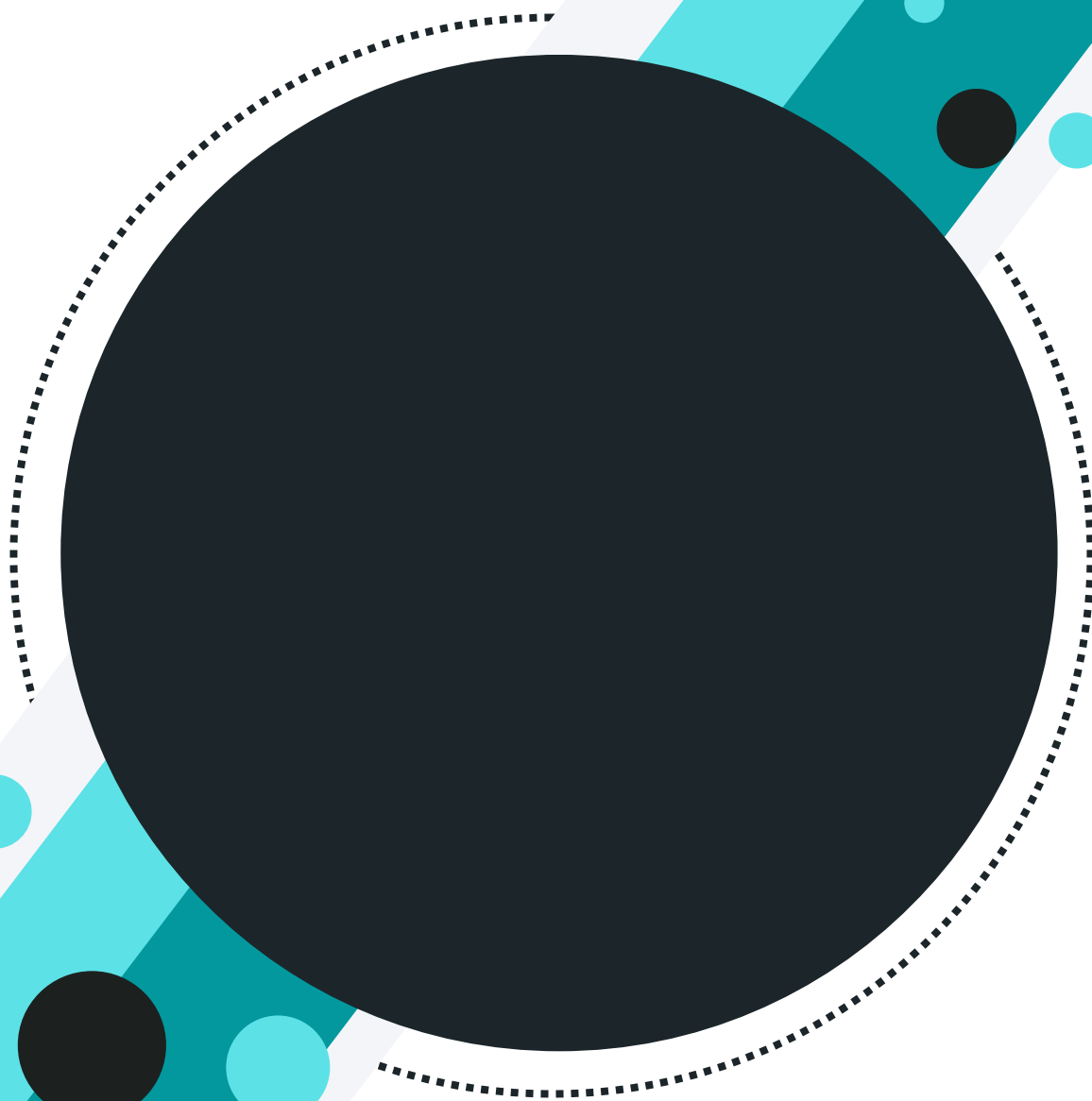
Executive Summary

Local government municipalities recognize the impact design has on our daily life, be it design of parks, roadways, or the buildings we move through and around, design has the potential to enhance our experience of the built environment. Design professionals, city staff, and the public serve as stakeholders throughout the extensive development of design review programs, guidelines, and standards to create a shared vision for the future of their city. Design Review then provides a mechanism by which municipalities cast the shared vision of their cities into the future through setting design standards for new development. Principles of design including, sitting, scale, rhythm, variation, composition, provide the foundation for setting standards and the jumping off point for individual design guidelines to reflect the character of a specific place and community.

This report provides a snapshot of several other design review programs in major cities across the United States in response to the Statement for Legislative Intent's request to *review national best practices for design review programs with significant public participation components*. Though it is important to acknowledge each city is unique with differing histories, legislative process, and form of governing bodies, gathering information on other cities allows us to begin a bench marking process for how the City of Seattle's Design Review Program compares to similar programs.

The purpose of this report is to compare:
1) Required vs. optional Design Review
2) Inclusion of Early Design Guidance phase
3) Inclusion of Public Comment / Public meetings
4) Design Guideline scope
5) Inclusion of equity design guidelines

Seven cities including Austin, Bellevue, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Portland, and San Francisco, were analyzed as part of this *Design Review in Other Cities* report.

All included cities except for Austin, have a threshold for requiring Design Review. In the City of Austin applicants can pursue Design Review to meet criteria for bonus incentives. Chicago, Portland, Denver, and Boston have a public meeting or public comment component as part of the Design Review Process. Three of the 7 cities included a phase similar to the City of Seattle's Early Design Guidance phase including Boston, Denver, and San Francisco.

Regarding an equity component in the design guidelines, only the City of Chicago currently has established and explicit guidelines related to equity. Though it is important to note many of the included cities are currently undergoing updates which seek to better integrate equity into their design guidelines. In addition, it is worth noting the City of Seattle has historically been a leader in implementing progressive planning initiatives including standards related to Design Review.

In summary, each city includes some form of Design Review, ranging from optional/incentive based (Austin), administrative review (Bellevue, Boston, Denver, Portland), to review by planning/ design boards (Boston, Denver, Portland, and San Francisco). As our cultural and societal norms shift to reflect our evolving values, design guidelines will continue to evolve and adapt to meet these changing priorities, including equity. Looking at other cities allows us to identify strengths and where we might begin to improve our own Design Review process to better meet the evolving needs and values of the communities we serve.

The following table provides a snapshot of the information provided in the case studies which are included in this report.

CITY	Required (R)	Early Design Guidance Phase	Equity Design Guidelines	Public Meeting	Review Component: Site Plan	Review Component: Materials	Review Component: Program	Departure/ Code Deviations
Austin	R (gray)	gray	gray	gray	blue	blue	gray	blue
Bellevue	R (blue)	gray	gray	gray	blue	blue	blue	gray
Boston	R (blue)	blue	blue	blue	blue	blue	blue	blue
Chicago	R (blue)	gray	blue	blue	blue	blue	blue	gray
Denver	R (blue)	blue	blue	blue	blue	blue	gray	gray
Portland	R (blue)	gray	blue	blue	blue	blue	blue	blue
San Francisco	R (blue)	blue	gray	gray	blue	blue	blue	blue

Table 1: Comparison Chart

Background

Why do we value Design

We spend much of our lives in buildings and moving through the built environment. We work, play, rest in built environment. Design of the built environment changes the way we move through and experience the places we inhabit. Design has the potential to improve the way in which we engage with the built environment through intentional design which considers both how the design fits into the larger context and quality of the design itself.

Purpose of Design Review

As cities continue to grow and continue to become denser one tool used to anchor new development within larger city goals and plans is Design Review. The City of Seattle outlines the following as the goals for Design Review:

- Helps new development fit into the neighborhood context and enhance our communities.
- Establishes parameters for discussion of new development through design guidelines.
- Creates an opportunity to hear community's design related concerns.

Design Review Process

Three paths for design review currently in the City of Seattle:
- **Streamlined Design Review:** Early Design Guidance only and then straight to building permit. Including public comment but not public meeting.
- **Administrative Design Review:** Early Design Guidance, Master Use Permit / Recommendation, Building permit all required (reviews completed by city staff). Includes public comment but not public meeting.

- **Full Design Review:** Early Design Guidance, Master Use Permit / Recommendation, Building permit all required (reviews completed by city staff). Includes public comment and public meeting.

Examples:

SDR

ADR

FULL DR

Methodology

Seven cities including Austin, Bellevue, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Portland, and San Francisco, were analyzed as part of this *Design Review in Other Cities* report. Cities were selected based on similarity in size, population, and overall rate of growth by looking at 2020 Census data. In addition, the City of Bellevue was also included given its proximity to the City of Seattle.

SNAPSHOT

Population 978,908
a density of 3,141 people/sq mile

22.1%
growth from 2010 to 2019.

Why did we choose this example?
Comparable to Seattle size/growth

What projects are subject to Design Review?
Projects that opt into the Density Bonus Program

WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE? HOW IS EQUITY INTERGRATED?

Austin's Design Review program is currently more limited. Projects opt into the Density Bonus Program, where projects which met the guidelines were awarded development incentives. All other projects are reviewed by staff to meet Type 1 standards in the zoning code

Equity is not explicitly integrated; however, Austin is currently undergoing an update effort, with a key focus to better align the guidelines with current community goals; including, but not limited to, adopted city policies related to affordability, connectivity, equity, environment, access to open space, mobility, sustainability, and resilience

The scope Design Review includes site plan and the building (exterior lighting, glazing, façade relief (like modulation), location of entries, pedestrian paths, etc.). There is a limited consideration of materials/colors.

area-wide urban guidelines
This describes issues which apply generally throughout any area where the urban design guidelines are applied.

guidelines for the public streetscape
The major focus is on the streetscape environment which affects the pedestrian. This includes all the elements that can make a pedestrian comfortable such as the sidewalk, street trees, street furniture, and the facade of the building.

guidelines for plazas and open space
These guidelines propose the adoption of a uniform philosophy through shared vision for open spaces and plazas within urban centers. This vision would result in the focus of pedestrian activity pre-eminently over vehicular modal transport in urban settings.

These guidelines adopt the principle that open spaces and plazas are public spaces, and that these natural public amenities encourage human occu¬pancy.

guidelines for buildings
These guidelines include recommendations for the physical makeup and shape of construction inside the property lines.

B.1 - Build to the Street

B.2 - Provide Multi-Tenant, Pedestrian-Oriented Development at the Street Level

B.3 - Accentuate Primary Entrances

B.4 - Encourage the Inclusion of Local Character

B.5 - Control On-Site Parking

B.6 - Create Quality Construction

B.7 - Create Buildings with Human Scale

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Initially created in 1999, the process and guidelines were grounded through a values and vision process.

"Because the city is a community of people and not of buildings, and because people can come to community through shared values, the Commission sought first to articulate a set of commonly held values"

The current 2008 revision of the original Downtown Design Guidelines expanded the geography to include any areas in the city which, through general agreement, seek to create and shape dense development.

The proposed update includes four main priorities:

1. Having broader applicability throughout Austin's urban core, and therefore, the ability to serve a wider range of users and project types
2. To better align the guidelines with current community goals; including, but not limited to, adopted city policies related to affordability, connectivity, equity, environment, access to open space, mobility, sustainability, and resilience.
3. More clarity by creating a more inviting and user-friendly document that all Austinites can seek insight from
4. The guidelines must evolve to become a predictable resource for everyone. To achieve this, an easy-to-use document is needed with a simple graphic format (including illustrations and photos) to visually communicate the desired (and undesired) outcomes.

DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

Most reviews are staff only and there is no public meeting.

There is a notice of application only, no public comment period or public meetings. Rarely projects go to a Land Use Commission, which does include comment and appeal period. When there is opportunity for public comment, the comments are rarely "entertained" due to politics.

An "Equivalent path" allows applicant to propose an equivalent to the code required standard. Small adjustments are possible (ex. lighting, different amenity like a bench in the common area, etc.)

STREET LEVEL VIEW LOOKING WEST

DRAFT

1234 West Randolph
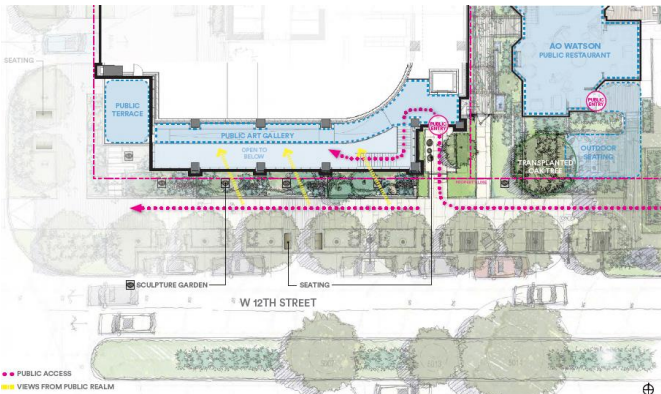
SNAPSHOT

Population 2,693,976
a density of 11,943 people/sq mile

-0.1%
growth from 2010 to 2019.

Why did we choose this example?
Suggested by stakeholder advisory group

What projects are subject to Design Review?
All public and private projects located along Chicago's commercial corridors.

WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE? HOW IS EQUITY INTERGRATED?

In 2020, the City of Chicago launched a community led planning process called "We Will Chicago." In the process they devised a design review program and design guidelines based on community input. Initially the Chicago Department of Planning and Development engaged a Design Excellence Working Group to answer the question:

"How do we engender a culture that values design excellence in everyday life?"

From this question, several thematic principles emerged that collectively aspire to achieve design excellence for Chicago residents, businesses, and other local stakeholders. Equity is called out and integrated into these principles including commitments to:

- Equity & Inclusion; Achieving fair treatment, targeted support, and prosperity for all residents
- Innovation; Implementing creative approaches to design and problem solving
- Sense of Place; Celebrating and strengthening the culture of our communities
- Sustainability; Committing to environmental, cultural, and financial longevity
- Communication; Fostering design appreciation and responding to community needs

The scope of the Design Review program is similar to Seattle and includes the building program including uses, unit sizes, etc.

A mix of commercial, hotel, and office uses brought needed neighborhood amenities as well as customers.

Vue 53
Valerio Dewalt Train

Active ground floor, easy resident access to upper floors, and hidden parking make complementary uses work.

Independence Library and Apartments
John Ronan Architects

Retail isn't the only way to create active uses - this library fronts the street with affordable housing above.

City of Chicago

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Developed by DPD under Mayor Lightfoot and adopted by Plan Commission in March 2022, the Neighborhood Design Guidelines provide specific recommendations to enhance the planning, review and impact of development along the city's commercial corridors. As a complement to other City design resources and regulations, the guidelines are adaptable to the unique context of individual neighborhoods, corridors, and blocks.

The guidelines are organized across six categories:

- Sustainability
  Features that have long-term environmental, sociocultural, and human health impacts.
- Program
  Targeted uses that complement a property's surrounding context.
- Site Design
  Building orientation, layout, open space, parking, and services.
- Public Realm
  Improvements within and near the public right-of-way adjacent to the site.
- Massing
  Bulk, height, and form of a building.
- Façade
  Architectural expression of a building's exterior, including entrances and windows.

The guidelines are intended to be used for all public and private projects located along Chicago's commercial corridors. Projects that require the City's review and oversight should substantially correspond to their parameters, especially Planned Developments, Lakefront Protection Ordinance projects, and projects that receive City grants, funding, or other incentives.

DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

After initial zoning and planning and design review, qualifying projects are presented to the COD (no fee for COD review). DPD staff writes up the COD recommendations. Applicant follows them or justifies why they are unable to follow them, and proceeds to Chicago Plan Commission hearing. Applicant can disagree with recommendations, then staff will review further or make a negative recommendation to Plan Commission. Or applicant can withdraw their proposal. It seems applicants can choose a staff review process instead (like ADR) which may require multiple review cycles prior to Plan Commission.

SNAPSHOT

Population 874,784
a density of 18,562 people/sq mile

8.5%
growth from 2010 to 2019.

Why did we choose this example?
Comparable in in size to Seattle; more density, less growth.

What projects are subject to Design Review?
Required citywide for projects 10 or more units, or over 10,000 sq ft

WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE? HOW IS EQUITY INTERGRATED?

In general, San Francisco's Design Review program is quite similar to Seattle's regarding scope, process, and the content of the design guidelines. The major distinctions are the lack of public meetings, that more smaller scale projects are subject to design review, the larger role played by city design review staff, and that the Planning Commission provides final project approval.

Design review is part of the overall entitlement process. The scope of SF's design review includes massing, scale, articulation, materials, composition of open space, relation of the new building to existing buildings and street pattern, and location of functions especially as they relate to the public realm and aesthetics.

Equity is not explicitly integrated into the design review process or design guidelines. While the guidelines do contain references to "diversity" and "culture", those concepts are left up to interpretation. The guidelines do contain precedent images that reference BIPOC art, cultural events, and architectural forms.

A set of guidelines specific to projects that are in the Affordable Housing Bonus Program help to ensure that affordable housing projects are designed to an equal level of design excellence as typical private development.

