

Seattle Permits

— part of a multi-departmental City of Seattle series on getting a permit

Streamlined Design Review:

General Information, Application Instructions, and Submittal Requirements

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What Is Streamlined Design Review?

The City of Seattle's design review process, outlined in SMC 23.41.018, requires that certain new development projects undergo a discretionary review of their siting and design characteristics. Streamlined Design Review (SDR) is a type of design review specifically for townhouse developments and other small forms of low-rise multifamily housing. This Tip provides general information about SDR and offers detailed instructions about the application, submittal, and review process.

SDR has three principal objectives:

1. To encourage better design and site planning that enhances the character of the city and ensures that new development sensitively fits into neighborhoods.
2. To provide flexibility in the application of development standards.
3. To improve communication and participation among developers, neighbors, and the city early in the design and siting of new development.

The SDR process differs in several important respects from the Full Design Review (FDR) process and Administrative Design Review (ADR). The SDR program includes measures to reduce the complexity of application materials and process. To streamline the review process, SDR differs from the City of Seattle's FDR and ADR in a number of important ways:

- SDR is performed by a Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) planner instead of by neighborhood Design Review Boards.
- Public notice is provided for SDR project applications. No public meetings occur with the SDR process.

- Submittal requirements are reduced for SDR applications.
- Projects undergoing SDR have access to flexibility from the application of specific Land Use Code development standards called *adjustments*.
- As with FDR and ADR, the final decision on the SDR component is made by the Director of SDCI, similar to decisions on any other Master Use Permit (MUP) components. However, this decision may not be appealed to the City of Seattle Hearing Examiner.

SDR utilizes the same Design Guidelines as projects subject to the Full and ADR processes.

For information on the City's FDR and ADR, which applies to most new large multifamily, commercial and mixed use projects, see [Tip 238, Design Review: General Information, Application Instructions, and Submittal Requirements](#).

What are Design Guidelines?

We have published 2 sets of Design Guidelines in order to provide greater predictability to designers, developers, and community members. They ensure greater consistency in Design Review decision-making.

The 2 sets are:

- [Seattle Design Guidelines](#) for multifamily and commercial buildings that apply throughout Seattle's neighborhoods.
- [Guidelines for Downtown Development](#) that apply specifically to downtown Seattle.

In addition, many neighborhoods have adopted and published supplemental neighborhood-specific multifamily and commercial guidelines. Neighborhood-specific guidelines augment the Seattle Design Guidelines (citywide) and the Guidelines for Downtown Development by addressing more specific design concerns that have historical, cultural or architectural significance to a particular neighborhood.



You should check with us to determine whether a proposed project lies within an area which is covered by neighborhood specific guidelines. All of the adopted neighborhood specific design guidelines and maps are also listed and available on our Design Review website at www.seattle.gov/sdci/about-us/who-we-are/design-review/design-guidelines.

Design guidelines are available online at: www.seattle.gov/sdci.

Types of Streamlined Design Review

Mandatory Streamlined Design Review

Generally, SDR is required for applications for development between 8,000 square feet and 15,000 square feet in zones Low-rise 1 and higher. In some cases, proposed development that is within this square footage range may be subject to ADR. To confirm whether this applies, as well as to research other exceptions and exemptions to this threshold, please consult the thresholds table on page 3 of [Tip 238, Design Review: General Information, Application Instructions, and Submittal Requirements](#).

In addition, if the project falls below the thresholds for Design Review established in SMC 23.41.004, SDR is required for all development in multifamily and commercial zones that propose removal of an exceptional tree or would not be able to develop outside of the restricted tree protection area and achieve the allowed floor area.

Voluntary Streamlined Design Review

Applications for projects in zones that are not otherwise subject to Design Review may opt into SDR depending on the project size.

Adjustments & Departures

Development Standard Adjustments

Development standard adjustments are unique to the SDR process. An adjustment allows a project to achieve flexibility in the application of a specific set of land use code standards or requirements. In order to allow an adjustment from a land use code standard, an applicant must demonstrate that it would result in a development that better meets the intent of the adopted design guidelines and provides a better overall design response.

