Design Review Program Improvements
Online Open House Survey Questions Summary
September 2015

PURPOSE

As part of the Design Review Improvements Project, in summer 2015 the Seattle Department of Planning and Development (DPD) created an online open house with survey questions to obtain input and feedback on several potential changes to the Design Review program. This followed an initial online survey released in spring 2015 that sought public feedback on preferences for learning about and providing input on new buildings being reviewed as part of the Design Review Program.

The survey was housed within an online open house website that provided general information on the Design Review program as well as the potential changes to the program.

The survey was divided into four separate sections:
- Early outreach
- Process changes
- New tools
- General feedback

Survey respondents could choose to respond to one survey only, or up to all four. In total, the four sections of the survey received 278 responses between June 15 and August 21, 2015.

TARGET AUDIENCES
- Members of the public who are likely already engaged in the Design Review process (e.g. attending meetings, providing comments, etc.) or have an interest in topics related to urban design/planning
- Readers of local neighborhood blogs

HOW THE SURVEY WAS DISTRIBUTED

The link to the online survey link was distributed in the following ways:
- At Design Review Board meetings
- Emailed to local neighborhood blogs (Capitol Hill Blog, Central District News, MyBallard.com, Next Door Media (parent site for several local blogs), Rainier Valley Post, West Seattle Blog, The Urbanist
- City Neighborhood Council (CNC) newsletter distribution
- On the Design Review main webpage, and on the webpage announcing upcoming Design Review Board meetings
- Seattle Design Commission (provided to staff for distribution)
- Seattle DPD Building Connections blog
- Seattle Planning Commission (provided to staff for distribution)
- DPD Facebook and Twitter social media

KEY COMMENT THEMES
- Involve the public, and provide strong and consistent guidance on effective feedback
- Perform communication outreach with a variety of tools online and offline
- Create transparency at Design Review Board meetings, and communicate how feedback from an applicant and/or the public is being used
- Support diverse and social justice communities by performing targeted outreach
- Ensure that larger or more impactful projects receive more review, smaller or less impactful projects may be administrative
- Ensure all projects go through adequate review cycles, either through the Design Review Board or staff, regardless of special accommodations
- Keep design review process efficient, focused on design, predictable and concise
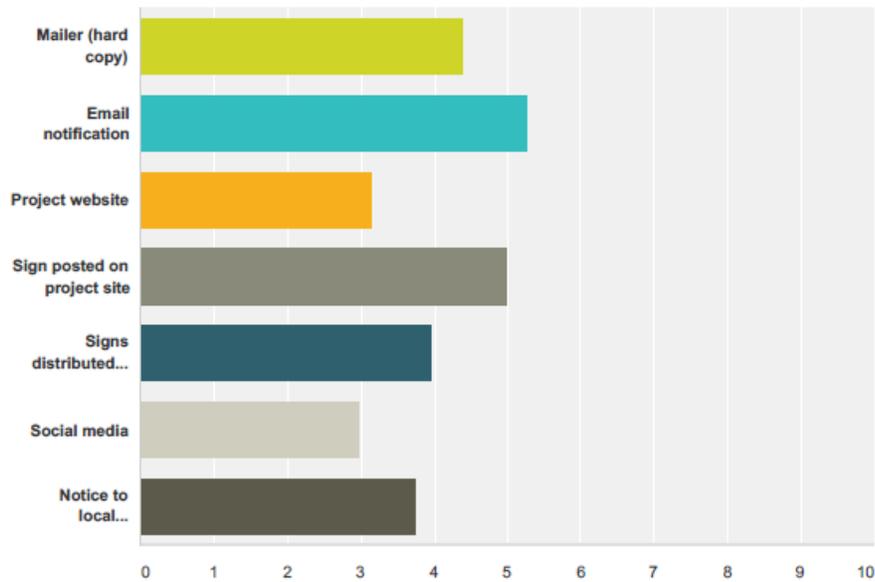- Provide materials online, however, online feedback may be less effective, and difficult to moderate

SURVEY #1 - EARLY AND ONGOING OUTREACH

Respondents: 78

1. **Which of these ways of finding out about a design review project would be most useful? (rank in order of preference (1-7))**
   Answered: 77
   Skipped: 1

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total	Score
Mailer (hard copy)	20.29% 14	21.74% 15	14.49% 10	7.25% 5	11.59% 8	5.80% 4	18.84% 13	69	4.39
Email notification	45.95% 34	13.51% 10	5.41% 4	9.46% 7	8.11% 6	16.22% 12	1.35% 1	74	5.26
Project website	2.70% 2	9.46% 7	12.16% 9	16.22% 12	13.51% 10	28.38% 21	17.57% 13	74	3.16
Sign posted on project site	18.67% 14	24.00% 18	22.67% 17	17.33% 13	10.67% 8	4.00% 3	2.67% 2	75	5.00
Signs distributed throughout community	9.59% 7	12.33% 9	16.44% 12	19.18% 14	21.92% 16	10.96% 8	9.59% 7	73	3.97
Social media	5.56% 4	5.56% 4	12.50% 9	9.72% 7	16.67% 12	25.00% 18	25.00% 18	72	2.99
Notice to local neighborhood organizations (such as community councils, LURC's, business associations)	2.70% 2	17.57% 13	18.92% 14	20.27% 15	14.86% 11	5.41% 4	20.27% 15	74	3.76

2. **Which of these forums for dialogue about a design review project would be most useful? (rank in order of preference (1-4))**