Urban Design Guidelines

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Urban Design Guidelines are the default guidelines used; Residential Design Guidelines; Ground Floor Residential Design Guidelines are layered on as supplemental depending on the project zone and uses. There are a handful of neighborhood specific design guidelines. A separate set of Affordable Housing Bonus Program Guidelines are provided for projects that are 100% affordable housing, as they receive extra height and FAR and are generally larger than surrounding context.

The content, organization, and style of the three main sets of guidelines are similar to Seattle's; focusing on designing to respect and enhance context, contribute to vibrant and active streetscapes, and create visually rich and textured façade and building design. There is perhaps a bit more deference requested to fitting in to existing historic context, direct rejection of expanses of large cementitious panels, and desire for secondary architectural elements and quality ground-floor residential design.

DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

Design Review is led by the Urban Design Advisory Team (UDAT), an internal staff team comprised of staff planners with expertise in architecture, landscape architecture, historic preservation, and urban design.

Design review occurs in two phases: Initial Design Review, in which the intent is to identify and respond to basic design issues early on, and the second stage, which occurs before entitlement action and encompasses a more detailed review of the project design. There may be multiple rounds of review and revisions to the project design. Design findings are documented in case reports, which the Planning Commission uses as the basis of review in their final review motions. There is no public meeting exclusively on the proposed design of a project

SNAPSHOT

Population 149,440
a density of 4,335 people/sq mile

14.7%
growth from 2011 to 2021.

Why did we choose this example?
Similar regulatory environment (Washington); geographically proximate urban center.

WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE?

Design review is discretionary administrative decision that is part of the overall entitlement process. Departures from code are allowed through the Design Review process. Design guidelines are embedded within the code. Generally, Design Review is only required in denser areas of mixed-use development, as well as in areas that abut single-family zones. No public meetings are held as part of the Design Review process.

WHEN & WHERE IS DESIGN REVIEW REQUIRED?

Design review is required in specific mapped districts, including Downtown, Belred subarea, several transit-oriented development overlays, Community Retail Design Districts, Neighborhood Mixed Use Districts. Design review is also required in Transition Area Design Districts, which are areas where multifamily uses are planned next to single-family uses.

HOW IS EQUITY INTERGRATED?

Equity is not integrated into the design review process or design guidelines.

5. Promote Welcoming Residential Entries.

   a. Intent. Residential entries should provide a graceful transition between the public and private realms.

   b. Guideline. Residential entries should be substantial enough to suggest privacy yet welcoming to those who approach and enter.

   c. Recommended.

      i. Ground-related individual unit entries should be provided on ground floor space not used by storefronts or a multifamily lobby. Where there are ground-related individual entries, a clear transition between public, semi-private, and private space should be delineated with a combination of the following techniques:

        (1) Moderate change of grade (two to five feet is preferred) from sidewalk level to entry.

        (2) Provision of a porch or deck at least six feet wide by four feet deep. A covered porch is preferred.

        (3) Private open space at least 10 feet wide.

        (4) A low fence, rail, or planting two to four feet high. (This option is recommended in combination with any of the above.)

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Design guidelines are embedded into the land use code, generally under the special district in which they apply. Design guidelines do not prescribe specific design solutions, and there are many ways to meet a guidelines. Each individual guideline provides the following detail:

- Intent: an initial concise statement of the objective of the guidelines
- Guideline: Explanatory text describing the details of the guidelines
- Recommended: Textual and photographic examples of recommended development consistent with the intent of the guideline.
- Not recommended: Textual and photographic examples of development that does not meet the intent of the guidelines.

Guidelines generally cover architectural compatibility, architectural detailing, materials, massing, design concept and character, site layout, pedestrian-oriented design and building elements.
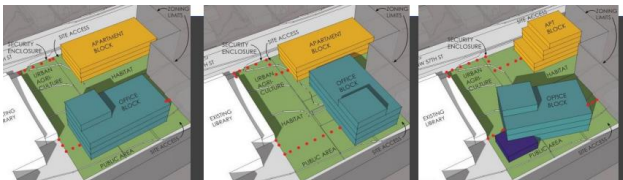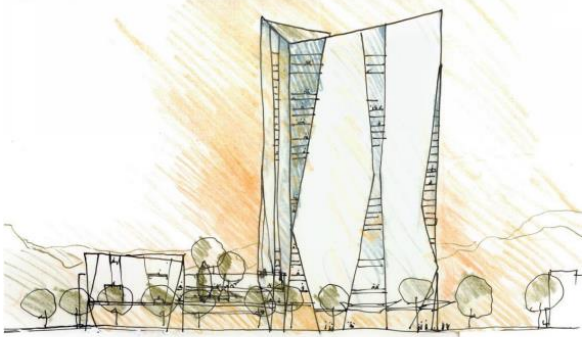
DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

Design Review applications are reviewed and approved by city staff within the development services department. A preapplication conference is required for Design Review projects, in which city staff provide initial feedback and guidance on codes and design guidelines. Applicants must submit the following materials: project narrative; design concept and images; site plans; site analysis of existing conditions and transportation access; elevation and massing diagrams; design process concepts; responses to design guidelines, and drawings that depict the pedestrian experience of the project. After a permit application is submitted, the discretionary design review process occurs as part of the overall permitting process.

Per data provided by the City of Bellevue, 13 projects have completed the Design Review Process in the past year, taking an average of 76.3 weeks to achieve project or site plan approval.

CASE STUDY
PORTLAND

DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

Population 660,398
a density of 4,994 people/sq mile

11.5%
growth from 2010 to 2019.

Why did we choose this example?
Comparable to Seattle size/growth

WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE?

Design review supports development that builds on context, contributes to the public realm, and provides high quality and resilient buildings and public spaces. Design Review offers opportunities for increased flexibility over the design standards. Design Review occurs as part of the overall entitlement process.

There are three types of Design Review:

- Type I is administrative review and is appealable to the state LUBA.
- Type II is administrative review and is appealable to the Design Commission.
- Type III requires a hearing and approval by the Design Commission; staff provide a recommendation.

WHEN & WHERE IS DESIGN REVIEW REQUIRED?

All new development within the Design Overlay Zones is subject to design review; the overlay is limited to mainly the central city but has been expanded to some growing urban nodes across the city. The type of review required is based on geographic location, project size, and

complexity, with larger and more complex projects requiring Type III review. Development in the downtown area is generally required to go through a Type III process; in other areas, a two-track system is available for certain projects (generally, those under 40,000 sf). In these areas, projects may opt to comply with a set of prescriptive design standards using the Design Plan Check process instead of going through the discretionary Design Review process and using the design guidelines

HOW IS EQUITY INTERGRATED?

Certain projects are required to coordinate a Neighborhood Contact meeting prior to submitting permits, to provide opportunity for the community to learn about a project and initiate discussion about potential issues.

The Design Commission lists equity as a core principle of the design review process, stating that "everyone deserves the opportunity to participate" and that "everyone deserves to live and work in safe, well-designed buildings…"

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Projects that are subject to Design Review must meet the Citywide Design Guidelines; in some areas, neighborhood specific guidelines may also apply.

The Design Guidelines are organized into three sections: context; public realm; and quality and resilience. There are nine overarching design guidelines, each accompanied by background information, diagrams, images, and suggested design approaches that provide examples of how to meet the design guidelines.
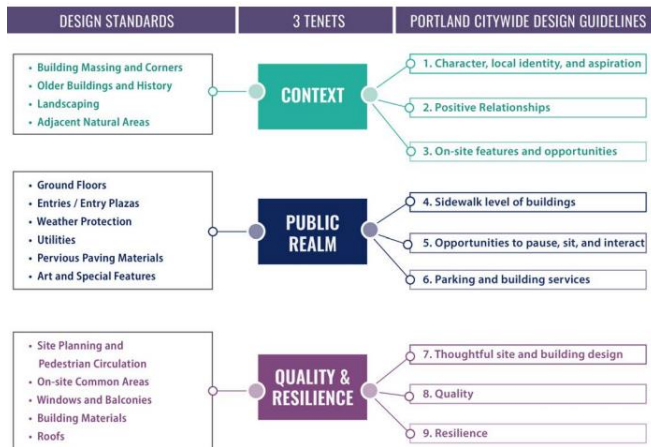
DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

Type III procedures require a pre-application conference. Applicants may opt in for a Design Advice Request (DAR) to get feedback from the Design Commission prior to the submittal of a Design Review. DARs are strongly recommended for Type II reviews that are large and/or sensitive.

Certain projects—generally those over 10,000 square feet--require 'neighborhood contact'

Modifications may be granted if it is demonstrated that the modification "better meets the design guideline" and are "consistent with the purpose of the standard for which a modification is requested."

The Commission relies heavily on the issues identified in staff memos and Staff Reports and most often agrees with their recommendations.

Design Commission is a volunteer body.
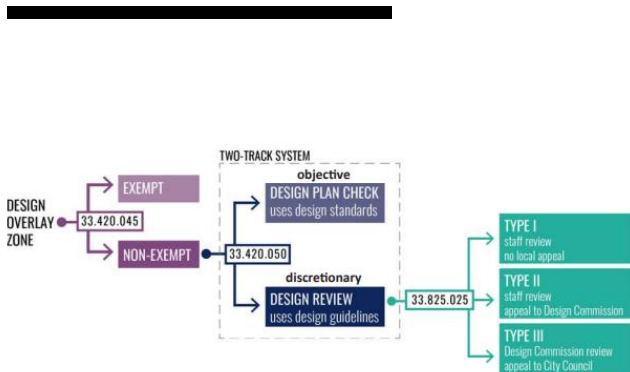
SNAPSHOT

Population 727,211
a density of 4,532 people/sq mile

21.2%
growth from 2010 to 2019.

Why did we choose this example?
Comparable to Seattle size/growth

What projects are subject to Design Review?
New Construction as required by the applicable Small Area Plan

WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE? HOW IS EQUITY INTERGRATED?

The Downtown Design Advisory Board is empowered through the Denver Zoning Code to advise and assist the Community Planning and Development Department in the design review process. The board is composed of Downtown residents, property owners, design professionals, and real estate development industry representatives who help ensure that projects are developed in accordance with these DSG's Design Standards and Design Guidelines specific to each Small Area Plan

Equity is not explicitly integrated, and the scope Design Review appears to be exterior and site only.

3.I To encourage use of well-detailed exterior materials with texture and depth that provide a sense of Human Scale

3.J To integrate changes in exterior building materials with the overall design and articulation of the building

3.K To promote use of a variety of high-quality durable exterior materials

3.L To reduce resource and energy consumption through use of sustainable exterior materials

67. Building materials shall be of proven quality and durability.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

The DSG is organized to follow a typical approach to project design.

1. Site Organization
2. Building Mass & Scale
3. Facade Design & Site Details
4. Private Streetscape Design
5. Neighborhood Specific Design
6. Building Signs

Each section includes intent statements, design Standards and design guidelines

Intent Statements establish the objectives to be achieved for each topic and may also be used to determine the appropriateness of alternatives or innovative approaches that do not meet specific design standards. It is expected that projects will be consistent with all relevant intent statements.

Design Standards set prescriptive criteria for achieving the intent statements. They use the term "shall" to indicate that compliance is expected and are numbered by chapter for reference.

Design Guidelines provide additional suggestions to achieve the intent statements. They use the term "should" or "consider" and are numbered by chapter for reference.
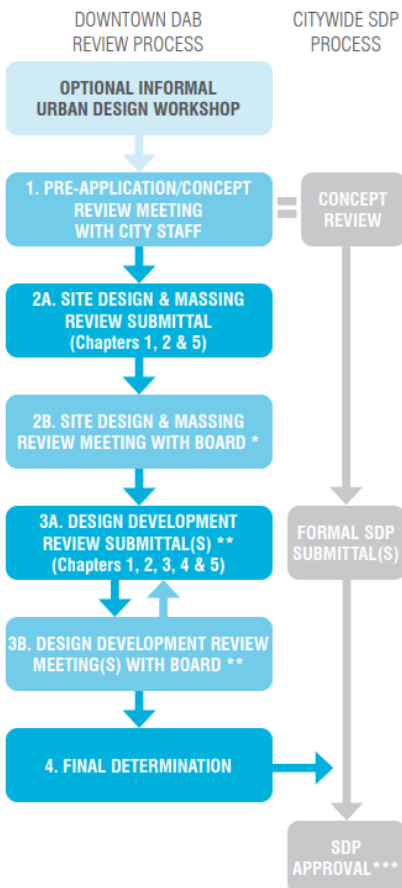
DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

Depending on the project location, Design review may be admin or by a Board. Some Boards appear advisory, others appear to recommend decisions to the zoning administrator

Site Development Plan and/or Large Development Review similar' to Seattle's EDG; seems to be admin. Depending on the Small Area Plan, a Board/Commission review may be required, which seems to be facilitated by the planner.

Public notice is required for development in some Areas (ex. A General Development Plan is required in the station area, and that plan requires extensive public outreach, new specific design guidelines, etc.)

In some cases, an innovative or creative design approach that does not comply with specific design standards or guidelines may be approved if it is consistent with the guiding principles and relevant intent statements. It is the applicant's responsibility to show that an alternative solution is consistent with, and effectively implements the guiding principles and intent statements of the DSG.

CASE STUDY

BOSTON

SNAPSHOT

Population 692,600
a density of 14,073 people/sq mile

12.1%
growth from 2010 to 2019.

Why did we choose this example?
Comparable to Seattle size/growth

What projects are subject to Design Review?
Projects with 15 units or more and/or 20,000 sf or more

WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE? HOW IS EQUITY INTERGRATED?

The Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) responsibilities include planning, workforce development, and overall economic development. As part of project review, Design Review is integrated into a holistic process. The type required, varies based on the size of project:

- Small Project Review (20-50K or 15 units)
- Admin; Large Project Review (50K+): Admin with public input and advisory boards;
- Boston Civic Design Commission review (100K+ or in certain areas): advisory board with required action prior to permit approval

Design review criteria include references to building height, massing, materials. Environmental criteria include a project's impacts on sunlight, wind, groundwater, and air and water quality. Transportation review, undertaken in coordination with the Transportation Department, focuses on the impacts of traffic, parking, and examines proposed changes to rights-of-way, encroachments on public space, curb cuts, and requirements of the Boston Air Pollution Control Commission. Employment impact review focuses on the nature and quality of jobs likely to result from the project and the degree to which those jobs will be accessible to Boston residents. Other review criteria include impacts on both infrastructure systems and capacities, and on historic resources. While equity is not explicitly integrated community participation is encouraged and supported throughout the review process.

PNF

Project Notification Form (PNF) Filed Filing the PNF Initiates active review of the project and a 30-day public comment period. PNFs include a project summary and renderings, transportation analysis, and environmental impact analysis. It must also indicate the project's ability to achieve LEED Certification (as of 2006), a Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency Checklist (2013), and an Accessibility Checklist (2014).

↓

PNF Distribution to COB, City and State Agencies, and the IAG – The BPDA sends the PNF to City and State Agencies, local elected officials, and others. These agencies, the IAG and all interested stakeholders comment during the 30-day public comment period.

↓

Scoping Session – Scoping sessions are the official project review "kickoffs" and discussions, that include the developer, BPDA staff, interested City and State Agencies, and the IAG. All participants review the PNF prior to the Scoping Session.

↓↓↓

IAG-Developer Meeting – Developers meet with the IAG prior to hosting a community meeting to discuss project impacts and possible mitigation and/or community benefits. Mitigation often relates to infrastructure and public realm improvements. Community benefits typically involve funding for neighborhood initiatives.

↓↓↓

Community Meeting – The developer presents the project proposal to the community, during the 30-day public comment period. Developers may meet with community groups prior to this meeting to learn about potential community concerns.

↓↓↓

*Boston Civic Design Commission (BCDC) Review – Projects ≥100,000 square feet are reviewed by BCDC for impacts on the public realm. BCDC is composed of professional volunteer architects and meets monthly. BCDC review is advisory, but BCDC approval is required prior to BPDA Board approval.

↓

Scoping Determination Issued – If the comments and meetings demonstrate that the PNF has adequately addressed potential impacts and mitigation, the project will proceed to the BPDA Board for approval and issuance of a Scoping Determination Waiving Further Review. If the BPDA finds that the PNF does not adequately address impacts and mitigation, the BPDA will issue a Scoping Determination requiring supplemental information represented by the Draft Project Impact Report (DPIR).

Approved or **DPIR**

DESIGN GUIDELINES

In lieu of design guidelines, a comprehensive list of BRA submission requirements clarify expectations based on project size. Developers of large projects (Large Project Review), typically those greater than 50,000 square feet in size, are required to provide much of this information. Smaller proposals (Small Project Review) provide only the information appropriate to their context and complexity, as defined by the BRA.

In addition to the submittal requirements, the BRA reserves the right to request financial projections for a proposed project if a proponent cites financial limitations for non-compliance with BRA modifications.

DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

Design review is an integrated element of the full review process. The BRA's Urban Design department, in conjunction with the planning and economic development staff, considers the compatibility of a project with its surroundings in terms of massing, height, materials, ornamentation, fenestration, landscaping, and access.

