

Community Open Houses

Sept. 29, 2015 & Oct. 14, 2015



What is Design Review?

The review of most private new development of commercial, multi-family and mixed use buildings by citizen Design Review Boards (or city staff), for compliance with citywide and neighborhood design guidelines.

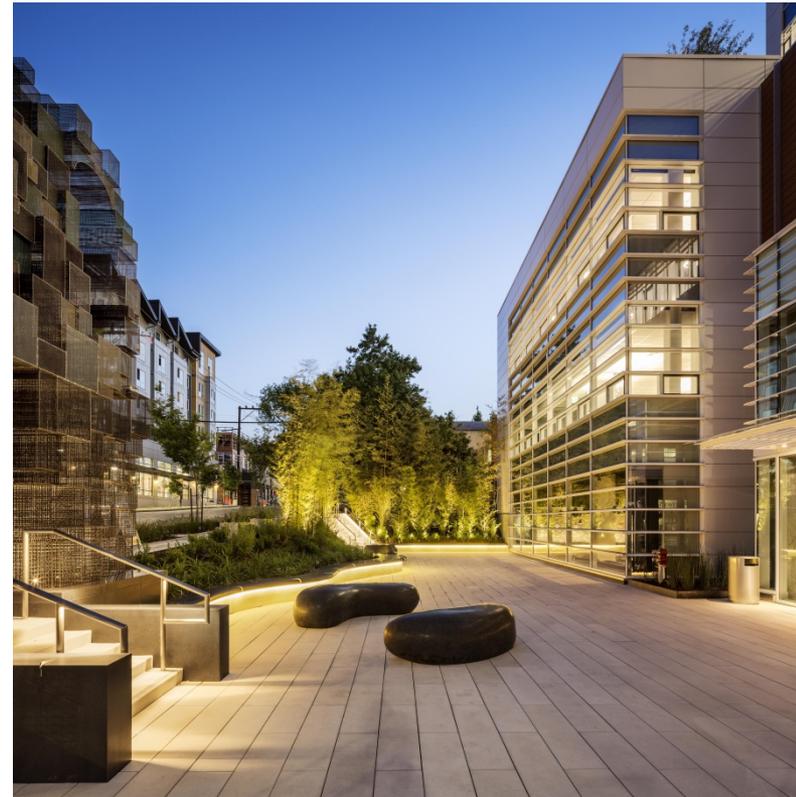


Seattle Design Guidelines



The Purpose of Design Review

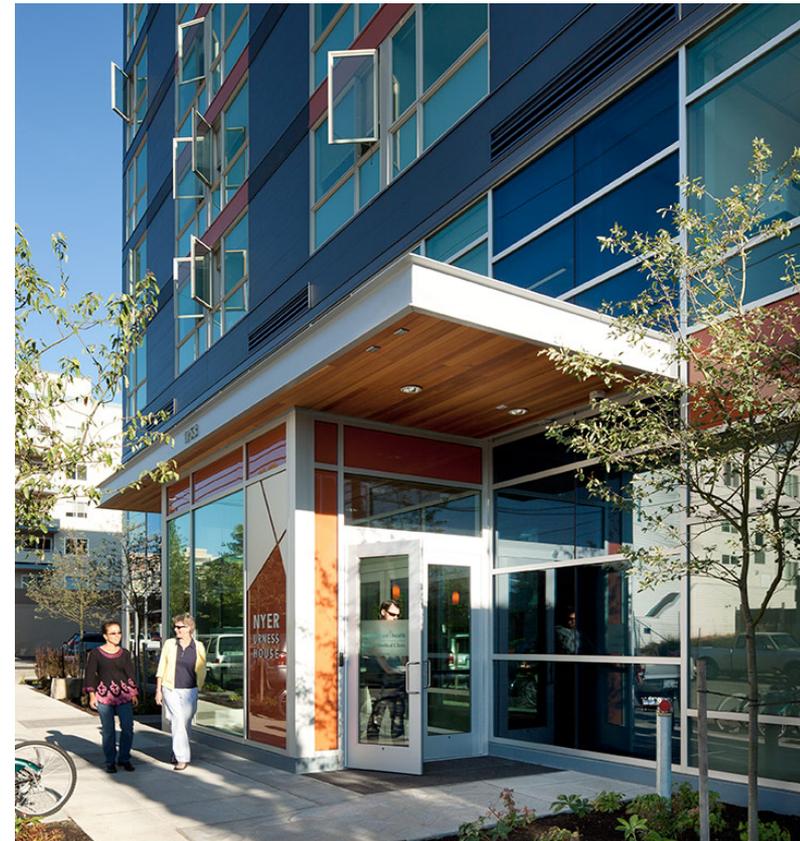
- Encourage **better design** - to ensure new development enhances the city and fits into neighborhoods.
- Provides **flexibility** in application of development standards.
- Improve **communication** and mutual understanding among developers, neighborhoods and the City.