Development standard adjustments differ in a few important respects from development standard departures that may be granted through the FDR and ADR process. First, development standard adjustments are

evaluated and may be approved by the planner during the review of the project as a part of the Type I land use decision. This means that while the project is given public notice and public comment is accepted, there is no official public comment period associated with the decision. There is also no appeal opportunity of the decision to the City's Hearing Examiner. The planner reviews the merit of a potential adjustment during the design guidance step and may approve the adjustment with the issuance of the project's combined construction and land use approval.

The second important difference between an adjustment and a departure is that adjustments are only available for a designated set of land use code development standards. SMC Section 23.41.018.D.3 provides the list of the specific development standards for which adjustments may be allowed, and is summarized below:

- Setback and separation standards may be reduced by a maximum of 50 percent
- Amenity areas may be reduced by a maximum of 10 percent
- Landscaping and screening may be reduced by a maximum of 25 percent
- Structure width, depth, and facade length limits may be increased by a maximum of 10 percent
- Screening of parking may be reduced by a maximum of 25 percent

Development Standard Departures

Development standard departures are also a potential source of flexibility that are outside of the scope of the SDR process. A development standard departure allows a project design to achieve flexibility in the application of most of the Land Use Code standards. Departures are available for nearly all multifamily land use code standards. See [Tip 238, Design Review: General Information, Application Instructions, and Submittal Requirements](#), and SMC 23.41.012 for a list of standards not available for departures.

If it is determined during the design guidance phase of the SDR review that a project proponent seeks flexibility exceeding the limitations of adjustments, a departure may be sought. Development standard departures however must be made as part of a Type II land use decision. This means that an official public notice and public comment period must be provided at the time the land use application for the departures is submitted. The planner now evaluates the proposed departure as part of the Administrative Design Review (ADR) process

(SMC 23.41.016). Development standard departures decisions are subject to appeal to the City's Hearing Examiner. This process can add some processing time for projects seeking development standard departures. See [Tip 201, Master Use Permit \(MUP\) Overview](#), for more information on the MUP process.

Who is the Design Review Planner?

We assign a land use planner to each design review project. The planner explains the permitting process, specifically the steps to navigate design review and associated reviews. The planner works closely with the applicant team to achieve a design that best responds to the design guidelines. Following a site visit and the review phase, the planner prepares and distributes a report summarizing the guidance which the applicant uses to guide the design response.

What Is the SDR Process?

The diagram on page 4 outlines the steps for the SDR process.

STEP 1: PRE-SUBMITTAL APPLICATION AND CONFERENCE

Complete the Building & Land Use Pre-Application online using the Seattle Services Portal located at <https://cosaccela.seattle.gov/Portal/welcome.aspx>. You will also need to upload a site plan and a complete legal description for your site. You'll receive an email once we have added the pre-application site visit (PASV) fees to your project. A pre-application project number will be assigned to you. After you have paid the fee, we will perform the inspection.

Your preliminary application materials will be sent to other departments for their review and comment. A pre-submittal conference meeting is also required; submit the pre-submittal conference application when you submit your other materials in order to have that pre-submittal meeting scheduled.

1. [Pre-Application Site Visit Request](#) (PASV) Note: This form may be submitted electronically via your project portal
2. [Preliminary Application Form](#) (PAF) Note: This form may be submitted electronically via your project portal

3. [Pre-Submittal Conference Application](#)

4. [Statement of Financial Responsibility / Agent Authorization](#)

5. [Tip 103, Site Plan Requirements](#) for Basic Site Plan information.

Applicant Services Center (ASC) support staff will review the request, note pertinent information, and call back with available appointment times and an assigned Early Design Guidance (EDG) project number. Please note that the pre-submittal date is scheduled several weeks from the application date to allow time for the completion of the Preliminary Assessment Report. Fees for pre-submittal conferences and additional hours of review are listed in the current version of the Fee Subtitle and are summarized in the [Land Use Application and Fee Requirements document](#).