The elements of ongoing design review include:

- Project Schematics,
- Design Development plans,
- Contract Document plans, and
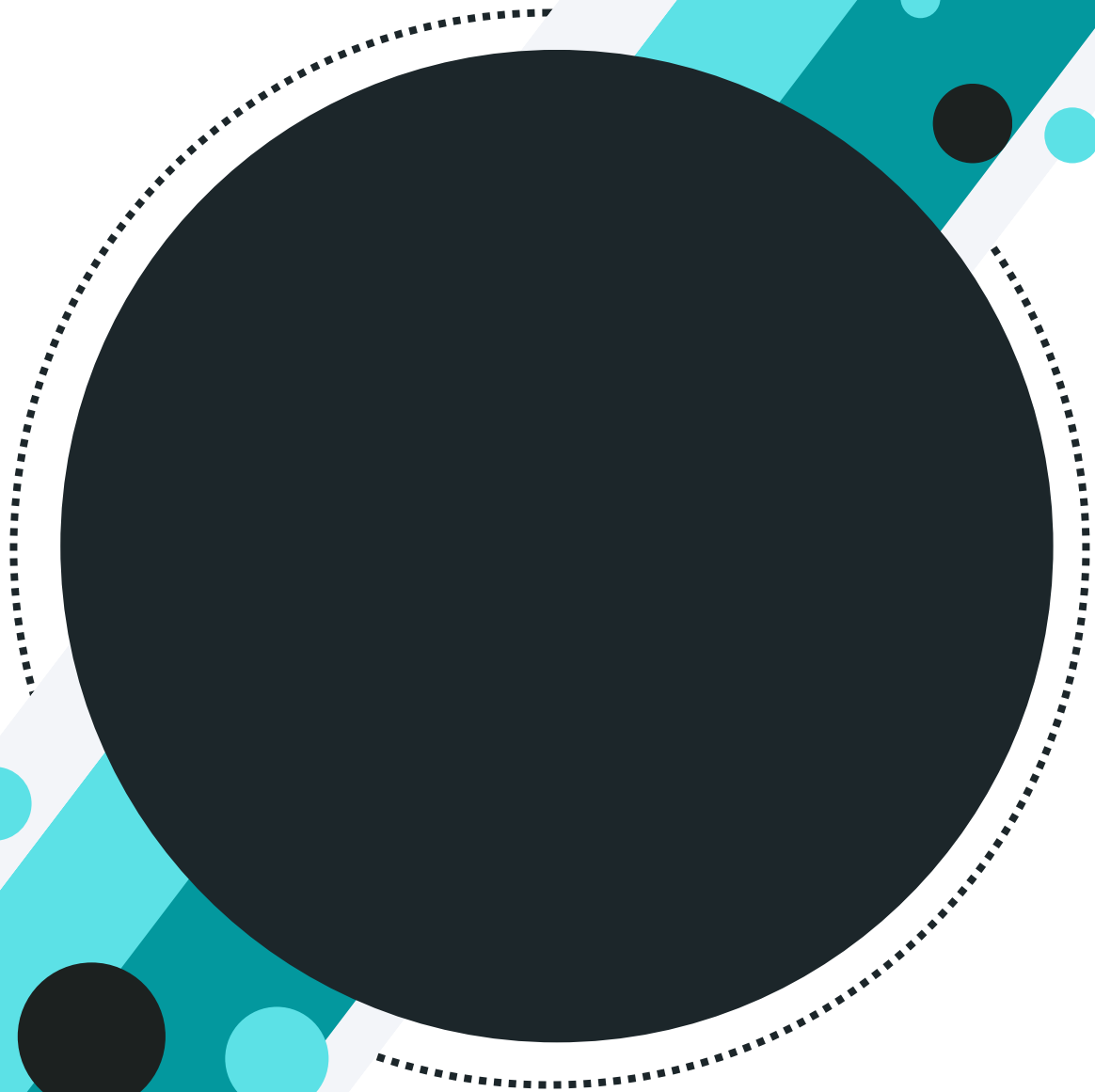- Construction Inspection,

Design review often begins prior to the submission of a Letter of Intent, and is fully engaged in the early stages of schematic design.

Projects larger than a single site will generally be asked to include a larger context area in their urban design analysis, showing relationships and connections to the neighborhood or district, its uses, its character, and its infrastructure.

As part of the design review process, certain projects are subject to Article 28 of the Code – Boston Civic Design Commission ("BCDC") review. BCDC review considers the relationship of a proposed project to the public realm of the City of Boston. Generally those projects at or over 100,000 gross square feet, or located within PDAs or IMP areas, are subject to review by the BCDC. The BCDC may also, at its discretion, choose to review proposed projects of somewhat less than 100,000 SF if such are determined to have a significant potential impact upon the public realm of the neighborhood or City. The BCDC is advisory to the BRA and must act on a project before approvals may be obtained through the BRA. In general, both BCDC and BRA Article 80 review take place during the development of the schematic design for a given project.

APPENDIX H

PUBLIC COMMENTS RECEIVED DURING SLI RESPONSE PERIOD

FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	COMMENTS
Irene	Wall	Please post some information on the membership of the group and their affiliation. This will help to understand the scope of the recommendations offered.
William	Gagne-Maynard	The current design review process is inefficient, inequitable and damaging to our city. The current process slows needed development within our city and focuses on minor changes to the detriment of our city as a whole. We need to make it easier to build new housing with the city and the current process makes that all too difficult.
Chris	Vanderwarker	Team, My concern is with design review at all. We have zoning rules which are quite robust. I do not understand why an unelected group of volunteers has any role in development. I also worry it promotes and incentives vocal constituents to litigate fear of change at the expense of those seeking housing and opportunity. Feels more like a tool to stifle housing production, raise home prices, and benefit existing property owners at the expense of future citizens It also feels like something that makes density (e.g. greener) living harder, the opposite of what we need to fight climate change. I think in general the idea is antiquated, captured by parochial interests, an impediment to housing affordability and to environmental stewardship. Finally, based on the glut of uninspired midrise I do not even see upside aesthetically. Just send everyone home and build some housing already.
Bill	Bradburd	Please identify on the website who the Design Review stakeholder committee members are and the schedule of the metings
Colin	Versteeg	I think it's frankly absurd that this stakeholder review process does not include representation from the largest stakeholder group - the numerous Seattle residents who face unaffordable housing due to the delays and machinations introduced by the design review process. This process should include representation from tenant advocacy or livable community groups, to counter the racist influence of architects and wealthy homeowners which do not want Seattleites without millions of dollars to buy single family homes to live in their communities.

If design review is continued, it should prioritize pushing for floor plans which make family sized units available, over petty ego-driven disputes about facades or massing. |
Graham	Golbuff	The design review process is well intentioned but overly cumbersome. Between climate change and housing costs, circumstances are dire, and we should not let process or administration allow perfection to be the enemy of good. Please drastically revamp the program to allow development to easily progress.
Katherine	Anderson	Design review is hampering the construction of housing necessary to address the housing crisis. It adds tens of thousands of dollars to the cost of units over trivial aesthetic issues. It needs to be abolished asap.
Glenn	Bristol	Design Review is a complete waste of time. Regardless of its original intent, its functional purpose at this point is to allow NIMBYs to prevent new housing from being built. None of the most interesting architecture in this city would withstand this process. It is time to stop pretending. Allowing an unelected board to dictate the look and feel of all new buildings in this city is utter madness, and is a major reason why housing in this city is so scarce and expensive. All of these people need to be thanked for their service and shown the exit door, permanently. I don't want one single dime of my tax dollars spent on design review in the future. Any building that passes building codes can get built unless someone has a real, practical objection to it.
John	Osborne	The Design Review process is broken and exacerbates inequality. The current system prioritizes the opinions of the loudest voices, often those retired or of affluent means, instead of a democratic sample of a neighborhood. The city should solicit opinions from a random sample of residents or have a democratic process like Street Votes, not public meetings tailored to the most educated citizens who have have incentives to oppose development (especially in a housing crisis).

Michael	Bjork	Dear SDIC,
		I am glad to hear the city's official process of design review is coming under scrutiny. While I have not directly worked within the SDIC review process, I have worked on a number of large transportation projects within the City of Seattle and understand how and why process reform is long overdue.

My concerns are the following:
1) The opaque, closed-door process for determining the members on our city's design committees, which is performed almost exclusively done by an internal referral process.
2) These committees, intended to bring a diversity of opinion, have become overly represented by a single profession; architects.
3) The lack of accountability on committee members and the SDIC review process in general.
4) How these committees and processes are intentionally leveraged by citizens of Seattle to intentionally slow or halt reasonable development within our city, and/or add undue cost and complexity to projects.
5) This process only applies to specific types of development with a primary goal of "preserve neighborhood character", but does not include review of single family homes (SFH) which represent a majority of buildings within Seattle.
6) The arbitrary and unpredictable nature in which SDIC committees act.

As part of process reform, I would like to see:
1) Review must either including SFH modifications above a threshold of square footage increase to this same design review to "preserve neighborhood character", or reducing review requirements on all types of construction.
2) Place limits on professional representation on the committees so this process cannot be dominated by a single group of people.
3) Ensure there is a place on these committees for people who are not home owners and others who wish to participate.
4) Add term limits to committee positions to encourage turnover and a diversity of opinion
5) Eliminate the internal referral process and use a method similar to the Seattle Modal Boards to select participants.
6) Create a clear, streamlined process to quickly resolve concerns to ensure design processes and the people who participate with the intent of blocking all change don't create undue burden on developers, residents, buyers, or communities.
7) Further streamlines processes in the vicinity of high capacity and frequent transit corridors; including Link Light Rail, RapidRide, and Transit-Plus corridors as outline in the Transit Master Plan.
7) Engagement with developers, professionals, community members, and architects who have raised concerns and may be afraid of professional retaliation by SDIC committee members.
8) Ensure the design review process cannot be utilized intentionally or unintentionally by citizens to impact development which has otherwise gone though the proper environmental and permitting processes, and meets city building requirements.
8) A note of general support for "Seattle Design Review: Public Statement & Program Recommendations", published by Seattle For Everyone.
9) Create an environment which welcomes our new neighbors, whomever they may be, in a manner which lives up to the inclusive and welcoming values we claim to have as a community.

In general, I am also concerned how long this reform process is scheduled to take and that nothing may come of it. This process appears to have started in November 2021, and the results seven months later is to host a monthly, non-public meeting until December 2022. This does not accurately reflect the need to make change to ensure the safety, affordability, and stability of our city and its people. By taking years for this process to reform a broken process, the SDIC and other aspects of Government could very well appear to be waiting for public attention and pressure to die out rather than meaningfully reform this review process.

Regards,
Michael Bjork, PE
Transportation Engineer
Wallingford |

Grant	Peltier	Design review as a whole sounds like an amazing idea in principal, but in practice has been misused. Currently, it is drastically slowing the creation of much needed new housing to ease the regions housing shortage. Often, when I've attended design review meetings they seem to focus on all of the people who will never live in the building being discussing. For example, much time is spent on brick color and color palettes when those will have minimal impact on future residents. If design review was trying to make the new units more livable by adding more 2/3-bedroom units and more windows that would be great! In short the process either needs to either 1)Only apply to very large buildings 2)apply to all buildings including single family (the worst option) 3) change its focus to livability 4)allow for members outside of the architectural community 5)be completely disbanded- we are in a housing crisis Thanks, Grant

| Gabriel | Briggs | Thank you for taking the time to review the design review process. I am in total agreement with the concept of encouraging more aesthetically pleasing buildings in our city.
However, I find the design review process unfair and costly. I believe that in its current state, the program is causing significantly more harm than good and significant changes are needed.
I consider the following to be the key issues with the program.
Firstly, that the current zoning code has so many unique setback and modulation requirements that it is nearly inevitable that a project must apply for a variance. Actually following all of the rules is leads to buildings that most would consider odd looking, due to an excess amount of faces and angles. This means all buildings must go through the review.
Secondly, the cost and the time. They city has estimate the cost per unit of design review is around $45,000- $50,000. This is a substantial cost to the builders that ends up getting passed on to the end users. This drives up the cost of housing, which in a time of housing crisis goes against our goals of getting more people housed. I also believe it is particularly inequitable, as it ends up harming those at the bottom of the income ladder the most.
Thirdly, the lack of consistency. If the boards are allowed to continue, I believe the design review boards need to be able to more accurately tell what they are looking for on the first review. Continued reviews with changing guidelines take time, add costs and make the entire process a guessing game.
Fourth, the lack of result. Ultimately I believe the design review process to be unsuccessful due to it inability to create better buildings. This is not something I see as fixable. I have seen numerous buildings that I personally consider "ugly" get approved while others that I quite like are forced to go back for continued review. It is impossible to satisfy all, and I understand that my views are not going to be the same as others. This is precisely why the program is destined for failure - because people have very different views about what a good building is. The design review board does not guarantee good buildings, only buildings that they personally like.
Fifthly, and finally. I believe the process has been weaponized. When building in areas with higher civic engagement, there is a much larger push by neighborhood groups to comment negatively on the designs. This means that these buildings go through additional reviews, and often have to downsize, or otherwise make their buildings less efficient. The extra reviews and modulation changes both add significant costs, which means less development in wealthier areas and more in poorer areas. This leads to a less equitable city and decreases economic mobility, since we are forcing renters into poorer areas. I hope this message finds the right ears. I thank you for your time. It is a bold step to advocate the elimination of these boards, but I believe it to be the only correct one. Thank you. |
| Mary Ellen | Russell | Design review badly needs to be reformed or eliminated. It has become a hurdle that slows down development, adds cost, and exacerbates our critical housing shortage. Nobody has the right to tell me what color I will paint my house, and nobody pretends to have that right for new single family homes. Why are multi-family homes slowed down by design review's opinions on aesthetic elements like cladding material and color? This red tape doesn't result in good design and is just plain unfair. The scope and power of design review should be dramatically reduced. Renters have the right to housing too, and allowing a small number of people to slow the process of building badly needed homes during an ongoing homelessness emergency is absolutely unconscionable. |

| Anthony | Gill | Thank you for conducting this review. I think it's extremely important that process improvement be an ongoing process and I'm concerned that this is the first time in the past decade that the community has been asked to weigh in on how the Design Review Board system is working.

First, I want to note that I think the intent of the program as originally designed was noble, and I have no doubt that many of the participants within it are acting with the best intentions and only desire to serve the community.

However, I am deeply concerned with the way that design review has been used by some community members and even some internal-to-the-process stakeholders over the past ten years to delay much-needed housing, including projects which include affordable housing through the MFTE and MHA programs. The Queen Anne Safeway project is one prominent example of a process which took far longer than it needed, and as such delayed much needed housing across three presidential administrations. It is the city's responsibility to create an environment which is conducive to the delivery of housing, to ensure everyone who wants to live in Seattle can do so. In other words, regardless of the original INTENT of the program, the OUTCOMES are not meeting the community's need anymore.

To that end, I would ask that this body carefully consider significant process enhancements to ensure that housing cannot be needlessly delayed by design review:

– Set a maximum number of design review meetings which may be held for a project (I'd say three total meetings). If a board's concerns cannot be adequately addressed within this time frame, design review approval should not be withheld (i.e. should be automatically approved).

– Increase the diversity of representation on the boards. I want to be clear that this is the minimum expectation I have through this project, and it doesn't address the fundamental concerns I have with design review. But it would be worthwhile to add more renters, developer representatives, residents, and housing advocates to the boards. The current structure favors architects who are by nature weedsy but who have little to no lived experience of the issues they tend to raise.

– Eliminate public comment from DRB meetings. It's not mandatory to have public comment, and too often the comments have nothing to do with the issues within DRB's purview. This would eliminate the ability of neighborhood activists to sow concern about a project and needlessly delay it.

– Ensure that DRB approvals/denials may be transparently appealed.

– Ensure staff are available to assist developers in interpreting DRB guidance, and give staff the power to interpret without DRB input. This would also eliminate needless delays and allow SDCI more authority in the process.

– Greatly expand the use of administrative design review, which is used in other Puget Sound communities and is much more transparent.

I understand the point of DR when it was instituted, but I am starting to think it may have overstayed its welcome. Quality design is important, but we also need to ensure that the process of building new housing is transparent, straightforward, and fair. Our housing crisis demands it. |
| Scott | Berkley | The design review process is broken and should be abolished. Months of delays make housing more expensive and no more beautiful. If needed, let's have clear and objective quality standards that can be reviewed administratively. Arbitrary decisions by boards hand picked to conform with an anti growth agenda are not democratic or accountable and have no place in a city that values democracy and has pledged to flight climate change. End design review for housing NOW! |

John	Borwick	Design review should be advisory. We need to prioritize building more housing more quickly. Design review makes housing more expensive because it takes longer and requires more effort to get approval. Design review makes designs less interesting because developers have an incentive to choose safe designs that have been approved in the past.
M	P	Cancel design review.
Kiarash	Rahbar	Hello, Having a Design Review process unnecessarily slows down the building of new homes in a time where the city desperately needs to build much more housing capacity. Furthermore, it's unfair that we only force multi unit buildings to go through the process and exclude single family homes. While the aesthetics of a building may not be "ideal" to some, ultimately what's more important is that more homes get built faster to alleviate the very low supply.
Anna	Kawski	I feel that design review should be removed as a part of the approval process - it not only becomes, but actively gets leveraged, as a tool specifically to slow down and/or block housing projects, when this city DESPERATELY needs more dense housing to be approved and built. I don't feel I am being hyperbolic when I call our situation regarding available housing a "crisis" (whether it's affordable is another topic), and details, such as brick color, should not only 1) not be something that can block a project, but also 2) not be available TO BE INTENTIONALLY LEVERAGED as a blocker by those opposed to a project for reasons other than the detail, in this case brick color itself.