325 9th Ave. A People's Choice finalist.

Why Program Improvements?

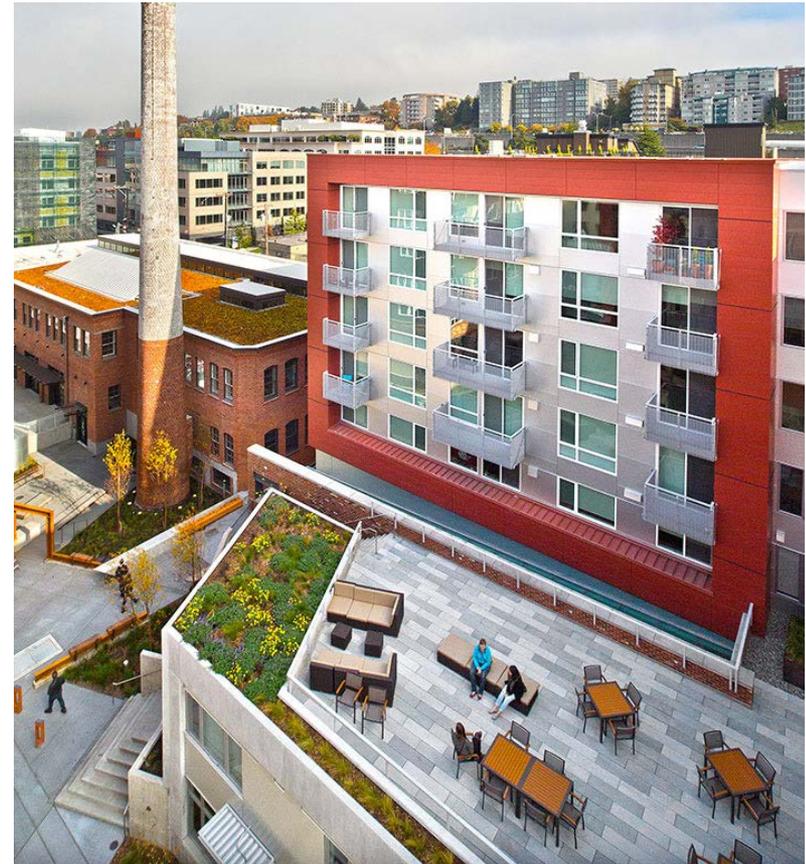
- The program hasn't been significantly updated since it's start in 1994
- The volume of projects has increased dramatically
- New tools and resources are available
- Calls for a review by stakeholders:
 - Neighborhood and community groups
 - Business and developer groups
 - Professional design organizations
- City Council direction
- Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda



Nyer Urness House, Ballard

Other Past Evaluations of Design Review

- 2014: Chamber of Commerce / NAIOP study
- 2014: DPD commissioned review
- 2008: Permit process focus groups
- 2006: Audit by City Auditor