We highly encourage you to upload a draft SDR packet along with the pre-submittal materials. This will allow staff to begin review of your packet and provide feedback at the meeting and likely save review time after the application is submitted. We also recommend that you use the [SDR Packet Checklist Worksheet](#) to document where the information has been provided; please provide a copy of this worksheet to your planner along with the draft packet.

Public Outreach

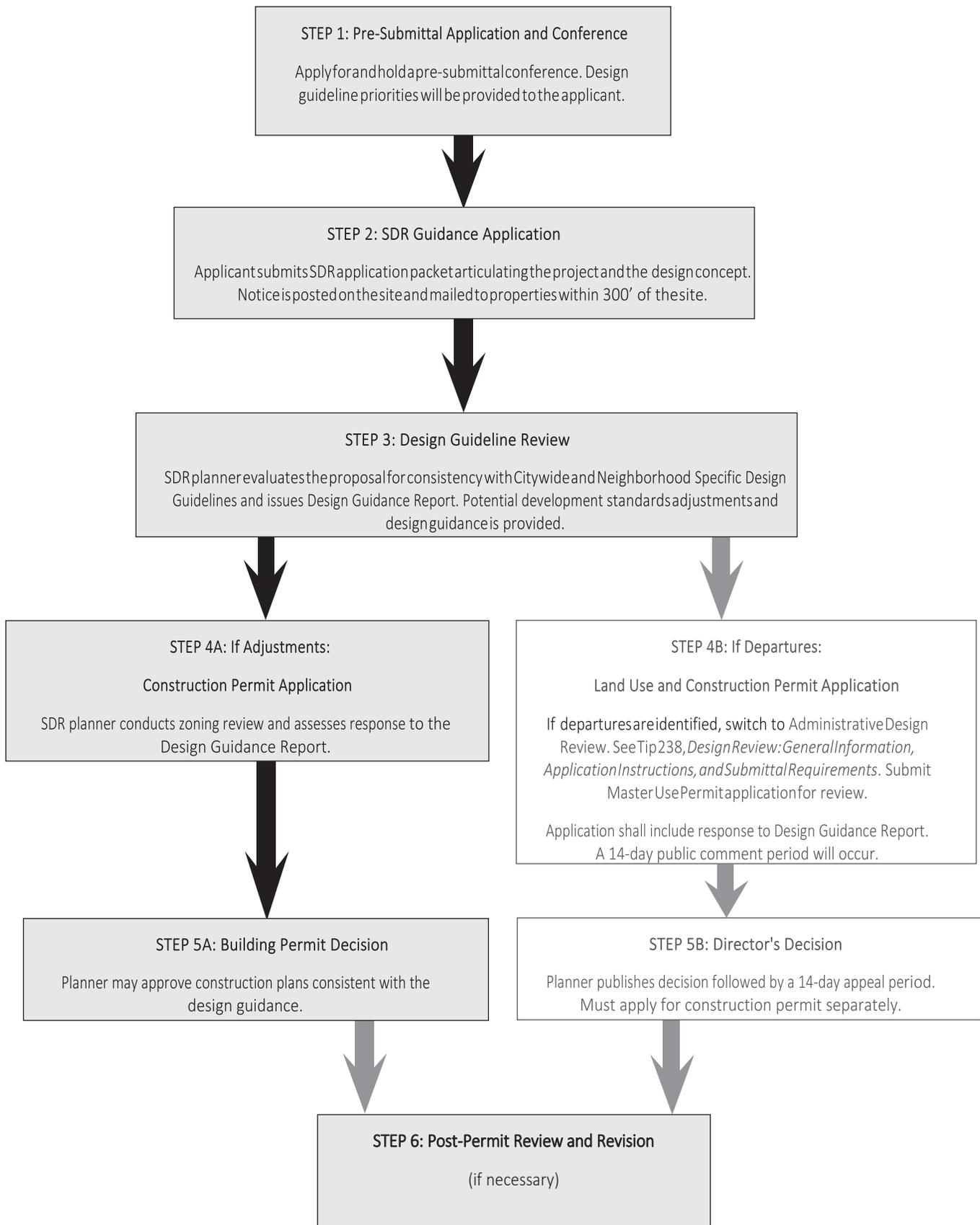
Visit the Department of Neighborhood's (DON) [Early Community Outreach for Design Review webpage](#) for information and resources about planning, conducting, and documenting your required community outreach. The DON staff contact listed on that webpage is responsible for reviewing and approving your outreach documentation and is available to answer any questions you have about your outreach. You may begin your outreach at any time; however, it must be completed before we begin any review of your application.