Eric	Aderhold	I don't believe the design review program should exist at all.
		We have an ongoing housing shortage. Any delay imposed onto housing construction needs to be viewed with a very critical lens. How terrible-looking does a building need to be in order to justify making people wait months or even years longer to move into their new homes, with the bank charging interest and therefore driving up costs for the whole time? How much does the appearance of a building actually improve with these delays imposed by the design review board? I'd love to see an example where a building was improved so much by this process that we can all agree it was worth the wait, but so far I have not yet seen one.
		Secondly, the results of the design review program seem to be bland, cookie-cutter architecture. Architects clearly look toward what has been approved in the past in order to improve their chances of their next designs being reviewed. I'd love to see some truly creative buildings go up, buildings that aren't designed to blandly fit in as well as possible to their surroundings. The design review program actively stifles that creativity.
		For these reasons I think the city would be better off without the program at all. If it is to be continued, I have a few improvements to suggest: 1) Have a transparent application and appointment process with oversight from the city council. I have read that a number of qualified "pro-housing"-identifying individuals have applied to be on these review boards, but have not yet been accepted by the city staff who manage this process. The local community/residential seats should be filled by community members who are not architecture/development/real estate professionals if at all possible. A majority of the seats are already reserved for professionals in the field. 2) Speed up the process. Guarantee applicants that the board will act on their proposal within a certain maximum amount of time -- weeks not months. If the board cannot meet this deadline, the building can move forward without design review. Subsequent meetings should also be scheduled within a few weeks (not months) after the initial meeting, else the building can move forward.
		Thanks for listening. Please eliminate this program so we can have more homes built more quickly and more inexpensively.
Morris	Sharp	Design review is currently just delaying needed housing from being built for very superficial reasons, and this just adds to the cost of already expensive housing. There have been too many design review meetings devoted to the color of brick that will be on the buildings. There's no reason we should be delaying housing because of the color of the proposed building.
		Additionally, even though only some slots are reserved for architects, it seems like almost all slots are filled with architects, instead of other community members. This means that architects are delaying buildings that are being built by their competitors! They have a significant conflict of interest in these proceedings.
		Please reform the process to remove needless delays.
Nick	Wishaar	Seattle Design Review is out of control! The purpose of design review boards should be to prevent clearly unattractive or problematic designs from creating a long term blight on the city; our board is instead using their power to micromanage every little of every building and imposing their strict aesthetic biases upon the entire city. On top of this, their increasingly obscene demands add months and up to millions of dollars in added costs to projects. Unacceptable!

Robbie	Cunningham Adams	I'm a graduate student at the Evans School of Public Policy & Governance. I co-lead the student interest group Evans Coalition for Housing. My graduate consulting work consisted of cost containment strategies for the Washington Housing Finance Commission. I say all that to say I'm intimately aware of cost drivers in housing construction and the affordable housing crisis in Seattle. And with that I have the knowledge of the immense damage design review does to our ability to build housing quickly and affordably in the city. It leads to significant delay in housing built which leads to significant cost increases. It is unclear if design review has any positive affect on actual design. Seems everyone complains about the way apartments look these days, and yet those apartments were approved under design review. I hope your work leads to a reasonable compromise that can reduce time spent in design review. But the real solution is the complete abolition of design review. It has almost no upside and endless downsides. It drives up cost, and gives an unrepresentative and tiny group of people inordinate power to obstruct desperately needed housing. More often than not years are spent debating the color of brick. I don't think its unreasonable for us to realize and admit this process is ridiculous. Please consider ending design review. Thank you!
Lee	Pyne-Mercier	I appreciate a beautiful built environment. But it is apparent that the current design review process is not contributing to a more beautiful city, and is causing significant delays and cost increases for construction. It is now a significant contributor to our housing crisis. I think it should be reformed significantly or shut down.
Isak	Linstrom	At a time when rents and housing prices are surging, Seattle desperately needs to increase the supply of housing. Design review adds excessive costs and delays with no tangible benefits, causing homeless and rent burden. If Seattle truly wants to be a progressive, inclusive city for all, it has to address the very real concerns that the housing crisis imposes on it's residents and not cater to the trivial, arbitrary whims of an overly vocal and unrepresentative minority.
Kian	Bradley	Design review in Seattle has been well intentioned, but in practice, is used by wealthy homeowners to discourage more dense development in their neighborhoods. Density reduces the cost of housing and allows for a more efficient public transportation system, which in turn, is good for the environment. We should seek to streamline the design review process as much as possible or do away with it altogether.
Anne	Nonimous	Please look at the history of how this program came to be. In 1989 Seattle voters who did not want the city to continue growing strategically held an election in an off year, and on a special month in order to drive down turnout. The 15% of registered voters who approved it were enough to be considered a majority. And Design Review was born. This is the same inequitable voting suppression we see Republicans deploy in The South, and now we have a chance to progressively review something in our own past and right this historic wrong. You all have the power to change this. Design review, no matter how much opportunity you give it for community input, will always favor the privaleged few to stall change to their neighborhood. Who is this program working for? And who are these buildings for? Are they for the people showing up to say they look ugly, are too tall, or too dense, or are these homes for people who don't get a chance to speak up in support? You must ask yourselves these questions and make an equitable, progressive determination for removing the power of delay from this program.

George	Winn	The design review process should be painless and simple (or nonexistent). Reviewing aesthetic designs slows down housing construction, and increases costs. The design review process should be as quick and easy as possible. Appointed and empowered design review commissions don't seem to create more product (housing) or improve the city. They create red tape that abets climate change, entrenched Nimby's, and the status quo. I hope to move back to Seattle someday and believe that a design review process doesn't improve those chances. Thank you staff and readers for hearing my comments.
Connor	Descheemaker	Please do everything we can to limit design review to focusing on items germane to getting more housing units online. The current process is adding expense exponentially when we are in a housing crisis - more units must come online, and in fact the process should not even be required for affordable housing developments. Current processes privilege homeowners (read: White, wealthy folks) with time and resources to devote to development in their communities, particularly to historically redlined communities. We must do better, and allow more housing to be built faster as part of the means of exiting our housing crisis.
Michael	Girardi	Design reviews have failed to produce any remarkably designed buildings. They're great at slowing construction and adding immense costs to projects. There's no reason for them to continue. The need for more housing is at astronomical levels, and anything that slows its creation should be discarded, if possible.
Joseph	Wyer	I'm writing to comment on both a specific incident and on the regressive impacts regulatory barriers like the design review board have in general. Specific incident: I am not connected with any developers, but I find the recently leaked emails from city planners trying to nudge board membership away from pro-housing viewpoints disappointing. In a famine would one attack people who are pro-farmer? Is there evidence that pro-housing viewpoints of current board membership not valid or represent members of the community? Is there evidence of quid pro quo between members and developers? The answer to all these questions is "obviously not". If anything, being adversarially anti-housing should be disqualifying for board membership or participation in housing policy given the dire shortage of housing we find ourselves in nationwide. This kind of behavior leads me to believe that this institution is unsalvageable, should be abolished, and public hearings should be held on any city actions slowing the construction of new housing. Generally: There is no reason to place barriers to housing construction in the middle of a housing crisis. Placing subjective and arbitrary review processes in the way of home builders does not serve the majority of people in the city. Aesthetic reviews in a housing crisis are an extreme act of privileged gatekeeping. It serves existing home owners and landlords by removing competition and stifling change. It is a disservice to renters and young families who carry the brunt of higher prices. There is significant evidence in the academic economic literature that these kinds of regulatory restrictions are the cause of the housing shortage, have provided regressive wealth transfers to entrenched already wealthy home owners, and have held back the prosperity of the country at large (look up Professor Enrico Moretti's work, for starters I highly recommend his book "the new geography of jobs"). Given the regressive effect this institution inherently has I recommend pausing it for 5 years at a minimum in favor of de facto approving new builds, but ideally abolishing it. If anyone would like to discuss the research supporting the progressive benefits of pro-housing policy feel free to email me joewyer88@gmail.com.
Nicholas	Righi	This is a needless burden on building more housing while we're in the midst of a housing crisis. Ideally get rid of the whole thing, but barring that fix the maximum amount of time a design review can take (<3 months) and make the process more accountable and transparent.
Megan	Kruse	Thank you for your thoughtful comments on what issues Design Review should be addressing and whether early community outreach is achieving what it was designed to do. To understand the range of community experiences with design review, please publish the topics for future stakeholder group meetings and allow members to review and address public comments. Thank you.

Jeremy	Swirsley	There is no reason to subject new housing to design review. We are in a housing crisis. Our goal should be to build as much housing as possible. Give the builders the discretion on aesthetics and let our city grow organically. Otherwise all will we ever permit is the projects that meet the narrow tastes of a narrow self selecting group of architects.
Ron	Davis	Design review has failed the people of Seattle and should be abolished immediately for three reasons: First, it is peddled as participatory democracy, but in reality, it's a powerful vehicle for elite capture. Second, instead of improving the beauty of our built environment, it makes it more banal and self-similar, and in any case, our buildings aren't known for looking a bit better than any surrounding city. And finally, these reviews are supposed to be for the good of our communities, but have harmed them and thousands of our citizens, sometimes permanently. This harm has overwhelmingly fallen on poor and BIPOC citizens. Shame on us! Let's take each in turn. First, design review is not an effective way to consult the community. It is a textbook example of poor process design and the perverse consequences that come with it. Public input structured this way is famous for fanning the flames of inequity, because people with means have an easier time showing up. They are also more motivated, because they benefit from the status quo (that's why they have means!), and change threatens that. And they are also better organized, because their losses are more concentrated than are the benefits of new housing, which flow to thousands more people, but over time. This dynamic is a similar driver of corn subsidies in the US and the fact that Medicare cannot negotiate for lower prescription drug prices. But in Seattle, we've made the hijacking process even easier. We vested ultimate decision making power in volunteers drawn largely from this same social tier, so their incentives are misaligned with public service, whatever their intention is. Their power is immense, even if their reasoning is often petty. The result is many projects that cost millions more than they would, and an even more unrepresentative process. But that's not all. This already inequitable orientation isn't just set up for hijacking by rich, white, interest groups. Those behind the scenes appear to be deliberately pursuing that path, or one that at least aligns with the interests of single family homeowners, as evidenced by the silencing of housing advocates in meetings, or the public records requests that show that city staff are trying to maintain this gross perspective imbalance and keep advocates off of boards. Their diversity targets do nothing more than woke-wash heir real result, which is protecting the elite status quo. Second, such inequity would be an absurd price to pay even if it meant we had particularly beautiful or interesting architecture. But to add insult to this immense injury, our architecture is distinguished, if anything, by being undistinguished. This isn't just because the same people review every building, and architects can look to the past to see what gets passed, and so we inevitably drive toward more conformity and less creativity, although that certainly happens. But it's also because, even then, the conformity that is created isn't conformity to anything particularly notable or beautiful or different than what can be found in cities without such an onerous and harmful process.

| Ron | Davis | (Continued from previous comment...)

Finally, all this comes at a cost that is more tangible than the privileging of one group's voice over another. And that cost comes because that privileged voice is ushering in real, life-altering consequences, and they are not for the better.

Given that we in Seattle love to talk about how much we believe in science, we can look to the science to see the consequences of juicing the cost of construction and gumming up the stream of supply in Seattle. The science is pretty much unequivocal in showing that housing supply has a significant effect on prices for the middle class and on overall levels of homelessness. The science is also clear that access to neighborhoods with good schools, parks and transit creates upward mobility for disadvantaged kids, but that limited housing supply makes it harder to get that access. Economists have shown that shutting people out of desirable cities like ours reduces national and local prosperity. We also know that less housing here means more on the periphery, which means longer trips and more traffic. Which leads to the final insight that science has shown - multi-family housing in cities is far better for the climate than the alternative.

But we don't even need the science to see what our eyes and our pocketbooks can tell us. Even many of our well-off residents can barely keep up, and the immense suffering on the street shows the catastrophic consequences for people with lesser means. Our streets clog with traffic, our parks are filled with people who are unable to even get a roof over their head, and our volatile skies fill with smoke - and we continue to dither and pursue policies that exacerbate all of these - despite what the science says and what we claim about our own values.

And, speaking of our own values, the city has been quite clear that we need to pay attention to who benefits and who gets harmed, and it even created a racial equity toolkit for that purpose. I am grateful to see that this toolkit was highlighted on the design review site. It is notable that the toolkit requires, among other things, that we determine the benefits and burdens of a policy, and that we then advance opportunities and minimize harm for racial groups that have been subject to exclusion.

In other words, the toolkit requires us abolish design review. The benefits of the process - more access to power for people with time and means, and more wealth for those who can create artificial scarcity, flow to the richer, older, homeowning members of our city. While the burdens, less access to power, unaffordable housing, sometimes unattainable housing and the trauma of the street, flows downward toward the young, the poor, renters and to racial minorities who always bear the brunt of our failed policy experiments.

Abolish design review, and abolish it now. |
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| Amy | Richards | I wish design review would be abolished. It's one of those ideas that looks great on paper, but doesn't work in practice. Design review adds costs to projects by delaying them over superficial details, which means less stuff gets built. The board tends to only select their friends/professional architects despite getting applications from folks outside these communities. Design review doesn't seem to have any real oversight or accountability to the community. I have seen no evidence that design review results in better buildings - but lots of evidence that it causes delays and cost increases over minor details like brick color. It's also inequitable because single family homes are not subject to design review, while apartment buildings are. Design review just isn't providing any value and is restricting Seattle's ability to house all its residents. |

Paul	Chapman	Abolish design review. It's classist, racist, blocks housing, makes housing more expensive. Just get rid of it.
Markus	Johnson	First off, huge red flag to the legitimacy of the racial equity toolkit (RET) when from the top say design review WILL continue. If you can't even consider the possibility that there is no such thing as a racially just equitable design review, that such a thing is just wishful thinking between two incompatible desires. Then your RET is illegitimate. I mean its kinda insanity to think that with all of the evidence of almost 30 years of design review and inequitable outcomes, that keeping design review is an absolute answer already known. Now if this is more of a political mandate that should be shared transparently, though again that hurts the whole legitimacy. On slide 10, racial equity should not primarily (or at all) essentially mean access to a process. Equity is all the measurable real material conditions and options to good choices that white people have the advantages of. Equity is nonwhite people comfortably able to afford where they live for multiple generations the way subsidization of single-family detached white neighborhoods provided that advantage to white people. It's having access to homes by water, homes with views, homes with parks, homes with schools, and homes in the hills, without having the requisite need of being able to afford the most costly homes in the city. Additionally, having BIPOC people participate in a process that serves them disadvantage is not equity. It probably falls more in line with equality, though it's bad equality because all your doing is allowing outsized control for now both white and nonwhite people to exclude whoever they can. and exclusion is not something to strive for. Back to the RET, there are four requirements it says it has. Numbers 2 and 4 connect strongly to each other but are rarely done. Being racially explicit about impacted communities usually comes from a paradigm in which race means BIPOC and white is the default, control, the standard. Rarely do analyses like this look and interrogate whiteness, they fail to problematize the advantages (or positive impacts) given to white communities and question whether that white community is doing better simply because this process or policy is artificially giving them benefits. I mean why create a process where primarily white homeowners in predominately single-family detached urban fabrics have influence over denser forms of housing neighboring them (excusing single-family homes from the process altogether), that they themselves will never live in, they just see it (people spend most of their time inside their homes or buildings just to add), if not to give deference to white aesthetics and advantages to white homeowners in the growth of property values/rents due to lack of supply? Slide 21, called project framing, there is a disconnect between your definitions. Guardrails don't prevent structural racism, the same way pruning a white advantage tree doesn't turn the tree into a racially equitable tree. Transformation does that, meaning killing off the roots of the bad tree or destroying the old structure is how you get those things from reproducing what they were made to do. Also, people are stronger influencers of culture than housing is. Build the housing to keep people and the culture will stay as well (though people and times change which means culture will never be static, worrying about culture over someone's housing is wrong in my opinion.) Again, be open to the consideration that two desires are incompatible and a decision needs to be made for one or the other without the illusion of both. I had a lot to add on this subject. As I have a graduate thesis more or less analyzing how design review perpetuates white supremacy/advantage and could never produce racial equity. I'll end with I think it is problematic that SDCI is in charge of this review, seeing that ostensively there are probably people in the department who like and benefit from this system. Bellevue, Vancouver BC, Vienna, and cities of Japan compare.