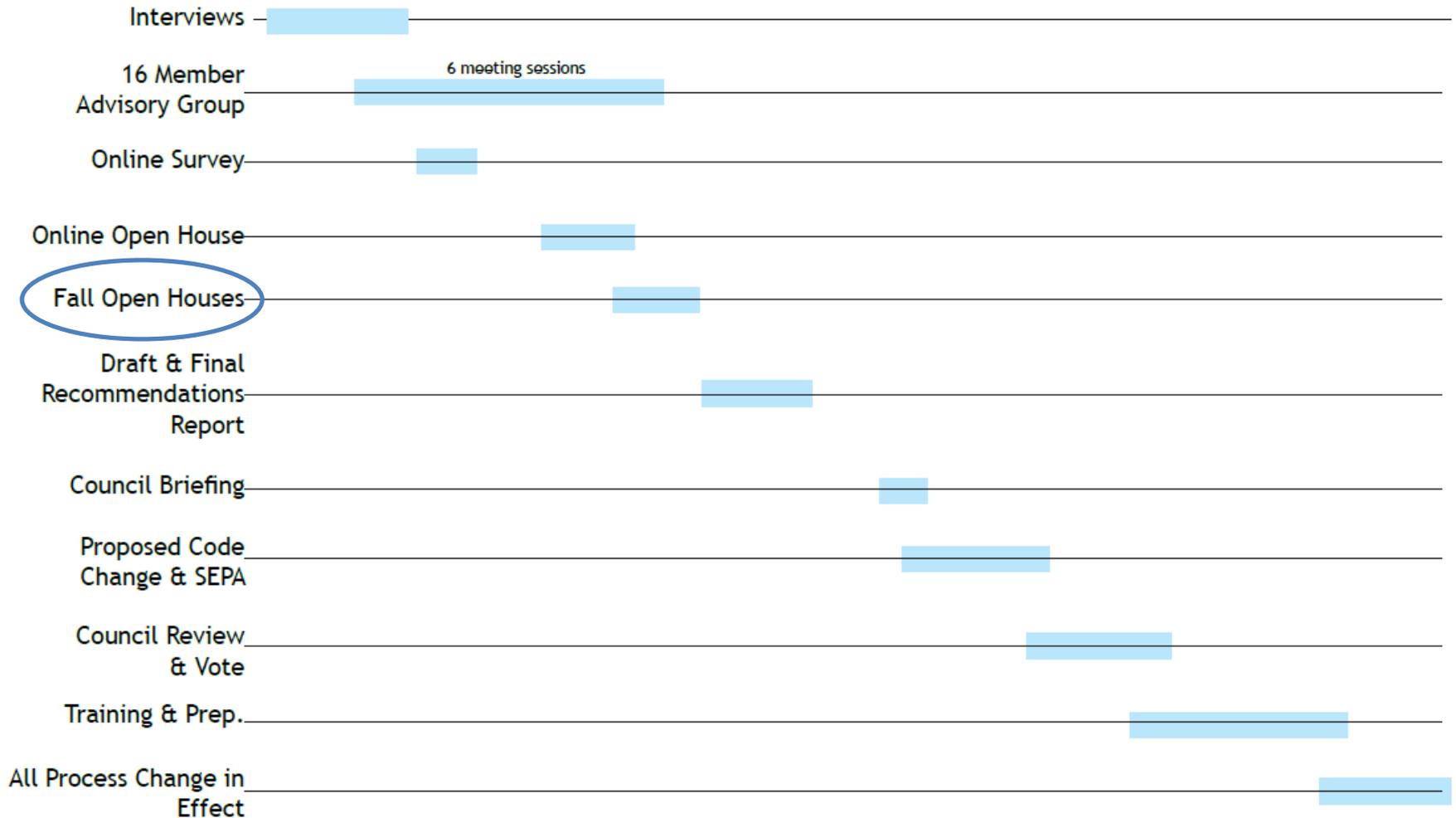
Stack House apartments, South Lake Union.



Schedule

2015 | 2016

Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sept Oct Nov Dec | Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sept Oct



Community Input

Stakeholder interviews

- March - April 2015

Online survey

- March - June 2015
- 400+ responses

Online Open House

- June - August 2015
- 486 participants

16 Member Advisory Group

- 6 Meetings April - Sept.
- Community members
- Architects
- Developers
- Board members



Community member provides public comment at a Design Review Board meeting.