Answered: 77

Skipped: 1
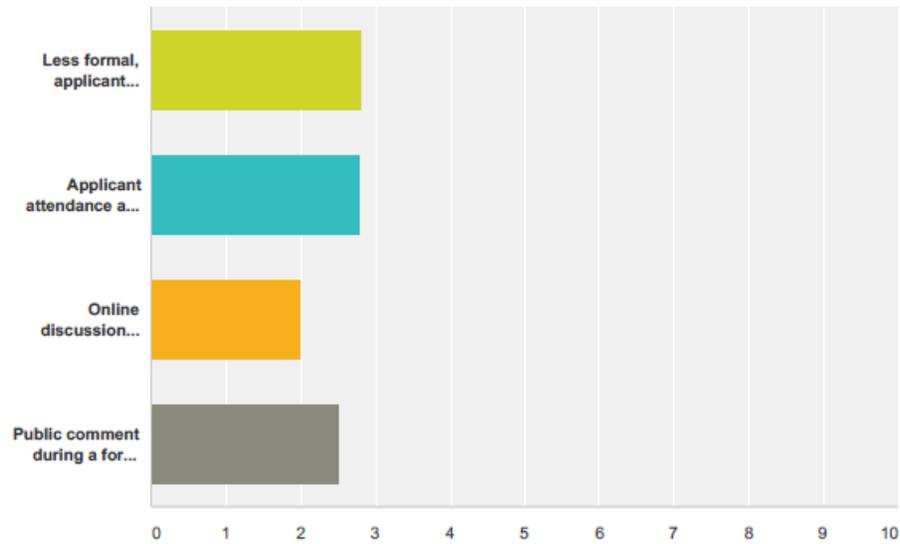
	1	2	3	4	Total	Score
Less formal, applicant organized meetings in the neighborhood where the project is located	26.67% 20	40.00% 30	18.67% 14	14.67% 11	75	2.79
Applicant attendance at standing community/neighborhood group meetings	31.08% 23	24.32% 18	35.14% 26	9.46% 7	74	2.77
Online discussion (i.e. listservs, blogs, websites, etc.)	13.51% 10	16.22% 12	25.68% 19	44.59% 33	74	1.99
Public comment during a formal design review board meeting (existing process)	31.58% 24	18.42% 14	19.74% 15	30.26% 23	76	2.51

3. **How often would it be useful to hear about the project?**
   Answered: 77
   Skipped: 1
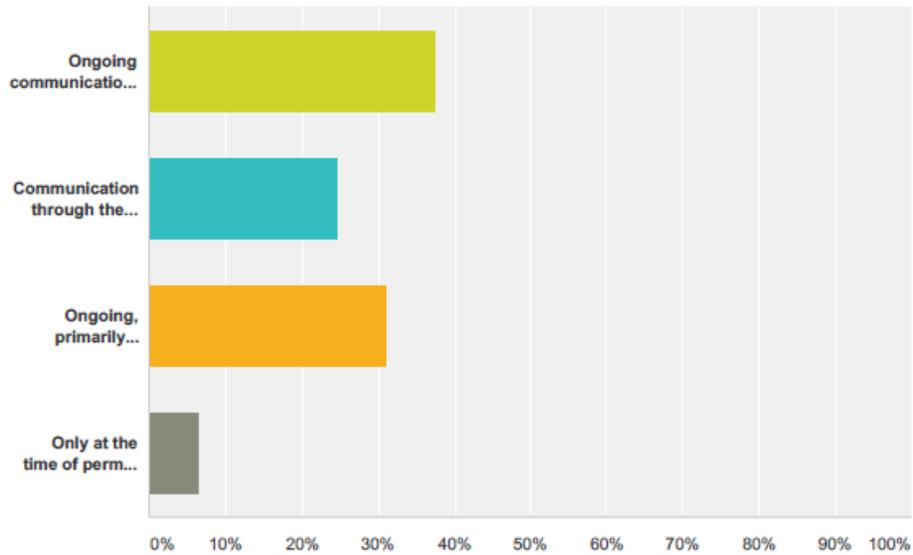
Answer Choices	Responses	
Ongoing communication with the applicant/project team that starts before design review and lasts until the start of construction (this could include a combination of in-person and electronic communication)	37.66%	29
Communication through the City's formal design review process usually at 2 formal public meetings (existing process).	24.68%	19
Ongoing, primarily through online communication (via a project website, blog, or social media platform).	31.17%	24
Only at the time of permit decision (with the right to appeal)	6.49%	5
Total		**77**

4. **Have other thoughts or ideas to share? Let us know!**
   Answered: 31
   Skipped: 47

   a. **Key themes and sample responses**
      i. *Limit notifications / pressure on applicant to perform outreach*
         1. "Let's not over do it with notifications. The way it works now is fine."
         2. "There is no way the applicant should be required to have additional communication with the public in addition to required public meetings."

       3. "I feel pushing the responsibility for public outreach onto the applicant is an impossible task that is sure to be another bureaucratic night mare, fraught with opportunities for failure."

  ii. *Online comments would be difficult to moderate*
       1. "Online discussion would need to be moderated since it can often be divisive and unproductive."
       2. "If contact is primarily done online or via social media the probability of vitriolic comments would shoot through the roof."

  iii. *DRB meetings and processes with developers or the public should be transparent*
       1. "No more closed-door meetings with developers, or organizations like HALA."
       2. "Make sure Design Review Board discussion and remarks are actually public, not a quiet conversation at their table which the audience can't hear. Make sure DR meetings are NOT held at the same time as the relevant neighborhood council monthly meetings – that happened for at least two years in the recent past and was not changed despite repeated requests."
       3. "Currently, while the process collects public comment, there is nothing to ensure those comments are integrated and acted upon in a meaningful way."
       4. "Each meeting/review should include a handout (or header for on-line info) which includes the goals of this particular meeting/review and what the board does and does not have jurisdiction over (i.e. parking)."

  iv. *Environmental / Social Justice*
       1. "Please do not allow existing community groups to manage this, include all community members. Community groups in Seattle normally only represent wealthy educated homeowners with lots of free time."
       2. "Important for ALL voices of community to get heard, including those without access to internet or [whose] first language is something [besides] English."
       3. "Let us not downplay the value of active participation by members of the communities in which these new designs are proposed."

  v. *Understand that projects may have different needs*
       1. "Bigger, more prominent projects should have more dialog"
       2. "Evaluate the collective impact of multiple, small projects on neighborhood design."

  vi. *Include a variety of communication methods*
       1. "You don't mention news media. That's how many people in some neighborhoods primarily hear about projects – via news coverage from community news outlets."
       2. "Use a variety of communication methods so everyone can be informed."
       3. "DPD should provide applicants with a list of community groups to reach out to during the design development process."