David	Rickard	I'm concerned that the design review doesn't seem to have an avenue to assess the downsides of mandating a particular architectural change. An unexpected change required from subjective criteria can have massive impacts on project scheduling and cost, which can dramatically increase the cost of housing and/or reduce housing availability. For example, a nice-looking brick wall might be worth an extra $5,000, but I've seen a project where a mandated brick wall added close to a million dollars to the project cost. I think it was done because the design review committee just wanted it to look nice, but they didn't have to pay for it. They have veto power so it's their way or the highway. If the design review board was given a fixed budget to beautify the city and had to pick and choose where to allocate the money; maybe the city would end up with more affordable and abundant housing.
John	Akamatsu	The design review process has been instrumental in keeping many poorly-designed and cheaply-built structures out of our neighborhoods. The simple projects that don't exceed the expected size and density can make it through without review. But when projects such as the Roxbury on 18th/Denny try to "re-address" itself so it can avoid rear lot set backs, or attempt to pass off open (green) space as parking too appease neighbors, then something like DR is needed to stop this. Not everyone's taste will be appeased, but massing, noise, privacy, and good neighborliness should prevail. Most of the groups seeking to remove DR and to open up development are not trying to build more homes for the needy. They are building the least expensive building they can and selling it at the highest price, which is their right. However, they are not entitled to build something not outright permitted without the say of the community.
Prajin	Uttamchandani	Homelessness is a housing problem. To remedy this, we need to build more housing across the board -- affordable, missing-middle, and luxury. The design review process is one of many steps that drastically slows this process down in Seattle. Affordable housing projects should be completely exempt from it, while its impact should also be lessened in missing-middle and luxury housing projects. Rather than being used to justify changes like "This bench should be changed to wood" and slowing a project down, it should be used for meaningful changes, like "This project is unsustainable and likely to require renovation within a decade. Consider a broader rework of materials and structure".
Jazmen	Smith	Please stop building vast amounts of apartments by already very rich construction companies in Lakecity neighborhood in Seattle. It was an intelligent low rise building area. You have enabled out of state families from anti-colored people from CA, AZ, Tx etc to move into affordable Lakecity. Please stop this attack on our peaceful life. Old large trees are cut down. Access to sight the sky from windows blicked by ugly tall 3 floor "cottages"(?). Please leave us alone. We watched how millionaires and billionaires profited from the sound transit while you stopped Metro Bus 522 taking our children and parents to downtown library or 5th ave etc. The commission is not wise. Please stop. Property taxes are increasing to make whom rich? Stop polluting the soil & environment with toxic building cement and material. Our children are suffering from encroachment. This is unjust, harmful to health, and unnecessary endeavor to attract rich racist californians, texans, arizonians etc. Please stop the building madness. Thank you

Anthony	Gill	I *may* have already left a comment (too many public engagement opportunities!), but I wanted to leave some thoughts on this process and potential improvements. Bear with me as these range from broad (significantly reduce the use of DRBs) to narrow (eliminate public comment). – First, I see the value of design review as a practice (that is, reviewing the design of a project to ensure it meets certain standards or guidelines). I'm not convinced that doing design review through Design Review Boards is the most equitable process. Alternatively, Seattle might move to a model more similar to what is seen in Bellevue, where design review occurs administratively as part of the master permit application. Seattle should expand Administrative Design Review (ADR) to cover most or all projects. – Second, perhaps the jurisdiction of the Design Review Boards could be reduced. Right now, DRBs cover most major projects across the city, but not every project needs a deep level of community engagement (see above) around design. Instead, maybe DRBs are only mandatory for public (i.e. City, School District, Sound Transit) projects, but voluntary for every other type of project. – Third, I don't think there's a reason that these need to be public meetings with full public comment. I've seen way too many meetings (that I've watched) go off the rails, and not always due to a bombastic public––sometimes from overzealous facilitators or from developers who rightfully have questions. I think it's worth asking whether it serves the public for these meetings to be public and have a public comment period. What are we trying to accomplish? Would our ends be better served if these meetings were closed-to-the-public, or if they didn't have a public comment period? That may sound like a way to "avoid public scrutiny," but I actually think this is a case where the public comment/interaction actually ADDS to the inequitable outcomes that we are concerned about. If design is the issue, and the public aren't regarded as design experts, then perhaps the public need not attend.
Jim	Luce	"classist, equity," sounds like you have alientatrdvthe far left. Politics should play no role in your work.
Drew	Collins	Please make design review a solely advisory body. We do not need design review on housing during a housing affordability crisis. Design review has not shown its value in the past, and serves to make housing more expensive and ugly in our city.
Amy	Broska	I'm a designer at a firm that specializes in affordable housing. I'm one of the people tasked with creating the design review packet. People in our firm do not like making the packet. It can take multiple months to create, and our clients could really use the time and energy we spend on the packet going towards other more critical tasks to the design. Please keep in mind that most of the time we don't get too much feedback from the administrative design review meetings that changes the actual design.
Miriam	Hinden	Please publish the agenda for the upcoming meeting on September 28th. Also - is this meeting available for the public to watch while in session?
Nigel	Veach	I support reforming the design review process - as it stands, the design review process adds unnecessary time and delays to housing construction in the Seattle area. I support eliminating the design review process for all housing projects (or at least increasing the threshold before a housing development is required to undergo one), making all design review meetings online, and drastically reducing the number of design review guidelines. I also support reducing the fees charged by City Planner.

| Patrick | Taylor | I noticed that all the links to the studies and other documents no longer work. Could you please fix them or direct the public to were the information now lives? Thanks.

And I would also like to add my support to efforts to severely curtail the design review process both in scope and time. It does not add substantially to the quality of design in most cases (and the cases where it does could be handled through code such as the street level use section of the land use code) but does cause delay and coast in the midst of a housing affordability crisis. |
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December 13, 2022

Dear Mayor Harrell and Councilmembers,

AIA Seattle, a membership organization of more than 2600 architects, planners, designers, and allied professionals, supports meaningful Design Review reform and welcomes today's legislation to remove barriers to create affordable housing. For decades, AIA Seattle has advocated for Design Review that is efficient, transparent, and consistent, and currently participates in the Stakeholder Group convened by request of City Council to SDCI to provide a report on Design Review program outcomes, process improvements, and equity. The strategic imperatives of AIA Seattle are climate, housing, and JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) which inform our recommendations.

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The findings brought forward by the Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) demonstrate the need to align the intentions of Design Review with the way it is practiced and experienced. AIA Seattle recommends transformational change around the tenets brought forward through the RET and transactional change.

Transformational Change Recommendations
AIA Seattle recommends a Design Review process which centers racial equity, work that leads with race to achieve equity, defined as just and fair access to opportunity and resources in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. In the context of Design Review, racial equity requires a process which will:

1. **Identify neighborhoods with high disparities, especially in housing, health, and socioeconomic measurements**.

2. **Build community capacity in high disparity neighborhoods**.
   a. Establish community relationships before the pre-submittal conference.
   b. Coordinate public process through Community Liaisons paid by the City and selected from the community.
   c. Clarify the process and communications in place-based engagements.
   d. Use an inclusive framework for community engagement.

3. **Reward projects which can demonstrate responsiveness to community-driven needs and center lived experiences.**
   The City should develop Equity Guidelines and reward projects which can demonstrate consideration of the Guidelines with expedited process and flexibility. Equity Guidelines should support design responsive to:
   • Discriminatory historic zoning practices

- Housing affordability and ownership
- Climate change
- Livability of neighborhoods in the context of displacement
- Access and connectivity to services and infrastructure
- Issues most relevant to the neighborhood and site

4. **Support housing affordability and ownership.**
   a. Shorten review time - expedited review with predictable timeframe.
   b. Exempt rental and homeownership affordable housing projects from design review.

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Transactional Change Recommendations
AIA Seattle recommends a Design Review process which addresses persistent process problems. The process should deliver quality design, eliminate extra costs and reduce the amount of time it takes for projects to be approved. In addition, it should identify thresholds for minimum performance to reward good design with expedited process and flexibility. Effective Design Review process change will:

1. **Reduce**
   a. the overall review timeline and number of meetings for projects.
   b. packet requirements and focus on the design of a single alternative.
   c. the number of Design Guidelines, identify priority guidelines during the pre-submittal conference and remove the neighborhood guidelines.

2. **Provide**
   a. opportunity for the applicant to present within the Administrative Design Review process to remove the current "black box" process.
   b. an Ombudsperson who oversees the process and coordinates with other departments.
   c. better alignment with other departments such as SDOT and SPU.

3. **Include**
   a. planner and board member training focused on creating efficiency, predictability and consistency while reducing subjectivity with focus on the established priority Design Guidelines.
   b. a single consolidated board to produce more efficiency, predictability, and consistency.

c.   thresholds for minimum performance to reward better design and more sustainable design with expedited process and flexibility to meet code.
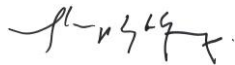
AIA Seattle has participated for decades in advocating for Design Review reform and provides these recommendations with the intention of seeing real transformational and transactional change in the process. AIA Seattle is prepared to work hand in hand on administrative and legislative changes with the SDCI, OPCD, the Mayor's office and Seattle City Council to ensure that meaningful change occurs. AIA Seattle urges reforms which will center racial equity and lead to an efficient, transparent, and consistent process for all stakeholders.

AIA Seattle

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Gladys Ly-Au Young, AIA, NOMA
SLI Stakeholder Group Representative
Co-chair, AIA Seattle Honor Awards

Matt Hutchins, AIA, CPHD
Co-chair, AIA Seattle Public Policy Board
AIA Seattle Board of Directors
AIA Strategic Council

March 14, 2023

City of Seattle
600 4th Ave
Seattle, WA 98102

SDCI, OPCD, Office of the Mayor, & City Council:

Re: Design Review Statement of Legislative Intent ("SLI") <u>SDCI-004-A-001</u>

We thank the Office of the Mayor, City Council, OPCD, and SDCI for undertaking the important work to understand—and recommend improvements—to the Seattle Design Review program outcomes, processes, and equity through the City Council-directed Statement of Legislative Intent ("SLI") <u>SDCI-004-A-001</u>. The Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection ("SDCI") and their consultant team convened the final SLI <u>stakeholder meeting</u> on January 18, 2023 and are expected to release a report in Spring 2023 summarizing the results from this stakeholder process. We are writing to provide comment on the following:

A. <u>Background:</u> We'll review the scope and purpose of the SLI and what we've observed about the stakeholder process so far.

B. <u>Process Expectations</u>. We expect report recommendations and future legislation to address *all aspects of the SLI* and the *full range of SLI stakeholder feedback*. Regardless of how the SLI process went in the eyes of each stakeholder, we are united in the recognition that bold program reform is needed. At a minimum, this includes program changes that can:

 a. **Decrease program timelines and complexity while supporting equitable public engagement and building community capacity** (*ex: impose enforceable timelines, reduce packet requirements and meetings, reduce the number of projects subject to Design Review, etc.*)

 b. **Increase program predictability, consistency, and accountability** (*ex: create a professional board, ombudsperson, planner/board training, etc.*)

 c. **Simplify and reduce guidelines** (*ex: consider reduced, ascertainable, and non-subjective guidelines; limit deliberations to priority guidelines*)

 d. **Support early public engagement to shape design** (ex: *clarify communication, inform interested community, be equitably responsive to community needs, etc.*)

 e. **Get final Design Review reform legislation passed before November 2023.**

C. <u>Appendix</u>: On page five, we provide more granular program recommendations based on the work of SLI stakeholders and the Seattle for Everyone ("S4E") coalition.

Background

As we've commented previously, Seattle for Everyone believes that Design Review, as it currently operates in our city, is <u>broken</u>. **This SLI process presents a critical opportunity for Seattle to improve how it designs and delivers urgently needed housing during an ongoing, deepening housing crisis. We strongly urge the SLI process to produce meaningful changes reflecting SLI stakeholder feedback across the full scope of the SLI.**

Based on our observations and feedback from SLI stakeholders, **we are significantly disappointed by the SLI stakeholder process that has taken an approach of nibbling around the edges despite growing concerns from program users and unsuccessful previous attempts to improve the program, including the one in 2017.** SLI stakeholders shared concerns that the engagement process didn't effectively balance discussion or time for all aspects of the <u>SLI text</u>. For example, a significant portion of the total meeting time was focused on program participation alone. S4E has advocated publicly for the improvement of program participation and equity. **However, a discussion of equity cannot separate program participation from other reforms related to efficiency, predictability, and accountability.** If Design Review unnecessarily increases housing costs— which there is bountiful qualitative and quantitative data to suggest— then program equity implications must also encompass factors that can increase housing costs which disproportionately impact Seattle's most vulnerable residents.

We understood that the City's purpose with this effort was simple: reform our city's Design Review to speed up the process of building homes for Seattleites in an inclusive manner**.** Based on the SLI text, the final report to City Council is meant to consist of **two intrinsically related components**, **produced by a unified "stakeholder group" that includes SDCI as one of several members:**

1. <u>"A Racial Equity Toolkit ("RET") analysis of the Design Review Program</u>…[including] an analysis of whether the program creates barriers to participation for BIPOC residents, either as applicants, board members, or public participants, and whether the program creates or reinforces racial exclusion."

2. <u>A mixed methods analysis of the program </u>that includes (1) "… outcomes since the program was modified in 2017, including review times by design review type and project complexity," (2) "…departures sought through the program," (3) "…whether the program increases housing costs," and (4) "…a review of national best practices for design review programs with significant

public participation." Ultimately, this report is intended to lead to (5) "recommendations for how the program should be modified to address the findings of the stakeholder group."

Process Expectations

We urge the development of final report recommendations that comprehensively covers <u>all aspects of the SLI</u>. More importantly, we encourage the Mayor and Council to incorporate the substantive reforms identified by S4E and its partners in any legislative proposal. Regardless of how the SLI process went in the eyes of each stakeholder, we are united in the recognition that bold program reform is needed to support more housing.

Based on comments and recommendations shared by SLI stakeholders during the SLI process and in individual interviews, we expect the final recommendations to cover the following "buckets:"

Note: Each "bucket" has additional details that can be found in "Appendix A" at the end of this letter.

- Decrease Program Timelines and Complexity: Recommendations should make housing production faster while supporting equitable public engagement and building community capacity. Establish clear and enforceable timelines for all process steps. Reduce meetings, steps, and packet requirements wherever possible. The city should also reduce the number of projects subject to Design Review by changing thresholds and project type criteria while maintaining clear community engagement and feedback protocols to inform project design early. All projects, regardless of Design Review status, should have a simple process for departures.
- Increase Program Predictability, Consistency and Accountability: Consider creating a single, professional Design Review board with clearer accountability structures and an ombudsperson with authority to move quickly between departments to resolve conflicts. Improve training for Design Review planners and boards to focus on the core purpose and scope of Design Review in [SMC 23.41.0042](). This should eliminate notable time differences between planners and boards. It should also include DEI, meeting facilitation, and de-escalation training.
- Simplify and Reduce Guidelines: Guidelines, and other program features, should eliminate overly subjective decisions made by planners and boards. Guidelines should not not reduce the development capacity (or FAR) authorized by the underlying zoning. Refine and simplify the City-Wide and Neighborhood Guidelines to be clearly *ascertainable* by program users. Formalize the sole use of prioritized guidelines for Design Review decision-making, per [SMC 23.41.014.D]().
- Support Early Public Engagement: Recommendations should clarify communication with the community, inform interested community members about the program scope, and be equitably

responsive to community needs to better engage with Design Review. This includes outreach to residents and LURCs.

- Other feedback: Fix other aspects of the MUP process that, along with Design Review, add time, uncertainty, and costs to projects.

We urge City Council and the Office of the Mayor to work with SDCI and a broad set of external stakeholders to get final, comprehensive Design Review reform legislation passed before November 2023. This process was set to end in June 2022, but has been extended by more than nine months. The SLI delay pushed back the legislative process as well. There is an urgency to act soon while there is momentum and public attention on these reforms. More importantly, the longer housing is delayed in the City's permitting process, the longer our newest neighbors must wait for their new homes.

We believe it's possible to make changes to the Design Review Program without sacrificing the goal of a well-designed city with unique neighborhoods. We appreciate your commitment to taking effective and timely action to improve the Design Review Program and other aspects of our local housing system.

