Seattle IT

DECISION PAPER

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Decisions to be made
Select a new process to be followed for Design Review Board meetings that allows for them to be conducted online instead of in person as a response to COVID-19. Select a video conferencing platform which is essential for administering these meetings online.

Background
The City of Seattle's design review process requires that certain new construction projects undergo a discretionary review of the siting and design of new development. Design review is a key required element in the application process.

For projects requiring design review, the Design Review Board convenes public meetings at least twice for projects that are required to go through the Full Design Review process. Without these public meetings, progress cannot be made on project applications.

There are eight review boards, each one focusing on a specific geographical region in the city. Meetings are held at locations throughout the city. Each board is scheduled to meet twice a month and to hold quarterly training sessions.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, significant changes had to be made in the way that SDCI and the public do business together. The City Council recently passed legislation mandating development of a solution that will allow the design review process to continue, while adhering to the city and county guidelines for safely conducting business.

Assumptions
- Public engagement is a critical component to the design review process and it is important that we not only provide opportunities for this engagement but also ensure that the public feel that their time is spent in a meaningful manner.

SDCI has a vested interest in continuing the design review process.

- COVID-19 shutdowns will continue to impact business with the City of Seattle.
- This decision will not impact any existing online conferencing systems used by SDCI.
- The action items listed at the end of this document will be completed prior to implementation of selected solution.

Options
1. **Use video conferencing applications currently offered by Seattle IT.** Skype and Microsoft Teams are the two video conferencing options currently in production and available for use for online meetings.
   a. **Pros.**
      i. Applications are in place and ready for use.
      ii. SDCI staff have been trained in the use of the applications.
      iii. Common platforms that are likely familiar to public users.

    iv. Can be implemented without additional IT support.
  b. **Cons.**
    i. Known connection issues (ex: busy signals, dropped calls, performance degradation depending upon network being used by presenters).
    ii. Limitations with existing functionality (ex: issues with non-City email addresses as participants)
    iii. Additional staffing needed to facilitate the online meetings.

2. **Use the new Webex Events video conferencing application.** Take advantage of Seattle IT's early adopter process to roll-out the recently added Webex Meetings offering.
  a. **Pros.**
    i. Additional available support by IT during early adopter phase.
    ii. Application that is well established for video conferencing functionality and stability.
    iii. Robust feature set may more solidly support the requirements.
  b. **Cons.**
    i. Early adopter status means that system issues may not have been uncovered yet.
    ii. Additional staff training needed.
    iii. Possible longer timeline to implement.
    iv. Managing the meetings will require technical administrators and communications outside of the scope of availability of current staff. Initial projections indicate the need for 2 term-limited temporary assignments to support this effort fully.

3. **Research third party design review process applications.** Create a project specifically to find and do an analysis of possible third-party applications specializing in the design review process. As part of the analysis, search for applications that also support video conferencing, and possibly integrate with Accela.
  a. **Pros.**
    i. Possibility of finding an all-in-one solution.
    ii. Supports the City's goal of "one City, one system" for permitting
  b. **Cons.**
    i. Research phase will significantly add to the timeline of solution implementation.
    ii. Research may not result in any products suitable for implementation.
    iii. If one or more products are identified, purchasing phase will increase the timeline
    iv. Implementation phase will add to the timeline
    v. Significant additional staff training needed.

Recommendation

The recommended approach is to implement Option 2 and execute a pilot launch. SDCI would be able to take advantage of the early adopter roll-out for Webex Events, an internationally established video conferencing platform .

Action Items Needing Decision Prior to Roll-out:

1. SDCI needs to examine the Racial Equity Toolkit and apply it to this project. There are concerns about equity in access to participate in this public process that need to be further examined and mitigated.
2. A key component of the board meetings is the project presentation by applicants. It is unlikely that the presentation materials will be viewable on smartphone screens. How will SDCI provide access to presentation materials?
  a. Option 1: set the expectation that, for full access to the presentation, attendees will need to use a tablet or other larger screened device.
  b. Option 2: provide hardcopies of the presentation to attendees that only have access to smartphones.

    c.   Option 3: require applicants to format presentation materials so that they are viewable across an assortment of mobile devices.

3. A second key component of the board meetings is display of physical models and materials boards. How will board members, and possibly the public, be able to review these work products?
4. SDCI staff currently involved with the design review process will not be able to run the online meeting. What additional technical staff members will be assigned as application facilitators? Tasks would include starting and managing the meeting application, managing the participant/speaker queue, assisting with support for technical issues, and acting as meeting timekeeper.
5. Meetings are very difficult to reschedule. What is the backup plan for online meetings that cannot be completed online due to technical issues?

Action Items to be Completed Prior to Roll-out:

1. Prepare and execute an approved communication plan.
2. Deploy the WebEx Meetings application.
   a. Pilot testing with SDCI design review staff.
   b. Application testing with meetings of 100+ attendees.
   c. Set up for all currently active board members.
   d. Training for SDCI staff involved with the design review process.
   e. Training for active board members.
3. Prepare instructions for attending meetings online.
4. Update all public facing communications with the link to the meeting instructions (ex: public notices, DJC, SDCI website, Tips).
5. Define the process for providing the meeting presentation package to board members prior to the meeting. File size may prevent distribution by email.
6. Create an electronic participant sign-in sheet that works with Webex Events.
7. Define the process for how participants will be able to share written and verbal public comments during the meeting. This needs to include how participants can provide input when clarification is needed during board deliberations.

High Level Roll-out Schedule

6/8 - 6/24	Decisions / Deploy Webex Events / Create temporary employee assignments (2)
6/15 - 7/20	Communication Plan / Application Testing / Hire temporary employees
6/22 - 7/24	Website and Public Facing Information Updates / Training
7/6 - 7/13	Deadline to Notice Board Meetings for Week of 7/27
8/3 - 8/7	First Available Week of Board Meetings
8/15 - 8/30	Follow-up / Updates to Process and Communications