    4. "I would LOVE to be able to sign up to receive email updates about projects within a certain area."

    5. "Create and maintain an online map that covers all projects going on in area throughout design cycle process."

vii.   *Direction for current non-DRB concerns*

    1. "There seem to be community concerns that fall outside of design that need a public forum."

    2. "Parking requirements must be included in the process."

viii.   *Design Review process and design decisions reform*

    1. "Process needs to be streamlined. It often dilutes design and is incredibly inconsistent."

    2. "We are creating an extremely boxy skyline due to our height controls. Can we introduce a 'vanity clause' that allows a developer to gain points by including an interesting crown treatment in order to attain more visual excitement in the skyline?"

    3. "The process should seek advocates for good design as much as it seeks, or rather caters to, those that are leery of development."

    4. "Hopefully we will see less corrugated metal buildings. They look cheap, and in 10 years from now will be asking why we built them."
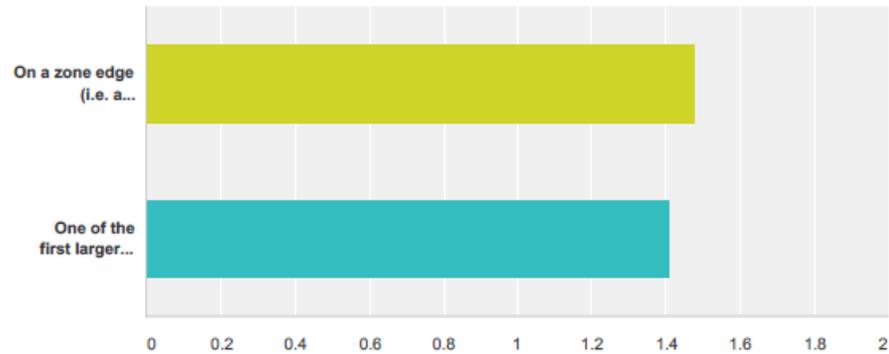
SURVEY #2 - PROCESS CHANGES

Respondents: 66

For questions 1-3, which types of projects would have the biggest design challenges and/or impacts on your neighborhood?

1. **Located in a transition area**
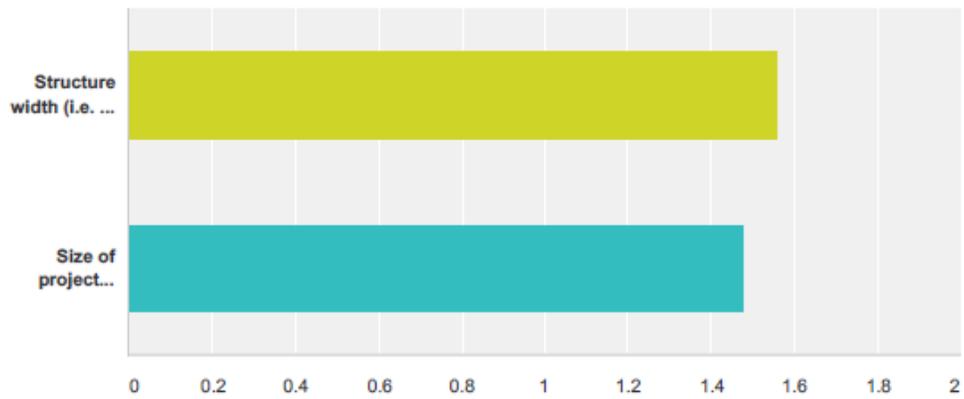   Answered: 64
   S

	Major challenge/impact	Neutral challenge/impact	Not a challenge/impact	Total	Weighted Average
On a zone edge (i.e. a multi-family zone next to a single family zone)	59.38% 38	32.81% 21	7.81% 5	64	1.48
One of the first larger projects on the block	68.75% 44	21.88% 14	9.38% 6	64	1.41

2. Projects of a certain scale
Answered: 64
Skipped: 2

	Major challenge/impact	Neutral challenge/impact	Not a challenge/impact	Total	Weighted Average
Structure width (i.e. a project that extends more than ½ of a typical block length)	57.81% 37	28.13% 18	14.06% 9	64	1.56
Size of project footprint (i.e. a project that occupies more than ½ of a typical block)	59.38% 38	32.81% 21	7.81% 5	64	1.48

### 3. Projects with unique characteristics
Answered: 61
Skipped: 5
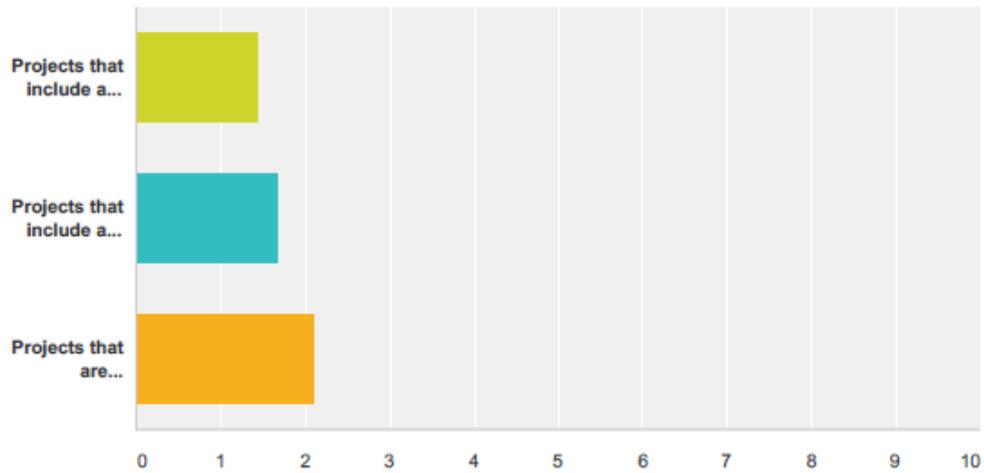
	Major challenge/impact	Neutral challenge/impact	Not a challenge/impact	Total	Weighted Average
Projects that include a historic landmark	65.57% 40	24.59% 15	9.84% 6	61	1.44
Projects that include a character structure in the Pike/Pine district	46.43% 26	39.29% 22	14.29% 8	56	1.68
Projects that are participating in a current pilot program (i.e. the Living Building Pilot Program)	18.97% 11	51.72% 30	29.31% 17	58	2.10