From,

[Seattle for Everyone](#)

AIA Seattle
Downtown Seattle Association
Futurewise
Habitat for Humanity Seattle-King & Kittitas Counties
Housing Development Consortium
Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties
NAIOP Washington State, the Commercial Real Estate Development Association for Washington State
Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce

|	
Maria Barrientos, Barrientos RYAN	(SLI stakeholder)
Roque Deherrera, Legacy Group Capital	(SLI stakeholder)
John Feit, Pike Pine Urban Neighborhood Council (PPUNC)	(SLI stakeholder)
Patrick A. Gordon, ZGF Architects, LLP, Board Member DSA	(SLI stakeholder)
Grace Kim, Principal, Schemata Workshop, Inc.	(SLI stakeholder)
Todd Lee, Executive Vice President, Urban Visions	(SLI stakeholder)
Gladys Ly-Au Young, Founding Partner, SKL Architects	(SLI stakeholder)
Tejal Pastakia, Managing Partner, Pastakia + Associates, LLC.	(SLI stakeholder)
Kate Smith, Principal, SMR Architects	(SLI stakeholder)

[APPENDIX A on next page]

Stakeholder Feedback "Bucket"	Examples of Stakeholder Comments & Recommendations Taken from SDCI-004-A-001 stakeholder meeting process and individual interviews. *Note: Seattle for Everyone has not discussed or agreed on all the following comments and recommendations.*
Decrease Program Timelines & Complexity	• **Establish clear and enforceable timelines for all steps** in the Design Review process. ○ **Establish clear protocols for delays** that can reinforce adherence to schedule. • **Simplify the Design Review process wherever possible** to make it more transparent and predictable. ○ For projects subject to design review, **hold only one meeting at the early design stage to establish feedback on key priorities/massing.** ○ **Reduce submittal requirements,** including allowing Applicants to share the massing options they believe are most appropriate for the site and not arbitrarily setting a number of options. • **Reduce the projects subject to Design Review:** ○ **Reduce the thresholds** for projects subject to design review. ○ **Exempt all housing projects from design review** while maintaining clear community engagement and feedback protocols to inform project design early. ○ **Exempt projects with affordable housing components** (ex: MFTE, MHA or incentive zoning) while maintaining clear community engagement and feedback protocols to inform project design early. • **Legislate code changes** to make commonly granted departures "as of." • **Empower staff to grant departures administratively** through zoning review. • **Hire more staff** to support a more aggressive review schedule. • **Better align the process with other departments** such as SDOT and SPU. • **Uncap the meeting slots available each month** to allow more projects to be heard by planners and Boards.
Increase Program Predictability & Accountability	• **Establish a singular, professional, and full time Design Review Board** that is fully trained in the intent, authority, and procedures of Design Review. Place clear accountability measures on board members. • **Create an ombudsperson position** with authority to move quickly between Departments to resolve disputes that arise in the Design Review process and help applicants navigate the permitting process effectively. • **Improve training for Design Review planners and board(s),** emphasizing the core purpose and scope of Design Review in SMC

	23.41.0042, and reducing the subjectivity of decisions. Include DEI, meeting facilitation, and de-escalation training.
	
	    ○ Ex: Recommendations should be based on adopted design guidelines, neighborhood feedback, and the discretion and training of Board members. Recommendations should have the intent to move projects forward collaboratively.
	
	● Structure ways for the board(s), planner, applicants, and community to have **iterative, constructive communication throughout the process** in alignment with SMC 23.41.002.C. This should create opportunities to improve designs without slowing down the process.
	
	    ○ Ex: Provide opportunity for the applicant to present within the Administrative Design Review process to mitigate the current "black box" dynamics of ADR.
	    ○ Create space in meetings for less-structured collaborative dialogue that can avoid the need for additional meetings.
	    ○ Create drop-in office hours for planners to discuss ideas with Applicants.
	
	● **Require board meeting minutes (ADR or full DR) to list every voting member present and how they voted.** These should be published in the public meeting minutes.

Simplify and/or Reduce Design Guidelines	● **Refine and simplify the City-Wide and Neighborhood Guidelines.**
	    ○ Guidelines should not impose subjective preferences of Boards or planners.
	    ○ Guidelines should be ascertainable and clear.
	    ○ Guidelines should not reduce the development capacity (or FAR) authorized by the underlying zoning.
	
	● **Applicant and City to co-identify and limit deliberations to priority citywide and neighborhood-specific design guidelines** that will apply to the project throughout the entire Design Review process (<10 total).
	    ○ Note: this doubles down on a current requirement per SMC 23.41.014.D which already seeks to mitigate the sheer number of guidelines by directing Boards to identify the highest "priority guidelines" alongside community feedback for decision-making. However, Design Review deliberations often go beyond the "priority guidelines." This increases unpredictability.

Support for Early Public Engagement	● **Establish training opportunities for the community** to understand the Design Review process and scope and where to get information about projects and timelines.
	
	● **Dedicate resources to build community capacity**, especially in high disparity neighborhoods.
	    ○ Ex: Coordinate public process through Community Liaisons paid by the City and selected from the community.
	    ○ Support neighborhood LURCs with training.

	● **Schedule meetings during accessible times** of the day for residents and non-professionals to engage. ● **Provide meeting recordings** and **language options**. ● **Reward projects which can demonstrate responsiveness** to community-driven needs and center lived experiences.
Other	● **Fix other aspects of the MUP process** that, along with Design Review, add time, uncertainty, and costs to projects.

APPENDIX I

KEY THEMES + INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS BY BROADVIEW PLANNING
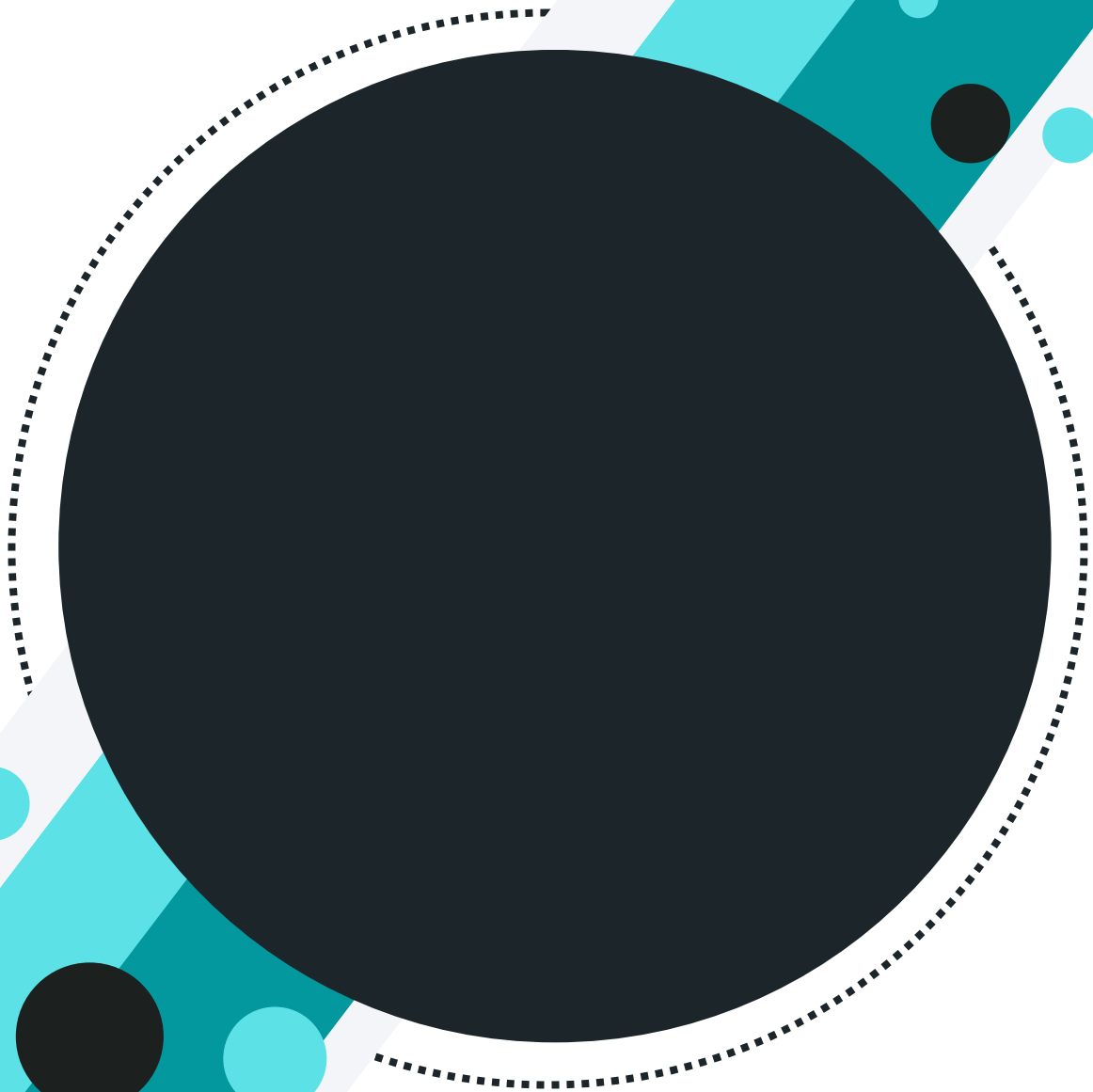
Advancing Equity in City Systems

Key Themes: need to infuse racial equity into planning, building, and permitting process overall; White privilege and systems of oppression are common in these fields; building capacity among Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) professionals; building capacity among BIPOC communities to engage with the City processes; prioritize outreach to and input from marginalized community members and neighborhoods; changes to program need to be measured and unrushed; use past projects as case studies or RET opportunities; design review doesn't include things community cares about most; reward projects most responsive to community; support housing affordability and ownership.

Opportunities for Consideration:

- Embed equity in design review program. For example:
    o Create design review program mission, vision, goals that explicitly account for institutional racial equity and shifting power.
    o Develop an equity accountability framework to ensure equity remains priority throughout the design review process.
- Convene a group of BIPOC community members to craft a design review program vision/goals/evaluation plan based on equity accountability framework.
- Create post-project RET opportunities to learn from real-world examples. Start with using the project at 23rd + Union and/or Othello as case studies/evaluations of racial equity.
- Conduct a health impact assessment of design review as formalized way to document and advance equitable outcomes.
- Build community capacity to engage in design review in high disparity neighborhoods. For example:
- Identify and map neighborhoods with high disparities, especially in housing, health, and socioeconomic measurements (e.g., Equity Areas).
- Fund CDAs or other organizations to do engagement in Equity Areas.
- Reward projects that demonstrate responsiveness to community-driven needs and center lived experiences by developing Equity Guidelines responsive to BIPOC communities (e.g., through faster timelines, etc.). For example:
- Discriminatory historic zoning practices
- Housing affordability and ownership
- Climate change
- Livability of neighborhoods in the context of displacement
- Access and connectivity to services and infrastructure
- Issues most relevant to the neighborhood and site
- Support housing affordability and ownership by specifying the amount by which to shorten all permit review times – resulting in expedited reviews with predictable timeframes.
- Increase transparency and access to power. For example:

- Publish calendars of regular meetings between SDCI leadership and groups such as developers.
- Hold regular meetings with BIPOC representatives and SDCI leadership/others in power.
- Build capacity among BIPOC design/development professionals. For example:
- Provide City support for community college and job training centers to promote career pathways and internship opportunities for real estate/architecture/development professions.
- Manage current BIPOC design/development professionals like a consultant roster.
- Provide free design review process trainings/coaching to new or less-experienced BIPOC applicants to learn how to navigate the City systems.

Design Guidelines

Key Themes: need clarity or reduce the number of guidelines; too complex/technical; need to be important and intentional; can be applied too subjectively but provide important structure for staff review/decisions.

Opportunities for Consideration:

- Rewrite design guidelines to improve clarity for applicant, staff, and community interpretation.
- Use clear language to specify what materials are not allowed, to avoid subjective opinions about materials. For example, explicitly state the types of siding that are not allowed.
- Rewrite design guidelines to encourage more opportunity for departures that can reward innovative design.
- Simplify the Citywide Design Guidelines but make them more detailed/specific/equity-focused in Equity Areas and have the community help craft those (in spirit of Central District guidelines).
- Remove the neighborhood design guidelines and use only the Citywide Design Guidelines.
- Identify priority design guidelines during the pre-submittal conference.
- Add additional elements for design guidelines or the importance of urban design in the comprehensive plan.

Land Use + Other Codes

Key Themes: code is too complex, period; applying code requires some level of technical knowledge; understanding code takes time and interest; increase regulatory oversight for important principles for design or equity; create systems for accountability; what people care about shows up in comprehensive planning, possibly more than design review; review threshold limits.

Opportunities for Consideration:

- Switch to design rules that are enacted as form-based codes and regulating plans.
- Embed equity in land use code for more regulatory oversight. For example:
- Set a threshold for design review to apply to single-family zones.
- Change design review oversight to include input on uses (e.g., retail, services, etc.), not just design aesthetics.
- Set minimum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) thresholds to prevent under-developing lots and the loss of development potential for housing units.
- Explore land use code changes that allow for more flexibility to develop and negotiate site-specific solutions. For example:
- Require larger setbacks in multifamily or mixed-use zones, then allow departures for projects that demonstrate design excellence.
- Increase thresholds so that fewer developments are subject to design review.
- Codify requiring applicants to meaningfully demonstrate how all public comments are considered and/or addressed in final design before approval.

City Review Processes

Key Themes: variable and unpredictable guidance from planners; inexperienced staff; not enough staff; applicant experience is important; support and encourage staff; design review staff/program don't have long- term political or institutional support; developers and planners have increasingly negative views of each other; applicants use different strategies for applying based on the assigned planner; issues of control over interpreting design intent; planners are inaccessible and don't communicate well; planners don't understand cost or consequence of delayed communication and ongoing cycles of comments; desire for collaboration from both planners and applicants; escalating complaints from developers; cost savings aren't necessarily passed on to renters; planners support each other during project review; applicants go above planner to leadership; long permitting times.

Opportunities for Consideration:

- Increase capacity for design review program. For example:
  o Hire more design review staff to review all permits in a timely manner.
  o Hire supervisors who have demonstrable experience with design review.
- Increase predictability of the review process. For example:
  o Standardize clear, effective design review corrections and reports to limit the amount of review time and variations in design guidance.
  o Reevaluate packet requirements based on the type of design review and reform the associated requirements for design packets and graphics.
  o Revise the packets on SDCI's website to include examples of inexpensively produced packets.
  o Place limits on the number of design renderings required for submission and at every correction cycle.
- Incentivize quality applications. For example:
  o Create a process for rating a Consistently Prepared Applicant that incentivizes quality applications by waiving significant requirements.
- Support and encourage staff. For example:
  o Provide at least two staff at every design review board meeting.
  o Give clear, written guidance and training on how to provide non-subjective comments that stay within the boundaries of what's required for design review and stay out of the fine grain of design changes.
  o Ask staff what training they need to better do their jobs.
  o Have SDCI management conduct performance reviews by attending or viewing recordings of design review meetings.
  o Provide more staff training and a consistent structure for reviewing projects against design guidelines to reduce subjectivity.
- Revise the communication structure between the City and applicants. For example:
  o Encourage phone calls and face-to-face meetings.
  o Require substantive comments for corrections cycles – not a single question.

- o Set, maintain, and evaluate reasonable time limits for corrections cycles.
- o Have a planners' ability to develop and maintain working relationships with applicants be a part of their annual performance review.
- o Standardize internal team review by creating a team (2+) of planners, rather than one, to review projects against design guidelines.
- o Allow applicant to present to a "staff board" as part of the ADR review process to reduce the number of correction cycles.
- Revise the communication structure between the City, applicants, and the community. For example:
  - o Provide an Ombudsperson who oversees the permitting process, coordination with other departments, and acts as a dispute resolution point person to provide better alignment with other departments.
  - o Require City staff to attend applicant outreach meetings to ensure SDCI planners hear input firsthand.
  - o Create call or drop-in office hours with City staff for community members to ask questions about proposed developments.
  - o Consider offering a pre-EDG meeting with Department of Neighborhoods/SDCI/Applicant team, to address public concerns early in the development process.

Design Review Boards

Key Themes: train board members better and more often; educate public on how to comment and increase awareness of the importance of design; have hybrid meetings; design review is a technical process, but community engagement is critical; meetings need strong facilitation; revamp the structure of meetings for better community involvement; expand technical expertise on boards.

Opportunities for Consideration

- Provide more training for design review board members to ensure guidance and recommendations are consistent between boards. For example:
  o Facilitation (and/or hire trained facilitators).
  o Mock/practices sessions.
  o Conduct peer review/critique of other boards.
- Professionalize design review boards. For example:
  o Provide a stipend for design review board members.
  o Increase technical expertise (specifically architecture and engineering) for boards.
  o Create a single, consolidated, citywide design review board to produce more efficiency, predictability, and consistency.
- Improve ability of the community to engage with design review boards. For example:
  o Provide community groups with resources to host in-person, in-neighborhood "watch parties;" fund free or reduced WiFi to eliminate internet connectivity issues.
  o Provide transcription and translation technology; design PowerPoint slides for visually impaired audiences and people who do not speak English as a first language.
  o Provide instructions for requesting translation on all materials and on the City's website.
  o Create a video that explains purpose of design review; play at beginning of meetings to clearly state that the project is allowed by the zoning code and the scope of accepted feedback is to consider the design guidelines.
  o Flip the way that public input is included in board meetings such that the response to comments becomes a required part of the City review process.
  o Create a more robust Q&A session for boards that can function as true community dialogue.
- Eliminate design review boards and replace them with a robust checklist.
- Create a process to recruit more BIPOC, displaced, and historically underrepresented voices to serve on design review boards.