What We Heard - Themes

- **Appreciation for the input and public engagement opportunity**
- Meaningful connection between developers and the public
- Public feedback is not always adequately incorporated
- More advanced notice
- **More focus on how projects fit into neighborhoods**
- More predictability and expediency
- Perform **outreach with a variety of tools** online and offline
- Improve transparency about the purpose of Design Review Board meetings
- Allow **greater dialogue** between applicant and board at meetings
- Communicate how feedback from an applicant or the public is used
- Perform targeted outreach to reach groups not normally involved
- Ensure that larger or more impactful projects receive more review by Boards
- Smaller or less impactful project reviews may be administrative
- Ensure all projects go through adequate review cycles
- **Keep design review efficient, focused on design, predictable** and concise.
- Provide materials online, however, online feedback may be difficult to moderate

Draft Recommendation #1

Early and Ongoing Engagement

- Applicants would be required to conduct and demonstrate outreach to the community prior to permit submittal at a very early stage of design, and continuing through the project.
- Direct conversation between applicant and community.
- Variety of formats and options for outreach, such as...
 - At a local business
 - Social media
 - At a neighborhood meeting

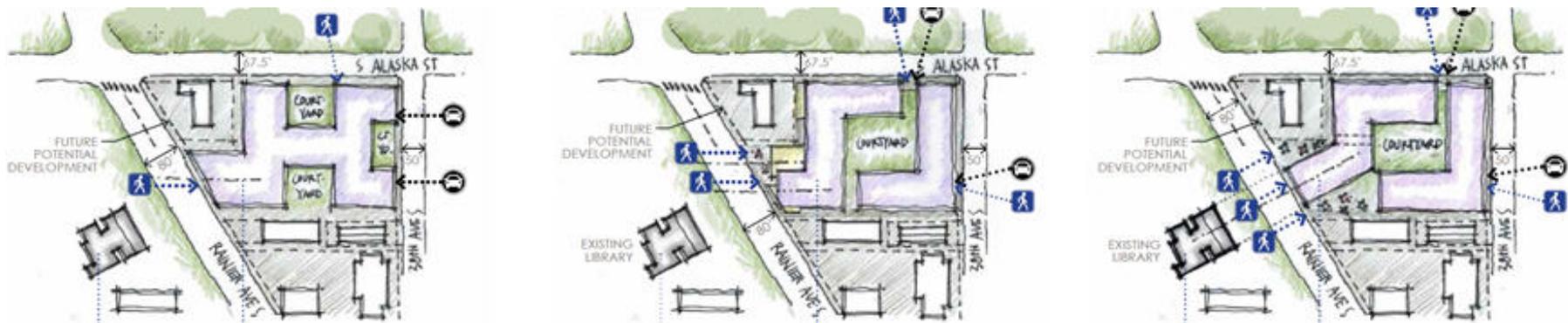


Designer gives a presentation at a Design Review Board meeting.

Draft Recommendation #2

Set Thresholds Based on Site Characteristics & More Administrative Review

- Design Review process would be tailored to meet project characteristics.
- **More complex** projects would have both design review phases before the Board.
- **Less complex** projects would have one design review phase overseen by City staff.



Example of alternatives in a Design Review packet.

Draft Recommendation #2

Set Thresholds Based on Site Characteristics & More Administrative Review

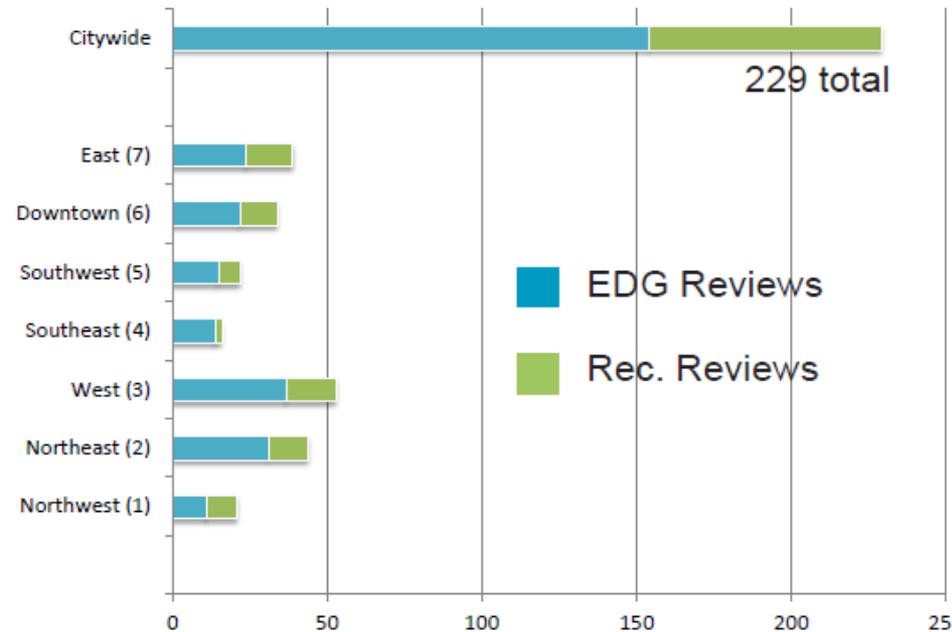
	Track A Less Complex / Less Challenging	Track B More Complex / More Challenging
Context	Established <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most surrounding properties are built out • Not on a zone edge 	Transitioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the first new buildings • On a zone edge
Scale	Typical <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not more than a half block • Less than 250' of street frontage 	Very Large <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than a half a block • More than 250' of street frontage
Site Characteristics	Normal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project does not have unique characteristics on site 	Unique <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Street or alley vacation • Historic landmark or Pike / Pine character structure present
Policy Priorities	Policy Priority <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated affordable housing • Art / cultural space • 'Deep green' development 	N/A - projects with a Policy Priority would be in Track A regardless of other factors.