4. **Given limited resources and a need for timely reviews, ow do you feel about each of the following statements?**
Answered: 65
Skipped: 1
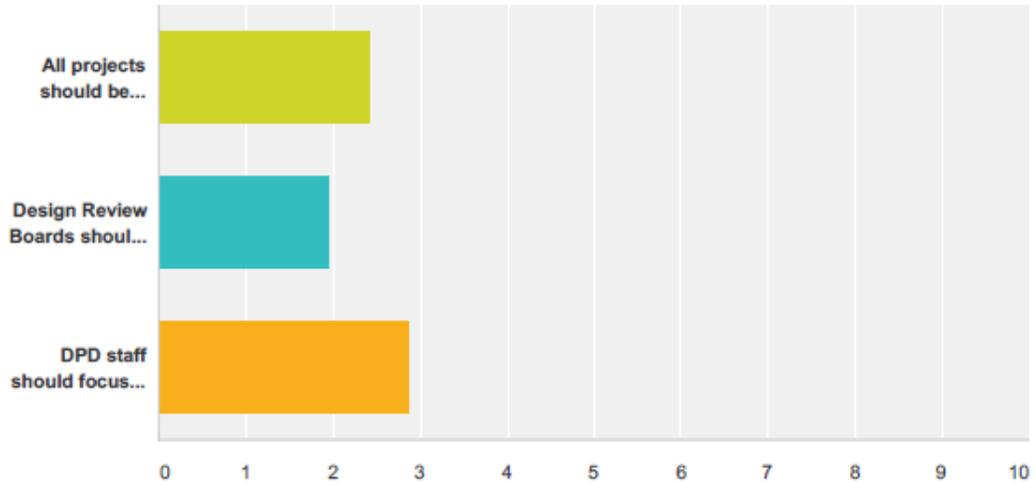
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total	Weighted Average
All projects should be reviewed by a Design Review Board, regardless of impact on project costs or timelines (existing process)	24.62% 16	30.77% 20	23.08% 15	21.54% 14	65	2.42
Design Review Boards should focus on the projects with the biggest neighborhood-specific challenges, with DPD staff taking the lead on reviewing other projects	36.92% 24	41.54% 27	10.77% 7	10.77% 7	65	1.95
DPD staff should focus on the projects with the biggest neighborhood specific challenges, allowing the Board to focus on other projects that don't have as many neighborhood specific challenges	10.94% 7	17.19% 11	43.75% 28	28.13% 18	64	2.89

5. **Should the design review process provide special accommodations for certain types of projects, such as:**

Answered: 63

Skipped: 3
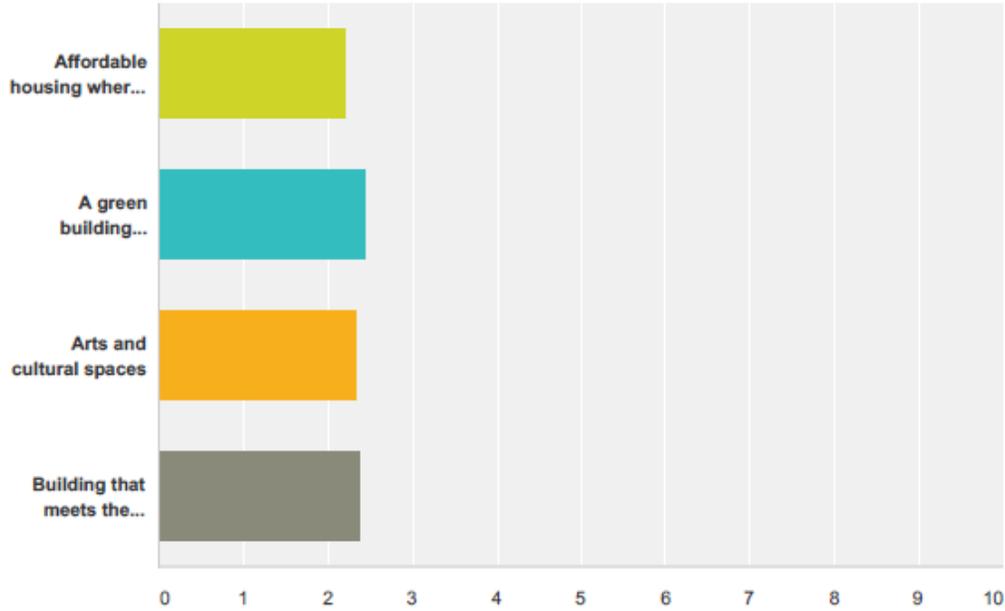
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total	Weighted Average
Affordable housing where most or all of the building is dedicated to low or very low-income residents	34.92% 22	26.98% 17	20.63% 13	17.46% 11	63	2.21
A green building project	20.63% 13	31.75% 20	30.16% 19	17.46% 11	63	2.44
Arts and cultural spaces	20.97% 13	37.10% 23	29.03% 18	12.90% 8	62	2.34
Building that meets the highest green building standards	23.81% 15	30.16% 19	31.75% 20	14.29% 9	63	2.37