Pre-Submittal Conference

SDR requires a pre-submittal conference with your assigned land use planner. At the pre-submittal conference, various city staff will be in attendance to discuss your project.

Please limit the number of people attending on behalf of your project to six due to room size constraints. If you want to bring more people to the meeting, please call (206) 684-8850. Please note that if you need to reserve a

Streamlined Design Review (SDR) Process



larger room, it may result in a delay of your appointment.

During the conference, please be prepared to make a presentation that includes the project site, surrounding building context, and your general development program. This is an opportunity for all parties to discuss the following:

- Review draft design packet and design thinking
- Design Guidelines of highest priority
- Process steps
- Community outreach
- Nearby projects and/or initiatives in the planning or construction phases
- Possible development standard adjustments
- Other important preliminary issues

A designated member of your team should take minutes/notes during the pre-submittal meeting and prepare the written notes of the meeting and email the draft (in Word format) to the City staff in attendance ideally within two weeks of the pre-submittal meeting. Staff will review, edit and approve the final notes and add them to the project file. This step must occur before the SDR application will be accepted.

STEP 2: SDR APPLICATION

You may submit your SDR application immediately following its approval and upload of your staff-approved pre-submittal conference notes to the [Seattle Services Portal](#). You should follow the procedures outlined under Step 2 on the [SDR website](#).

We accept all SDR applications daily, based on when your complete application is submitted through the [Seattle Services Portal](#). You do not need to schedule an intake appointment for SDR applications. You do, however, need to follow the steps in [How to Submit Your EDG Application](#).

The following are the required items that must be included for a successful, complete SDR application:

1. Draft SDR packet developed using the [SDR Packet Checklist](#). The 11 x 17-inch formatted packet enables the applicant to describe the conditions influencing the design and graphically demonstrate the design proposal for the project. This packet is what the planner will evaluate in the design review.

The information in this document will be used to give public notice of the project.

2. A [Statement of Financial Responsibility Form / Agent Authorization](#) signed by the property owner (this form is only required when the financially responsible party or agent has changed for the project since the pre-submittal).
3. Payment of fees per the [Land Use Application Fee Requirements](#) – see the Land Use Fee Table on the last page.

The fees due are outlined on the last page of the [Land Use Application Fee Requirements](#) document. We will also collect the fees for additional land use hours at this time.

All of these forms and instructions are all available online at www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/forms, or from the 20th floor ASC, Seattle Municipal Tower, 700 Fifth Ave.

The SDR Design Proposal Packet

The 11"x17" packet enables the applicant to describe the parameters affecting the design and graphically demonstrate the project proposal. You can find a [SDR Proposal Packet checklist](#) online.

In general, the SDR packet should include:

1. **Follow packet standards.** Please see SDR checklist.
2. **Project Info:** Project number, address, design review type and date.
3. **Development Objectives:** Approximate number of residential units, amount of commercial square footage and number of parking stalls and aerial photo of site and context.
4. **Site Plan:** Clear site plan showing property lines, dimensions, spot elevations, topography, structure footprint, adjacent structures, trees, access, right-of-way dimensions and landscaping, as well as a legal description.
5. **Urban Design Analysis:** Vicinity map, graphics and photos, indicating surrounding uses, structures, zoning and notable features, axonometric or other three-dimensional drawing, photos or mod-

els of the nine-block area surrounding the project site. Include information showing shadow impacts. Map and photos including call-out notes on drawings and captions stating what design cues can be gleaned to inform the design alternatives and contextual conditions.