Draft Recommendation #2

Set Thresholds Based on Site Characteristics & More Administrative Review

- 229 Design Review meetings in 2014.
- Boards are at or near capacity.
- Long delays for scheduling a review.
- More administrative review would open about 70 Design Review timeslots per year for complex projects.

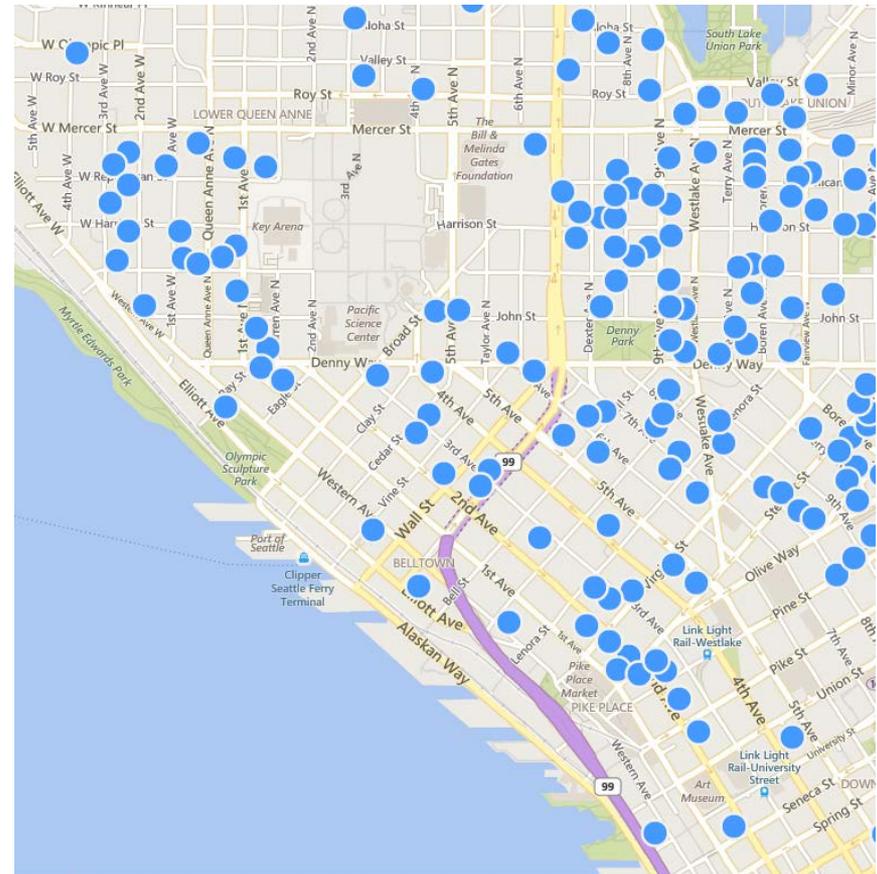
2014 Design Review Volumes
Citywide and Existing (7) District Boards



Draft Recommendation #3

New Tools & Techniques

- Online tools and commenting.
- Web-based project information.
- Video streaming of meetings.
- Revised meeting formats: more 2-way dialogue.
- Additional training for board and staff.
- Formal program to publicize design excellence.



 seattle.gov/dpd

[About](#)

Shaping Seattle provides information about Design Review projects in an online application.