6. **Have any other thoughts or ideas to share? Let us know!**
   Answered: 27
   Skipped: 39

   a. **Key themes and sample responses**
      i. *Concerns, comments and questions regarding special accommodations*
         1. "I only answered 'disagree' for green building above because I don't think green building should be leveraged to get what developers want. Especially because green building can be an easy out for bulldozing other impacts that can't be undone (for ex, conservation)."
         2. "What special accommodations would be allowed without review? On all of this, how much will neighbors and communities concerns be heeded?"
         3. "By special accommodation do you mean more leniency than the private sector or other projects get? This could set up a discriminatory situation. Guidelines for design should not be weighted with social justice issues."
         4. "Buildings that meet special accommodations criteria should still be subject to thorough design review if they are large for their location/zone and/or will have a big impact (eg, traffic) in the environment."
         5. "A small business accommodation in terms of fee would be useful"
         6. "What does 'special accommodations entail?"
         7. "Do 'Special Accommodations' mean a reduction or easing of code requirements? Are accommodations reductions or are accommodations increased requirements? If so, you won't get answers to the question you think you're asking. You'll get answers to the question the respondent thinks you're asking."
         8. "Special considerations for greenwashing or false preservation is ridiculous. Those two things have nothing to do with good design."
      ii. *More impactful (typically larger) projects should go through the DRB, but small projects should be administrative*
         1. "I think that the projects that carry the biggest potential impact will be the focus of community concerns, and I think it makes sense to direct the DRB bandwidth at those projects."
         2. "Full review is appropriate for very large buildings with very large departures. But for most buildings, I want the process to be easy at the administrative level."
      iii. *All projects should be reviewed*
         1. "I like the idea of all projects being reviewed. Because what is big and important to the board may not be the same as what is important to the nearest neighbors to the project no matter how small, however, I do see how this might bog down the entire DPD review board."
         2. "Just because a building fulfills a social purpose (arts, affordable housing, sustainability) does not mean that we should sacrifice our day-

to-day experience of that building and forgo to design review process. All large developments need this process."

3. "All projects should go through the DRB, but overall the scope of the DRB should be pulled back. Not on a project by project basis, but on an overall scale so that there can be less MUP revisions and in a way DPD can create less work for themselves."

iv. *Support communities, diversity and safety*
1. "By lowering building standards to maximize the profit of investors, the City of Seattle IS making a racially charged statement, don't kid yourself otherwise."
2. "Feedback from Design Review Boards with public discourse is essential to projects. This process provides the applicant with direction and often new ideas for developing the project. Relying on the review of a single planner from DPD during EDG would risk acceptance of the project or departure requests during Design Review."
3. "need greater setbacks (wider sidewalks) for livability and safety"

v. *Make materials available online*
1. "The instructions that are read at the beginning of the meetings should be available online for participants to see and understand before the meeting. A voice recording of all meetings should be made."

vi. *Strong leadership role of the DPD Planner*
1. "The DPD planner must take a stronger role in leading the project through the DRB phase, including administrative reviews for EDG and keeping the board focused on areas within their purview."
2. "DPD planners should be well versed in sheparding the projects through review in that they should help guide the community to applicable comment and consolidation of the highest shared community good that they desire."
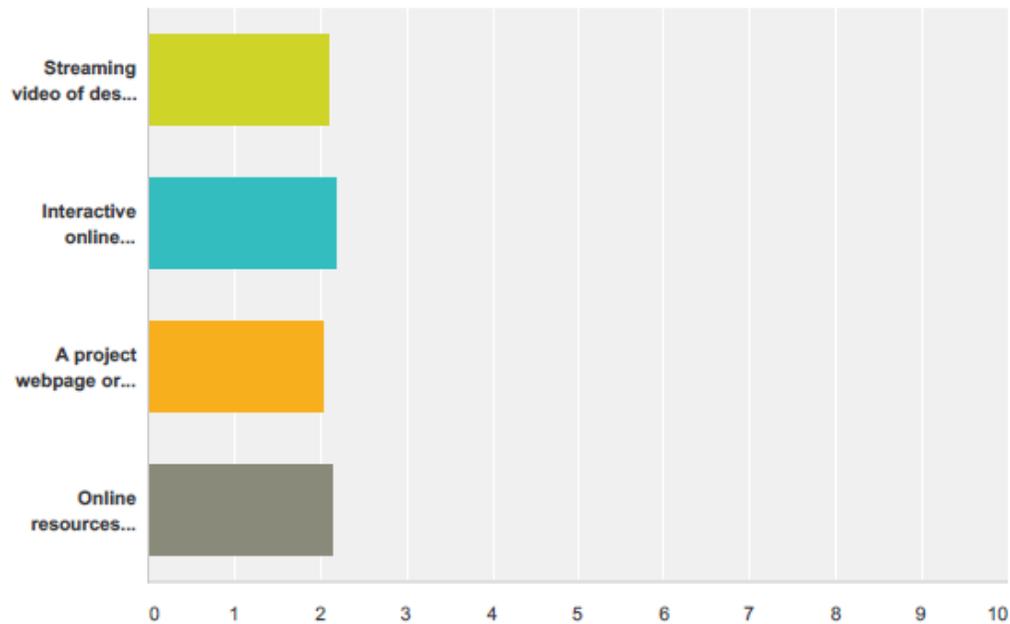
SURVEY #3 - NEW TOOLS
Respondents: 63