6. **Zoning Data:** Brief summary of applicable standards and how proposed development will meet these standards.
7. **Design Guidelines:** Briefly list those design guidelines and specific neighborhood design guidelines that are most pertinent to the site and design of the project. Explain why these guidelines are relevant and how the proposed design responds. Include conceptual response to guidelines with conceptual images or graphics.
8. **Architectural Concept:** Provide at least one architectural massing concept showing your design concept. List opportunities and constraints explaining the reasoning for this design. Include conceptual floor plans so ground level uses and functions are understood. Show siting, massing, open space, possible façade treatments, and access in the same graphic context. Three dimensional studies and sketches at the street level are helpful in processing this information, particularly the thinking in the design evolution.
9. **Adjustments:** Summary table for all potential adjustments which will need to include the following: code citation and code requirement, proposed design adjustment, and rationale explaining how the adjustment results in a project which better meets the intent of the identified design guidelines. Graphics should accompany the table, as needed, to clearly explain the adjustment(s) showing code compliant and requested adjustment with dimensions.

Note: For projects that require street or alley improvements, the right-of-way (ROW) plans will need to be submitted to Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), and accepted for review, prior to submitting your construction permit plans to SDCI. The applicant should initiate coordination with SDOT and submit initial Street Improvement Plans at this time to ensure full coordination and to avoid potential delays. Construction permit applications for new buildings will not be accepted by SDCI until the SDOT plan has been accepted.

STEP 3: DESIGN GUIDANCE REVIEW

Once you have submitted your SDR application, an SDCI land use planner will work with you to revise the draft SDR design proposal packet that you originally submitted at intake so that it better meets the criteria outlined in the [Streamlined Design Review: Early Design Guidance Packet Checklist](#).

SDCI will post a notice of the project in the weekly [Land Use Information Bulletin](#). We will also provide mailed notice to residents and property owners within 300 feet of the site, and post a yellow placard at the project site.

SDR does not require a public meeting, and comments submitted to SDCI are advisory.

When the complete SDR application is accepted, the SDCI planner will begin the design guidance review. The SDCI planner will review the final design guidance packet considering applicable citywide and neighborhood design guidelines. The planner will prepare a Design Guidance Report after the 14-day comment period. The Design Guidance Report will identify priority design guidelines, any design changes related to the guidelines and provide direction on whether requested development standard adjustments may be granted at the time of permit issuance or whether further modifications to the design might be required for the design to be approved. The report may identify whether potential development standard adjustments might be a suggested option for the proposed design to obtain approval (See Step 4A on the next page).

The guidance report will be sent to all parties who have written to SDCI regarding the project. The guidance report, as well as the 11"x17" design proposals, are also available under the search [Project Reviews](#) link on the Design Review website.

STEP 4A: CONSTRUCTION PERMIT APPLICATION FOR PROJECTS WITH DEVELOPMENT STANDARD ADJUSTMENTS ONLY – TYPE I (Projects with departures, see Step 4B)

The applicant develops the project proposal incorporating responses to the Design Guidance Report. If no development standard departures are included in the project and there are no other permit components otherwise requiring a MUP submittal (such as environmental review, variance, or shoreline substantial development

review) the applicant may prepare for application of a construction permit. See step 4 in [Tip 100, Getting a Multifamily or Commercial Construction Permit from SDCI](#), for a description of construction permit submittal requirements.

Along with the construction permit submittal, the applicant must include narrative documentation of responses to the Design Guidance Report. Depending on the content of the Design Guidance Report, the applicant's response may be required to include one or more revised color renderings, site plan or landscape plan graphics. The application must include material adequate to address the guidance provided in the Design Guidance Report. This should include a written statement documenting the response to the Design Guidance Report.