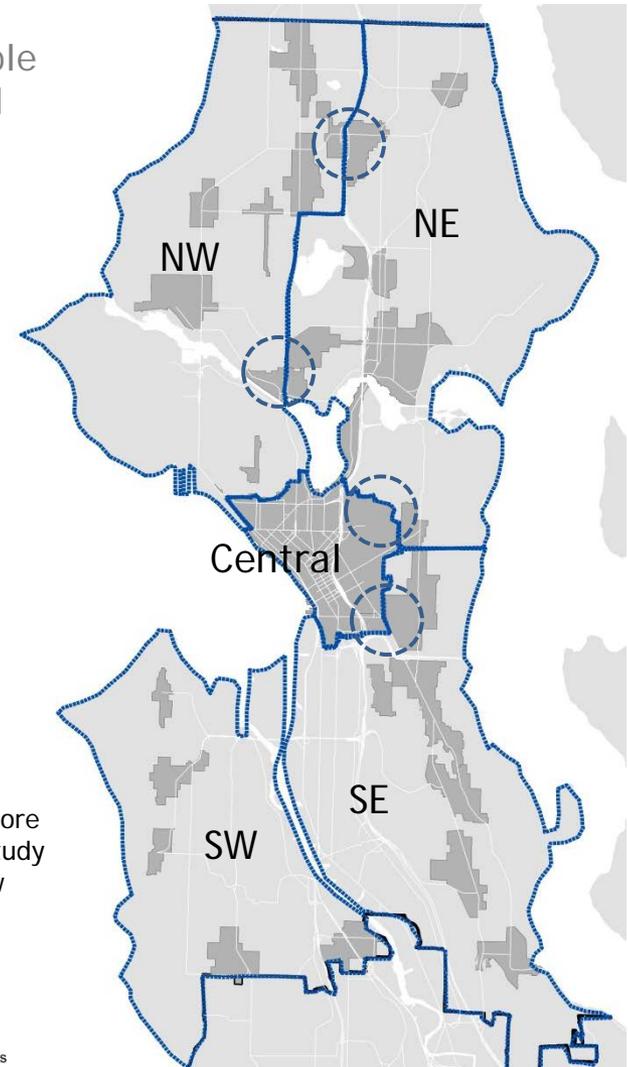
Draft Recommendation #4

Changes to Board Composition & Structure

- Increase size of boards to 7 members, adding design and community expertise to each.
- Consolidate the Central board to cover area of highrise projects.
- Keep NE, NW, SE, SW boards mostly in tact with neighborhood-based meetings.
- Improves consistency.
- Pilot new tools, technologies and meeting techniques at Central board.
- Greater balance on each board.

DRAFT: Possible revised board districts.

 Area for more detailed study and review



Draft Recommendation #4

Changes to Board Composition & Structure

	Existing Board Structure	Draft Potential Board Structure
Districts	<p>7 District</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NE, NW, W, Central, E, SE, SW 	<p>5 District</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NE, NW, Central, SE, SW
Board Composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Design professional • 1 Community member • 1 Developer / Real Estate • * 1 Business representative • * 1 Resident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Design professionals • 1 Design professional (Landscape architect / urban design) • 2 Developer / real estate / business • * 2 Community members / residents

* From within the district. (Otherwise, must reside within City limits.)



Thank you.

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Welcome

Welcome to the Design Review Program Improvements Project open house. This open house is intended to:

- Introduce and familiarize you with the City of Seattle's Design Review program.
- Update you on current efforts to improve the program.
- Get your feedback on some initial ideas to improve the process.

Agenda

6:00 - 6:30PM - Browse materials

6:30 - 7:00 PM - Presentation by City staff

7:00 - 7:30 PM - Discussion with staff



The Nyer Urness House, an affordable housing development in Ballard went through the Design Review process.

Background

The Design Review Program evaluates the appearance of buildings and their relationship to adjacent sites for most new multifamily, commercial and mixed use development projects in Seattle.