1. **How effective would each of these technologies/tools be in supporting the design review process?**
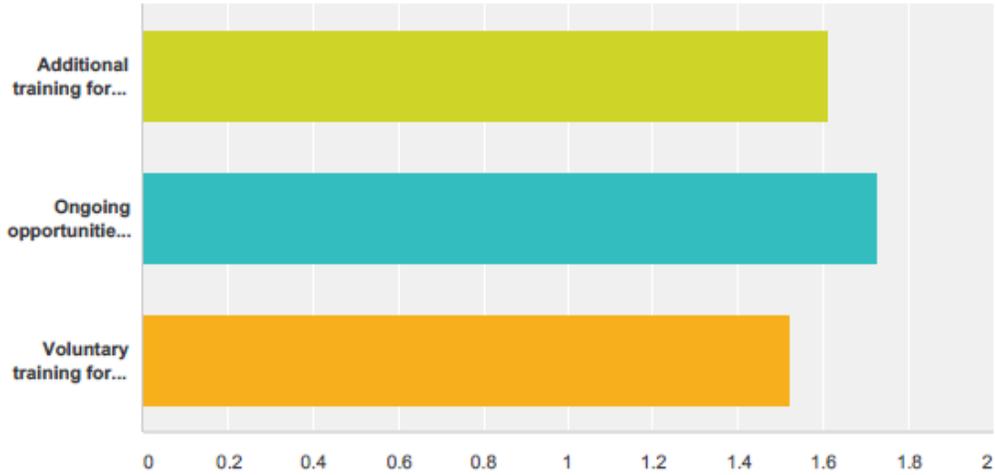   Answered: 63
   Skipped: 0

	Very effective	Somewhat effective	No impact	Counterproductive	Total	Weighted Average
Streaming video of design review meetings	22.22% 14	49.21% 31	23.81% 15	4.76% 3	63	2.11
Interactive online commenting platform	40.32% 25	27.42% 17	4.84% 3	27.42% 17	62	2.19
A project webpage or social media presence for each development project	33.33% 21	44.44% 28	6.35% 4	15.87% 10	63	2.05
Online resources highlighting exemplary design projects, based on a formal awards program	22.58% 14	43.55% 27	29.03% 18	4.84% 3	62	2.16

2. **How useful would training be for each of the following audiences?**
Answered: 63
Skipped: 0

	Very effective	Somewhat effective	No impact	Counterproductive	Total	Weighted Average
Additional training for all board members about the design review process	52.46% 32	37.70% 23	6.56% 4	3.28% 2	61	1.61
Ongoing opportunities for professional development in architecture/urban design for design review staff	45.16% 28	40.32% 25	11.29% 7	3.23% 2	62	1.73
Voluntary training for community members and groups about land use process and design review	54.84% 34	40.32% 25	3.23% 2	1.61% 1	62	1.52

3. **Which of these procedural changes would be most effective?**
   Answered: 62
   Skipped: 1
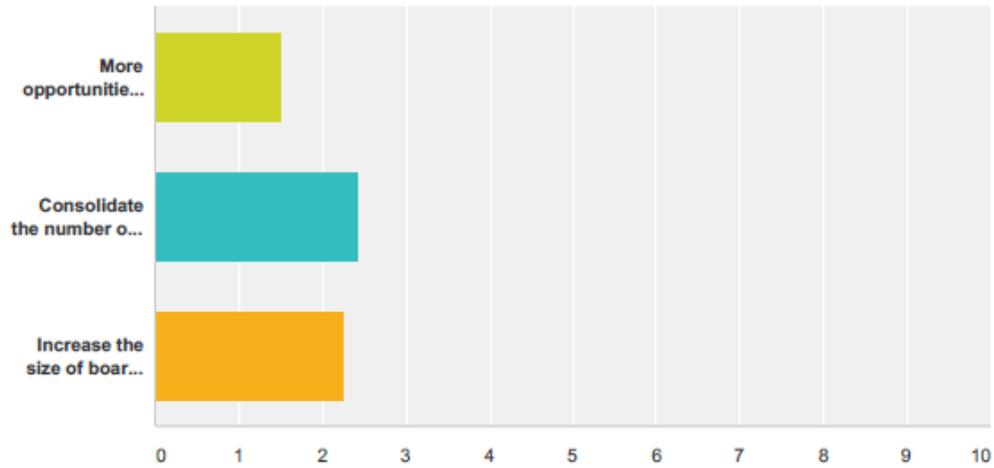
	Very effective	Somewhat effective	No impact	Counterproductive	Total	Weighted Average
More opportunities for dialogue between the applicant and board members at Design Review Board meetings	61.29% 38	30.65% 19	4.84% 3	3.23% 2	62	1.50
Consolidate the number of boards to improve consistency	25.00% 15	31.67% 19	20.00% 12	23.33% 14	60	2.42
Increase the size of boards to enhance consistency by reducing turnover of members	27.12% 16	37.29% 22	18.64% 11	16.95% 10	59	2.25

4. **Which of these staffing and support changes would be most cost effective?**
   Answered: 60
   Skipped: 3
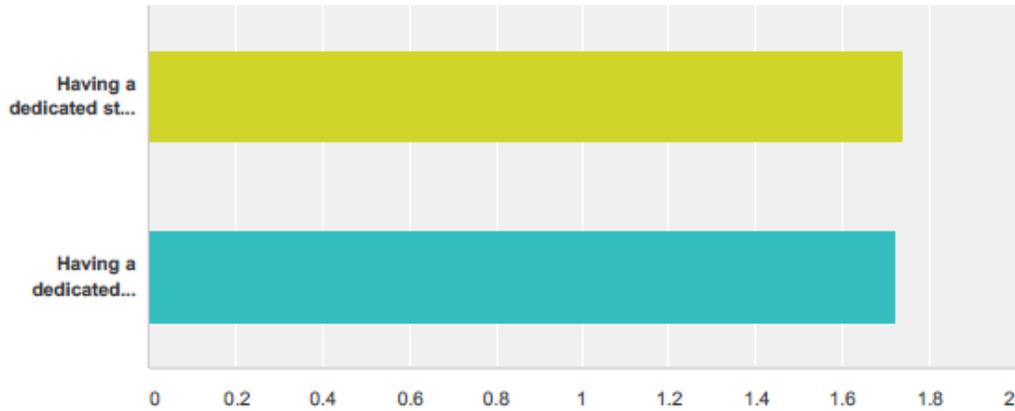
	Very effective	Somewhat effective	No impact	Counterproductive	Total	Weighted Average
Having a dedicated staff note-taker at all meetings	44.83% 26	37.93% 22	15.52% 9	1.72% 1	58	1.74
Having a dedicated meeting facilitator at select meetings	45.00% 27	40.00% 24	13.33% 8	1.67% 1	60	1.72