Outreach/Engagement

Key Themes: information about design review is clear and transparent for developers, architects, and designers; information about design review is technical, hard to find, not transparent for everyone else; no transparency about how comments are addressed in final design; boards are primarily White men; boards don't reflect communities that were displaced; unequal power dynamics in many design review meetings; institutional change isn't accounted for through design review process; need clear guidelines on how to handle non-design review comments;

Opportunities for Consideration:

- Improve communication processes. For example:
  - Rewrite all outreach and communication materials so they are shorter, use plain language, and are easy to translate.
  - Revamp the City's website with clearer language, including language translation and contact information.
  - Extend the 300-foot meeting public notice area, particularly for large parcels that may have fewer adjacent residents.
- Coordinate better hyperlocal engagement across the City to address broader community concerns about development. For example:
  - Establish an open house forum for community discussion about development that is both project-focused and addresses broader issues and concerns. Work with other departments and agencies involved in communities to have design review meetings be a part of larger city meetings/open houses, so the City is more engaged in communities.
  - Turn board meetings into community charettes. Communities would gather with City staff, design review boards, and applicant teams to receive comments and to sketch and outline design concepts. By the end of the meeting, a concept plan would emerge with direct resident participation.
  - Work with Department of Neighborhoods to communicate with neighborhoods and provide regular briefings about development in the community.
- Revaluate the early design guidance process with the Department of Neighborhoods and create more outreach structure and accountability.
  - Make outreach requirements more meaningful in Equity Areas.
  - Require that the Early Community Outreach step pays community members to provide input.
- Develop a more rigorous approach to engagement. For example:
  - Establish and document community relationships before the pre-submittal conference as part of the outreach process.
  - Develop an outreach enforcement plan to create accountability for applicants to demonstrate both a meaningful community outreach process and how community input was received and integrated.

- o Build long-term build community capacity by providing annual trainings in Equity Areas on how to participate in design meetings.
- o Pay community members for participating in design review.
- o Coordinate public processes through Community Liaisons paid by the City and selected from impacted communities.
- o Create a community engagement ambassador position to provide a clear pathway for routing non-design related comments.
- o Require more reporting on community engagement requirements to create a sense of accountability from the SDCI planner (and the City) to the community.

APPENDIX J

SUMMARY OF SDCI CHANGE TEAM REVIEW (SELECT MEMBERS)

SDCI/OPCD Change Team: Design Review SLI Memo Notes

March 2, 2023

Change Team is excited about the perceived openness to transformative change and to see that leadership may be listening to staff.

We appreciate the transparency of the process and support all efforts to make and keep this information easily accessible to staff and the public.

We appreciate the inclusion of all considerations within the memo and think it's especially important to highlight:

- There is no clear vision/values driving Design Review, and that the process as it exists is not in alignment with the stated values (incl. equity) of SDCI.
- A consistent foil to equity is the degree of access to power afforded to certain members of the development community through their relationships with SDCI & City leadership.
- While many of the potential interventions appear promising, the potential for harm is great and no reforms should be implemented without a full equity analysis.
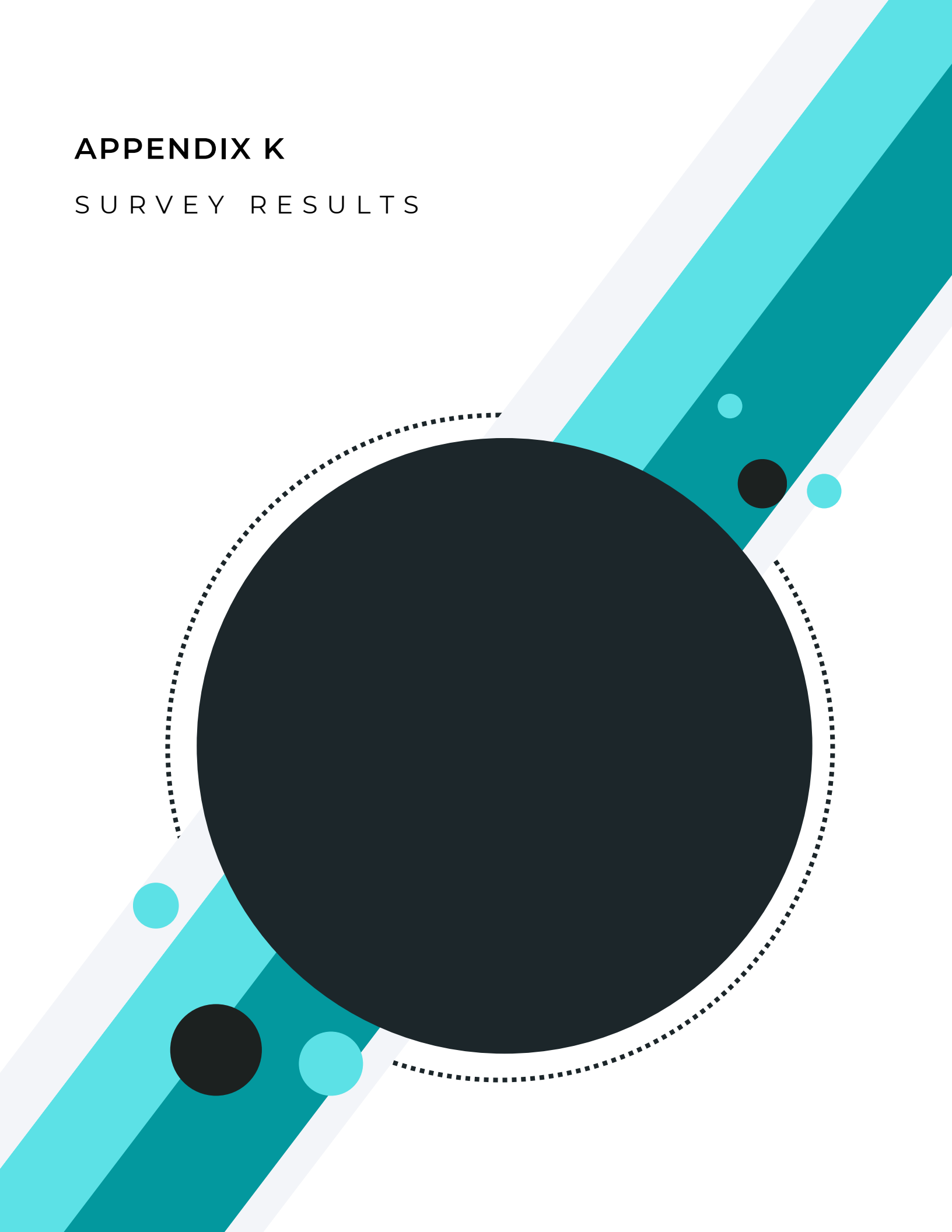
It is our opinion that the fuller context of Paradigm Shift's departure from the process is needed, and should include an explicit description of leadership's role in subverting (or failing to clarify) the purpose of the stakeholder meetings.

It is important to note that the memo, thorough as it is, may not account for outright discrimination as a barrier to equity within the DR process: "Most applicants don't want to hear (from a black man) that they need to do a better job."

Lastly, we want to express our appreciation for all the hard work that has brought us to this stage, our gratitude for being involved in this process, and to reiterate our commitment to supporting any and all initiatives determined to advance equity. If Shelley, Broadview Planning and/or other SDCI/OPCD staff have specific requests for us, we are happy to consider them.
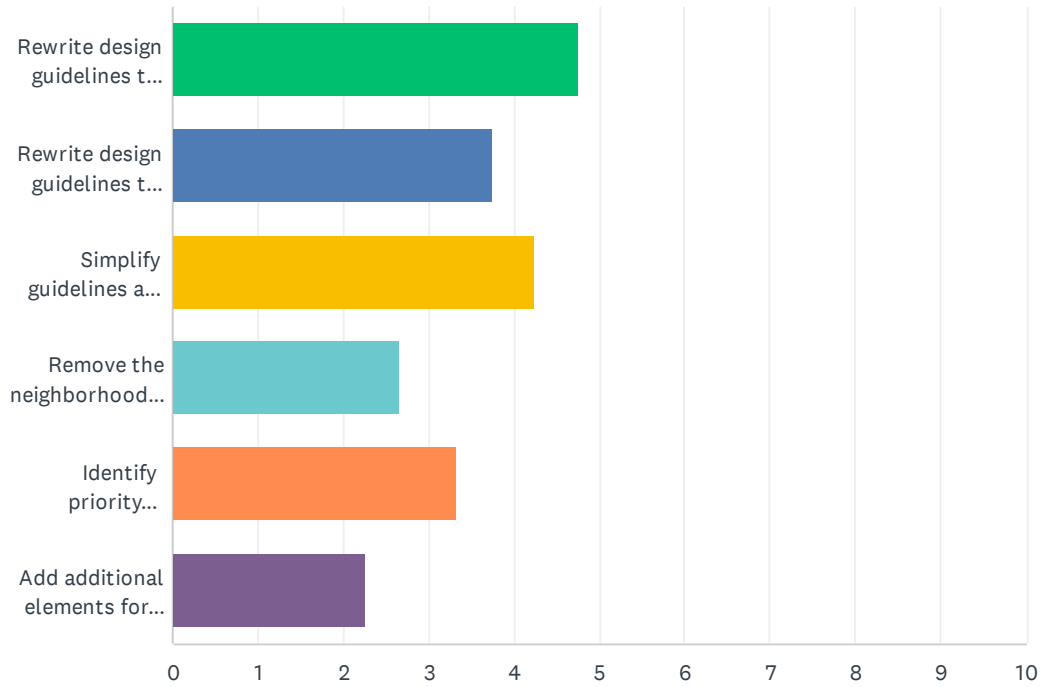
APPENDIX K

SURVEY RESULTS

Q3 Please rank the following opportunities in order of priority -- where 1 is the highest priority and 6 is the lowest priority.
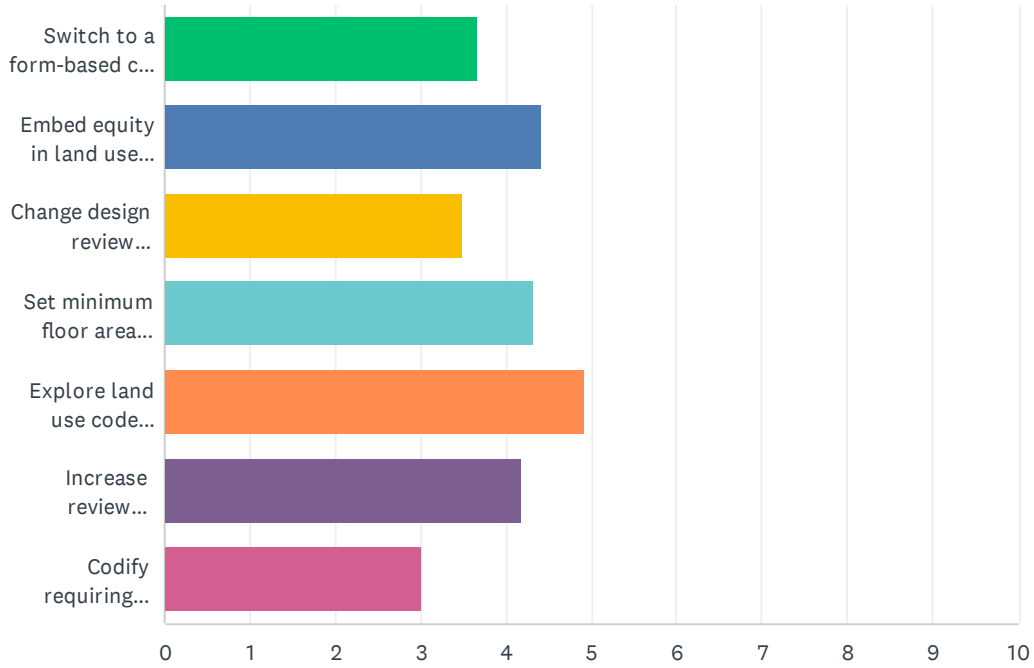
Answered: 12   Skipped: 2

Seattle's Design Review Program

	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL	SCORE
Rewrite design guidelines to improve clarity for applicant, staff, and community understanding/interpretation.Possible examples include:-- Use clear language to specify what materials are not allowed to avoid subjective opinions about materials. For example, explicitly state the types of siding that are not allowed.	41.67% 5	33.33% 4	8.33% 1	0.00% 0	8.33% 1	8.33% 1	12	4.75
Rewrite design guidelines to encourage more opportunity for departures that can reward innovative design.	8.33% 1	16.67% 2	25.00% 3	41.67% 5	8.33% 1	0.00% 0	12	3.75
Simplify guidelines at a city level but make them more detailed, specific, and equity-focused in Equity Areas.Possible examples include:--Allow Equity Area community members to craft their own guidelines (in the spirit of Central District's guidelines).	16.67% 2	33.33% 4	16.67% 2	25.00% 3	8.33% 1	0.00% 0	12	4.25
Remove the neighborhood guidelines in favor of citywide guidelines.	16.67% 2	8.33% 1	8.33% 1	8.33% 1	8.33% 1	50.00% 6	12	2.67
Identify priority guidelines during the pre-submittal conference.	16.67% 2	8.33% 1	16.67% 2	16.67% 2	33.33% 4	8.33% 1	12	3.33
Add additional elements for design guidelines or the importance of urban design in the comprehensive plan.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	25.00% 3	8.33% 1	33.33% 4	33.33% 4	12	2.25

Q6 Please rank the following opportunities in order of priority -- where 1 is the highest priority and 7 is the lowest priority.
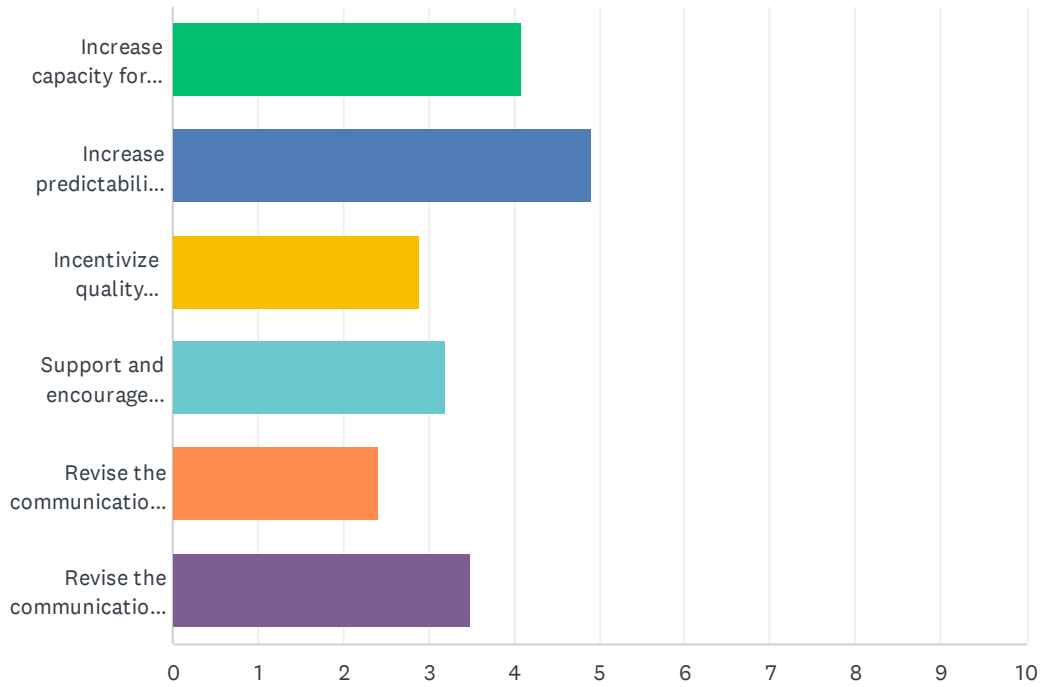
Answered: 12   Skipped: 2

Seattle's Design Review Program

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	TOTAL	SCORE
Switch to a form-based code to regulate design.	0.00% 0	16.67% 2	25.00% 3	25.00% 3	0.00% 0	8.33% 1	25.00% 3	12	3.67
Embed equity in land use code for more regulatory oversight.Possible examples include:-- Set a threshold for design review to apply to single-family zones.	25.00% 3	16.67% 2	0.00% 0	25.00% 3	16.67% 2	0.00% 0	16.67% 2	12	4.42
Change design review oversight to include input on uses (e.g., retail, services, etc.), not just design aesthetics.	16.67% 2	8.33% 1	0.00% 0	8.33% 1	25.00% 3	33.33% 4	8.33% 1	12	3.50
Set minimum floor area ratio (FAR) thresholds to prevent under-developing lots and the loss of development potential for housing units.	8.33% 1	33.33% 4	0.00% 0	16.67% 2	25.00% 3	16.67% 2	0.00% 0	12	4.33
Explore land use code changes that allow for more flexibility to develop and negotiate site-specific solutions.Possible examples include:-- Require larger setbacks in multifamily or mixed-use zones; then, allow departures for projects that demonstrate design excellence.	16.67% 2	8.33% 1	50.00% 6	8.33% 1	8.33% 1	8.33% 1	0.00% 0	12	4.92
Increase review thresholds so that fewer developments are subject to design review.	25.00% 3	16.67% 2	16.67% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 2	25.00% 3	12	4.17
Codify requiring applicants to meaningfully demonstrate how all public comments are considered and/or addressed in final design before approval.	8.33% 1	0.00% 0	8.33% 1	16.67% 2	25.00% 3	16.67% 2	25.00% 3	12	3.00

Q9 Please rank the following opportunities in order of priority -- where 1 is the highest priority and 6 is the lowest priority.