Once the construction application and the response to design guidance is accepted, the assigned planner will review the adequacy of the response to the Design Guidance Report. The planner will determine whether to approve or not approve proposed adjustments as a part of this permit decision. Concurrently, SDCI and other City staff will conduct reviews which include zoning and building code reviews and potentially relevant reviews specific to the proposal such as: energy/mechanical, geotechnical, shoring, ECA, grading/drainage, health, and fire.

STEP 4B: LAND USE & CONSTRUCTION PERMIT APPLICATION FOR PROJECTS WITH DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES ONLY – TYPE II

If, during the SDR review process, the applicant elects to include a proposed development standard departure, the applicant will need to return to the Early Design Guidance (EDG) phase in the ADR process for an Administrative EDG. In the scenario of a departure being sought, the applicant will also need to submit a MUP and will follow the process outlined in [Tip 238, Design Review: General Information, Application Instructions, and Submittal Requirements](#) (Design Review, beginning with Step 3).

Along with the MUP submittal, the applicant must include documentation of responses to the SDR Design Guidance Report. Depending on the content of the Design Guidance Report, the applicant's response may be required to include one or more revised color renderings, site plan or landscape plan graphics adequate to

address the planner's guidance provided in the Design Guidance Report.

Once the MUP application has been accepted, the appropriate notice of application will be performed for the project. People may comment on the project, including siting and design issues. The assigned SDCI planner will review and check to ensure adequate response to the Design Guidance Report. The planner will determine whether to approve or not approve proposed departures as a part of a MUP Type II permit decision. Application for a construction permit will follow the standard process but will not be approved until the Director's decision has been published and the appeal period and the MUP has been issued.

STEP 5: DIRECTOR'S DECISION

SDCI makes the final decision on the SDR component. If the proposal includes no other permit component requiring a MUP, the Director may approve the construction permit along with proposed development standard adjustments. The planner's evaluation of the response to the design guidance report and adjustments shall be embedded within the construction permit plans approved by the Director. This is a Type I land use decision. In this case, no further public notice is required, or appeal opportunity allowed. The decision is final.

If any development standard departures are proposed, or if another permit component requiring a MUP is present (Step 4B) the department's ADR decision will be issued as part of the decision on the MUP. This is a Type II land use decision. Written notice to all parties of record, as well as notice of the decision in the weekly [Land Use Information Bulletin](#). This decision is appealable to the Hearing Examiner.

STEP 6: POST PERMIT REVIEW AND REVISIONS (IF NECESSARY)

Any revisions an applicant wishes to make to a construction permit that underwent SDR must be presented to the planner for review. Revisions to projects that have undergone SDR must be reviewed for consistency with the original design guidance report. If the revision is minor and clearly within the intent of the original design and the SDR design guidance report, the planner may provide approval. Major revisions, as well as new adjustments from the original SDR guidance report and subsequent approval may trigger additional administrative process. See

Tip 224B, Master Use Permit (MUP) Revisions, for more information about revisions. All additional administrative costs for review of revisions will be borne by the applicant.

Additional Information on Design Review

Visit www.seattle.gov/designreview for more information about Seattle's Design Review program. In addition to basic program information, the site features:

- Links to the Preliminary Application Form (PAF), Statement of Financial Responsibility/Agent Authorization Form and Fee Worksheet and other required application materials
- SDR packet checklist
- A calendar of upcoming design review meetings
- Design proposal packets
- Visual gallery of design guideline examples
- Visual gallery of successful projects

Printed design review resources are available at the Public Resource Center, 20th floor, Seattle Municipal Tower, 700 Fifth Ave. Please visit: <https://www.seattle.gov/sdci/about-us/who-we-are/design-review> for further information.

Access to Information

Links to electronic versions of SDCI Tips, Director's Rules, and the Seattle Municipal Code are available on our website at www.seattle.gov/sdci.