5. Have other thoughts or ideas to share? Let us know!
Answered: 24
Skipped: 39

    a. **Key themes and sample responses**
        i. *Focus on design*
           1. "Keep applicant's presentations focused on design. Too much time is wasted on explaining the site, the goals etc."
        ii. *Improve the process through better organization and efficiency*
           1. "The process of deliberations of board members is unproductive, often negative, and caused inefficiencies in design. This detracts from the overall, long-term quality of design."
           2. "Board turnover can be best addressed by reducing time between EDG and Recommendation meetings. Perhaps instead of increasing the number of board members, there should be two parallel boards for busy district[s], so that projects can move through more quickly."
           3. "Staff could take a stronger role analyzing design issues after the initial community identification of objectives/concerns. Boards have limited ability to think on their feet, formulate coherent responses and [can] miss important considerations."
           4. "To the extent possible, assign staff to particular boards/areas so that they can learn neighborhood issues and can provide better guidance to applicants."
           5. "Having a note-taker or event court reporter would be very helpful at meetings. This could provide clarity in the event of an appeal on what occurred at a Board meeting."
           6. "20 minutes is not enough time to explain the project."
           7. "The Board notes should come from the board members themselves or a neutral third party."
        iii. *Involve and educate the public on the process and what is appropriate feedback*
           1. "We need more opportunities for public feedback, not just Board discussion."
           2. "Community involvement should point out the elements for the neighborhood that the planners/designers/developers just don't see. Steer the community clear of comments on parking and views that are blocked as this is not part of the process. Get communities to consolidate their opinions and desires into a ranked list, it is hard for developers to really address a fragmented group of requests that are really serving different community members individually."
           3. "Provide strong community education about what design review entails and who to contact/where to go to address development concerns that aren't part of design review. Repeat this information at all meetings, public notice postings, mentioning of a project – anywhere and anytime the public comes in contact with project information so people know

where to turn for help with questions/concerns related to developments but not a part of design review."

4. "I think I said this previously … but some kind of hand out which outlines the goals for the meeting and what can and cannot be talked about or decided on. But also include information about where issues that are NOT addressed at DPD meetings, could be voiced."

5. "I'd like to see intentional efforts to reach populations who have historically not been active in the design review process. I'm thinking of renters; students; newcomers to the city; minority populations."

6. "Better education for neighbors on the process and increased opportunities for participation would decrease the number of conflicts between neighbors and developers."

iv. Consistency through process

1. "Two issues in my experience as an applicant, 1. Inconsistency between boards – some tend to be more subjective, others are better at applying the guidelines. 2. The applicant's opportunity for dialogue after presentation seems too limited."

2. "It seems to me that the biggest unpredictable area of concern is the DPD staff. The inconsistencies and inappropriate behavior destroys good projects and often is antithetical to the ideals and concept of the Design Review Boards."

v. Open dialogue between the Board and applicant

1. "20 minutes is not enough time to explain a project. Opening dialogue between the applicant and the board would help the designer explain the implications of DRB comments."

2. "Some ability for the project architect to respond, clarify or explain issues as the Board discuss them would be very productive."
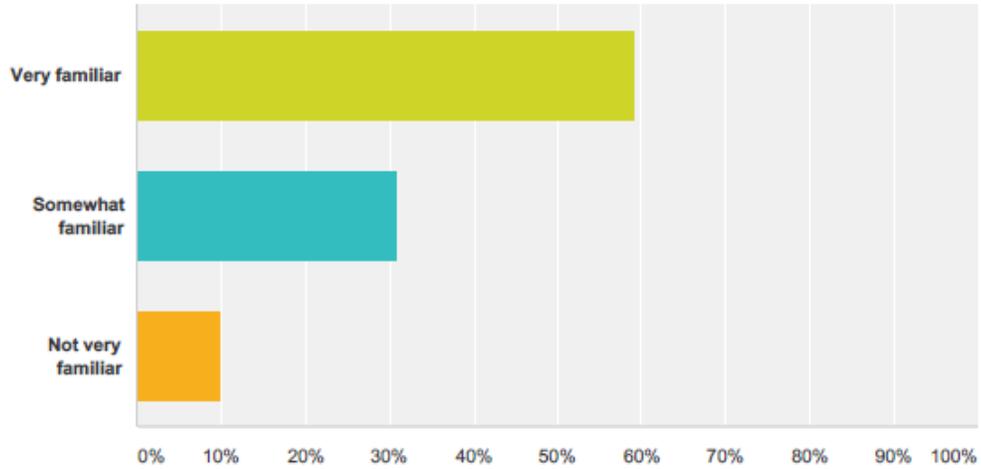
SURVEY #4 - GENERAL FEEDBACK
Respondents: 71