Answered: 10   Skipped: 4
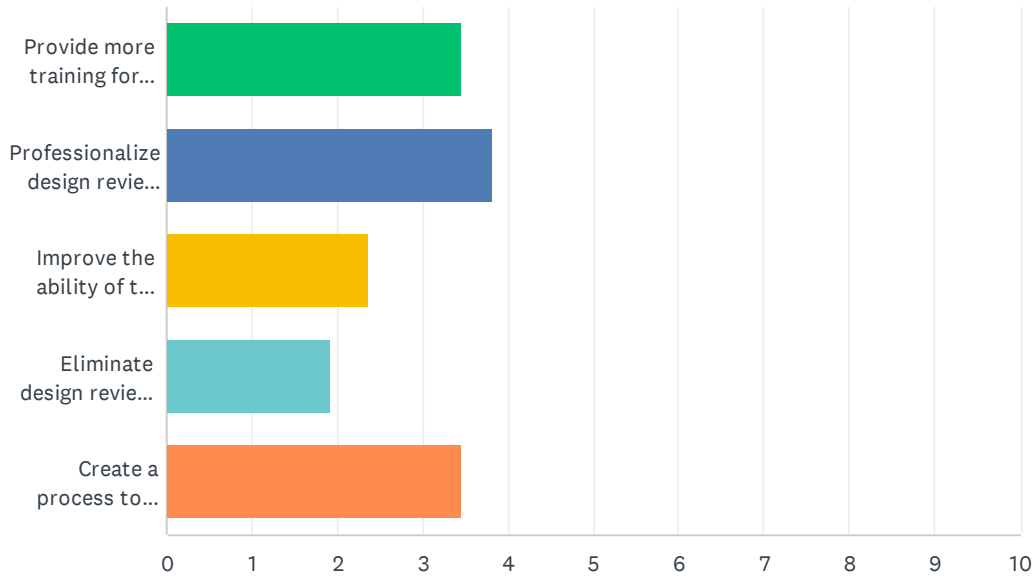
Seattle's Design Review Program

	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL	SCORE
Increase capacity for design review program.Possible examples include:-- Hire more design review staff to review all permits in a timely manner.-- Hire supervisors who have demonstrable experience with design review.	50.00% 5	0.00% 0	20.00% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	30.00% 3	10	4.10
Increase predictability of the review process.Possible examples include:-- Standardize clear, effective design review corrections and reports to limit the amount of review time and micromanaging design guidance.-- Reevaluate packet requirements based on the type of design review and reform associated requirements for design and graphic submittals:-- Revise the examples of packets on SDCI's website to include examples that are inexpensively and realistically produced.-- Place limits on the number of design renderings required for submission and at every correction cycle.	30.00% 3	50.00% 5	10.00% 1	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	0.00% 0	10	4.90
Incentivize quality applications.Possible examples include:-- Create a process for rating a Consistently Prepared Applicant that incentivizes quality applications by waiving significant requirements.	0.00% 0	20.00% 2	10.00% 1	40.00% 4	0.00% 0	30.00% 3	10	2.90
Support and encourage staff.Possible examples include:-- Provide at least two staff at every design review board meeting. -- Give clear, written guidance and training on how to provide non-subjective comments that stay within the boundaries of what's required for design review and stay out of the fine grain of design changes.-- Ask staff what training they need to better do their jobs.-- Have SDCI management conduct performance reviews by attending or viewing recordings of design review meetings. -- Provide more staff training and a consistent structure for reviewing projects against design guidelines to reduce subjectivity.	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	40.00% 4	20.00% 2	20.00% 2	10.00% 1	10	3.20
Revise the communication structure between the City and applicants.Possible examples include:-- Encourage phone calls and face-to-face meetings. -- Require substantive comments for corrections cycles – not a single question.-- Set, maintain, and evaluate reasonable time limits for corrections cycles. -- Have a planners' ability to develop and maintain working relationships with applicants be a part of their annual performance review. -- Standardize internal team review by creating a team (2+) of planners, rather than one, to review projects against design guidelines.-- Allow applicant to present to a "staff board" as part of the ADR review process to reduce the number of correction cycles.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	30.00% 3	50.00% 5	10.00% 1	10	2.40
Revise the communication structure between the City, applicants, and the community.Possible examples include:-- Provide an Ombudsperson who oversees the	20.00% 2	20.00% 2	10.00% 1	10.00% 1	20.00% 2	20.00% 2	10	3.50

permitting process, and coordination with other departments, and acts as a dispute resolution point person to provide better alignment with other departments.-- Require City staff to attend applicant outreach meetings to ensure SDCI planners hear input firsthand. -- Create call or drop-in office hours with city staff for community members to ask questions about proposed developments. -- Consider offering a pre-Early Design Guidance meeting with Department of Neighborhoods/SDCI/Applicant team to address public concerns early in the development process.

Q12 Please rank the following opportunities in order of priority -- where 1 is the highest priority and 5 is the lowest priority.
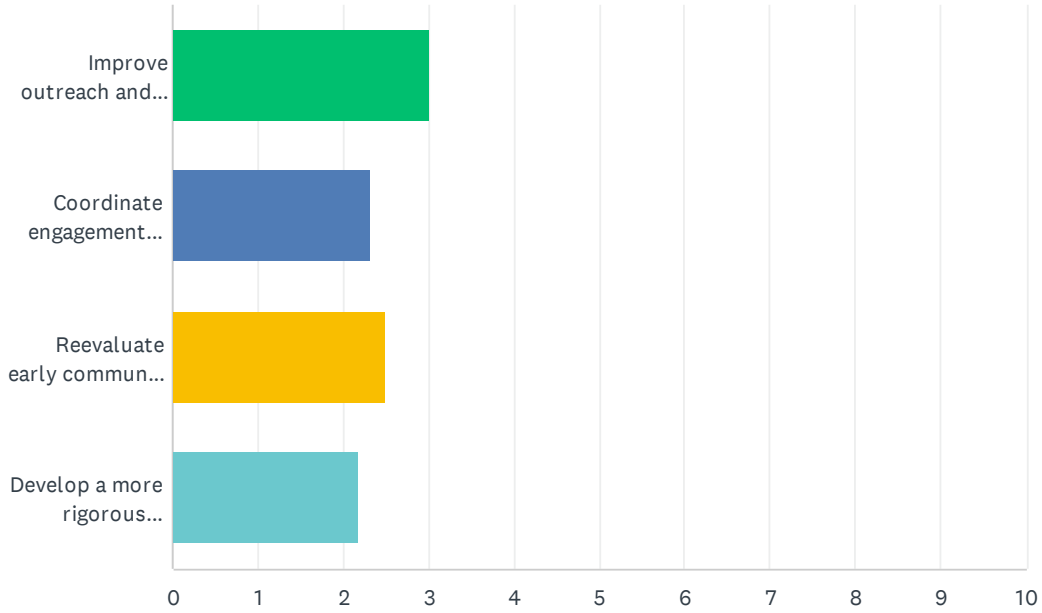
Answered: 11   Skipped: 3

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	SCORE
Provide more training for design review board members to ensure guidance and recommendations are consistent between boards.Possible examples include:-- Facilitation (and/or hire trained facilitators).-- Mock/practice sessions.-- Conduct peer review/critique of other boards.	36.36% 4	9.09% 1	18.18% 2	36.36% 4	0.00% 0	11	3.45
Professionalize design review boards.Possible examples include:-- Provide a stipend for design review board members. -- Increase technical expertise (specifically architecture and engineering) for boards.-- Create a single, consolidated, citywide design review board to produce more efficiency, predictability, and consistency.	27.27% 3	45.45% 5	9.09% 1	18.18% 2	0.00% 0	11	3.82
Improve the ability of the community to engage with design review boards.Possible examples include:-- Provide community groups with resources to host in-person, in-neighborhood "watch parties;" fund free or reduced WiFi to eliminate internet connectivity issues.-- Provide transcription and translation technology; design slides for visually impaired audiences and people who do not speak English as a first language.-- Provide instructions for requesting translation on all materials and on the City's website.-- Create a video that explains purpose of design review; play at beginning of meetings to clearly state that the project is allowed by the zoning code and the scope of accepted feedback is to consider the design guidelines.-- Flip the way that public input is included in board meetings such that the response to comments becomes a required part of the City review process.-- Create a more robust Q&A session for boards that can function as true community dialogue.	0.00% 0	9.09% 1	45.45% 5	18.18% 2	27.27% 3	11	2.36
Eliminate design review boards and replace them with a robust checklist.	18.18% 2	0.00% 0	9.09% 1	0.00% 0	72.73% 8	11	1.91
Create a process to recruit more BIPOC, displaced, and historically underrepresented voices to serve on design review boards.	18.18% 2	36.36% 4	18.18% 2	27.27% 3	0.00% 0	11	3.45

Q15 Please rank the following opportunities in order of priority -- where 1 is the highest priority and 4 is the lowest priority.
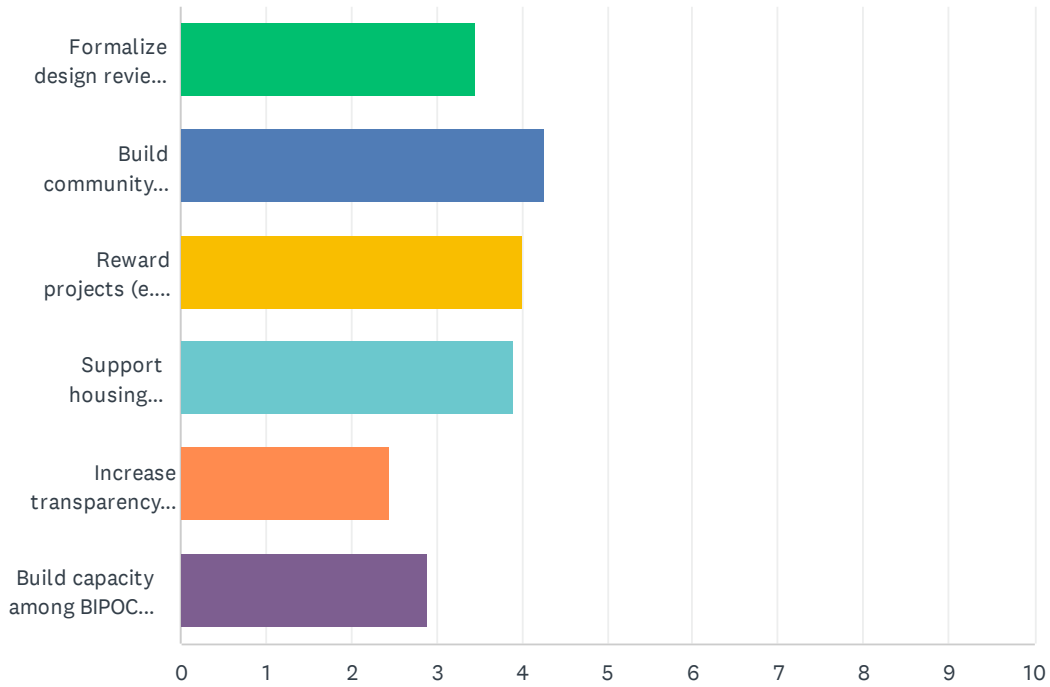
Answered: 12   Skipped: 2

	1	2	3	4	TOTAL	SCORE
Improve outreach and communication processes.Possible examples include:-- Rewrite all outreach and communication materials (notices, memos, etc.) so they are shorter, use plain language, and are easy to translate. -- Revamp the City's website with clearer language, including language translation and contact information.-- Extend the 300-foot meeting notice area, particularly for large parcels that may have fewer adjacent residents.	33.33% 4	41.67% 5	16.67% 2	8.33% 1	12	3.00
Coordinate engagement across City departments with communities that are experiencing changes from development.Possible examples include:-- Establish an open house forum for community discussion about development that is both project-focused and addresses broader issues and concerns. Work with other departments and agencies involved in communities to have design review meetings be a part of larger city meetings/open houses, so the City is more engaged in communities. -- Turn board meetings into community charettes. Communities would gather with City staff, design review boards, and applicant teams to receive comments and to sketch and outline design concepts. By the end of the meeting, a concept plan would emerge with direct resident participation.-- Work with Department of Neighborhoods to communicate with neighborhoods and provide regular briefings about development in the community.	33.33% 4	8.33% 1	16.67% 2	41.67% 5	12	2.33
Reevaluate early community outreach requirements.Possible examples include:-- Make outreach requirements more meaningful in Equity Areas. Enforce requirements. -- Require Early Design Guidance outreach to pay community members to provide input.-- Shift responsibility for early community outreach from Department of Neighborhoods to SDCI to better coordinate engagement.	16.67% 2	33.33% 4	33.33% 4	16.67% 2	12	2.50
Develop a more rigorous approach to engagement.Possible examples include:-- Establish and document community relationships before the pre-submittal conference as part of the outreach process.-- Develop an outreach enforcement plan to create accountability for applicants to demonstrate both a meaningful community outreach process and how community input was received and integrated.-- Build long-term build community capacity by providing annual trainings in Equity Areas on how to participate in design meetings.-- Pay community members for participating in design review. -- Coordinate public processes through Community Liaisons paid by the City and selected from impacted communities.-- Create a community engagement ambassador position to have a clear pathway so non-design related comments can get routed somewhere. -- Require more reporting on community engagement requirements to create a sense of accountability from the SDCI planner (the City) to the community.	16.67% 2	16.67% 2	33.33% 4	33.33% 4	12	2.17

Q18 Please rank the following opportunities in order of priority -- where 1 is the highest priority and 6 is the lowest priority.

Answered: 11   Skipped: 3

Seattle's Design Review Program

	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL	SCORE
Formalize design review program structure to meaningfully embed equity throughout the process.Possible examples include:-- Create a design review program mission, vision, goals that explicitly accounts for institutional racial equity and shifting power.-- Develop an equity accountability framework to ensure equity remains priority throughout the design review process.-- Convene a group of BIPOC community members to craft a design review program vision/goals/evaluation plan based on the equity accountability framework.-- Create post-project Racial Equity Toolkit analysis opportunities to learn from real-world examples. Start with using the project at 23rd + Union and/or Othello as case studies/evaluations of racial equity. -- Conduct a health impact assessment of design review as formalized way to document and advance equitable outcomes.	9.09% 1	18.18% 2	18.18% 2	27.27% 3	18.18% 2	9.09% 1	11	3.45
Build community capacity to engage in design review, particularly in neighborhoods with high disparities between race and opportunity of housing, health, and socioeconomics (e.g., Equity Areas).Possible examples include:-- Use Equity Area maps to target resources and capacity building to engage in design review.-- Fund Communtity Development Authorities or other organizations to lead deep engagement in Equity Areas.	9.09% 1	45.45% 5	18.18% 2	18.18% 2	9.09% 1	0.00% 0	11	4.27
Reward projects (e.g., through faster timelines, etc.) that demonstrate responsiveness to community-driven needs and center lived experiences of BIPOC communities by developing Equity Guidelines responsive to:-- Discriminatory historic zoning practices-- Housing affordability and ownership climate change-- Livability of neighborhoods in the context of displacement-- Access and connectivity to services and infrastructure -- Issues most relevant to the neighborhood and site	9.09% 1	27.27% 3	18.18% 2	45.45% 5	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	11	4.00
Support housing affordability and ownership by specifying the amount by which to shorten all permit review times – resulting in expedited reviews with predictable timeframes.	45.45% 5	0.00% 0	9.09% 1	0.00% 0	36.36% 4	9.09% 1	11	3.91
Increase transparency and access to power.Possible examples include:-- Publish calendars of regular meetings between SDCI leadership and groups such as developers.-- Hold regular meetings with BIPOC representatives and SDCI leadership/others in power.	9.09% 1	0.00% 0	18.18% 2	9.09% 1	27.27% 3	36.36% 4	11	2.45
Build capacity among BIPOC design/development professionals.Possible examples include:-- Provide City support for community college and job training centers to promote career pathways and internship opportunities for real	18.18% 2	9.09% 1	18.18% 2	0.00% 0	9.09% 1	45.45% 5	11	2.91

estate/architecture/development professions. --
Manage current BIPOC design/development
professionals like a consultant roster.-- Provide
free design review process trainings/coaching
to new or less-experienced BIPOC applicants
to learn how to navigate the City systems.