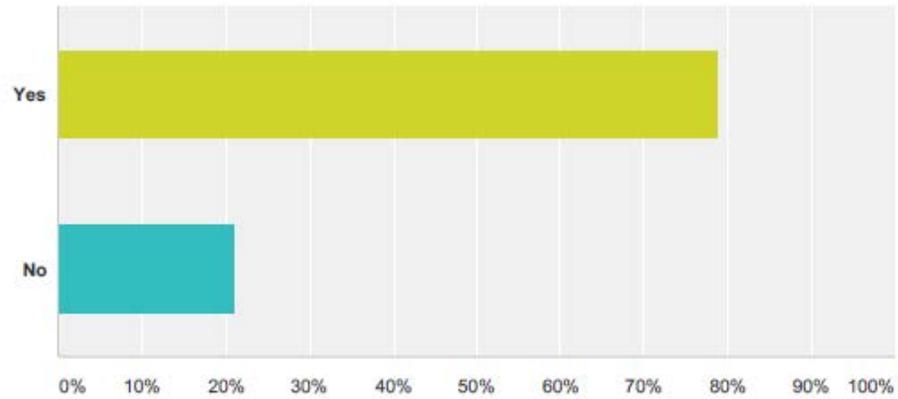1. **How familiar are you with the Design Review Program?**
   Answered: 71
   Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
Very familiar	59.15%	42
Somewhat familiar	30.99%	22
Not very familiar	9.86%	7
Total		**71**

2. Have you ever attended a Design Review Board meeting?
Answered: 71
Skipped: 0

Answer Choices		Responses	
Yes		78.87%	56
No		21.13%	15
Total			71

3. Have you ever submitted comments on a Design Review project?

Answered: 70
Skipped: 1
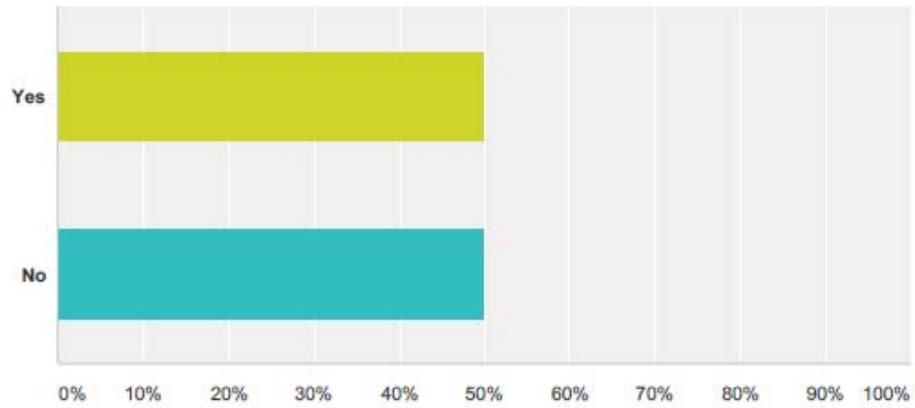
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	50.00%	35
No	50.00%	35
Total		70

4. **Have you ever engaged in the Design Review Program in the past?**
   Answered: 71
   Skipped: 0
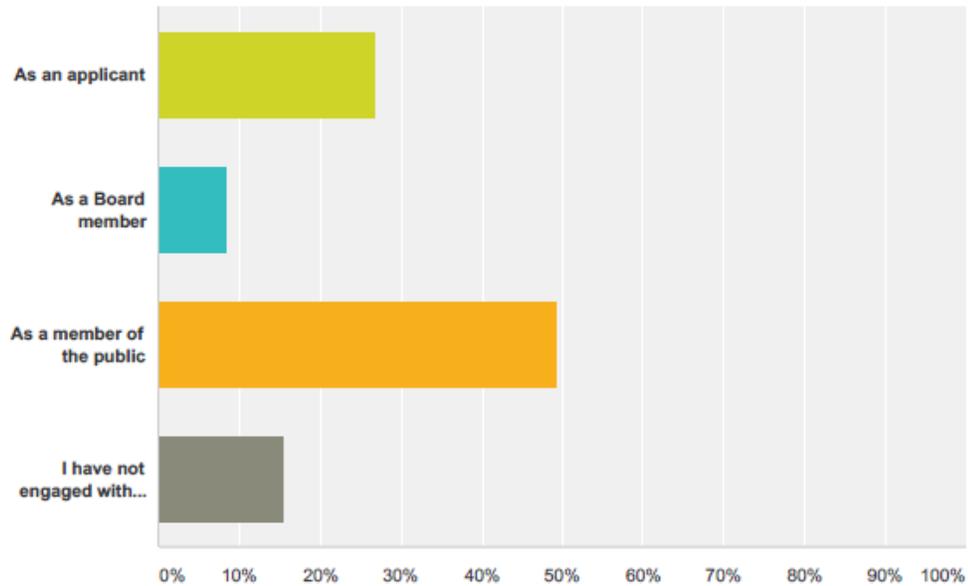
Answer Choices	Responses	
As an applicant	26.76%	19
As a Board member	8.45%	6
As a member of the public	49.30%	35
I have not engaged with the Design Review Program	15.49%	11
Total		**71**

#	Other (please specify)	Date
1	I have attended meetings as both the Applicant/Architect and a member of the public	8/12/2015 2:26 PM
2	And an applicant	7/15/2015 8:36 AM
3	I have been both an applicant, and as a concerned member of the public.	7/12/2015 11:31 PM
4	also as an applicant	6/30/2015 4:46 PM
5	And as board member	6/24/2015 4:12 PM
6	observed a neighborhood meeting for an already permitted project too late to affect it.	6/18/2015 5:56 PM
7	All of the first three above...consider allowing more than one choice here please.	6/17/2015 3:18 PM
8	applicant AND member of the public	6/17/2015 10:50 AM
9	As Applicant, Board Member, and Member of the Public.	6/16/2015 2:39 PM

5. What is your zip code?

ZIP/Postal Code	Number of repeat ZIP/Postal Codes
98101	5
98102	3
98103	8
98104	3
98105	2
98106	1
98107	3
98108	2
98109	3
98112	1
98115	3
98116	4
98117	7
98118	4
98119	5
98121	1
98122	5
98126	1
98133	1
98136	2
98144	5
98199	2