Key Facts

- Seattle's Design Review Program was established in 1994.
- Over 1,500 projects have been reviewed since the program began - or about 111 projects per year.
- The Design Review Program reviewed 14 projects in 1994. In 2014, the program reviewed 192 projects - including the majority of all large new commercial and multi-family buildings built in Seattle.
- Design review takes place before a new development can apply for construction permits.
- Seattle is one of the only large cities where Design Review is conducted primarily by neighborhood-based citizen boards.

The Purpose of Design Review

- Encourage better design and site planning to ensure new development enhances the city and sensitively fits into neighborhoods.
- Provide flexibility in the application of development standards to better meet the intent of the Land Use Code.
- Improve communication and mutual understanding among developers, neighborhoods and the City.

Design Review Boards & Districts

Each district board consists of volunteers appointed by the Mayor and City Council and serve two-year terms. Their duties include synthesizing community input on project design, providing early design guidance, recommending conditions of approval and ensuring fair and consistent application of citywide or neighborhood-specific guidelines.

Seattle's Design Guidelines

Seattle's design guidelines are the backbone of the Design Review program and the Seattle Municipal Code requires the Boards and City staff to use these guidelines as the basis for their recommendations and decisions.

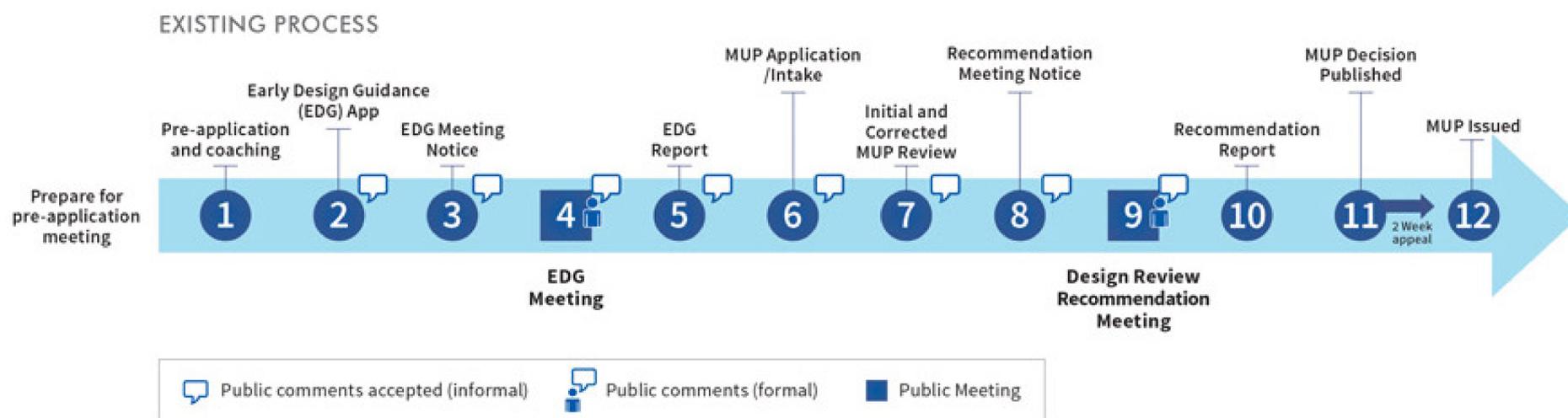


Existing Design Review Board districts.

Background

The Design Review Process Today

The chart below outlines key steps in the full design review process, which includes Design Review Board involvement. Today the process has an Early Design Guidance (EDG) phase, and a Design Recommendation phase, each with a public meeting, that must be completed before a development can be granted a Master Use Permit (MUP).



In addition to the full design review process, there are two other review processes (Administrative and Streamlined). These processes do not involve the Design Review Board, and are typically used for smaller projects with fewer impacts.

Over the last 15 years, the City has conducted numerous reviews and evaluations of the Design Review Program, which have indicated that there are many things that are working well, including:

Creating Dialogue

The opportunity for public comment and dialogue between developers, communities and the City is highly valued and can help remove conflict in the land use review process. Of all the projects reviewed in 2014 only 2% were appealed, and project land use appeals dropped significantly after the Design Review program began in 1994.

Improving Design

Design review improves project design outcomes. Many project designs are modified substantially from what was originally submitted for permit applications to what is submitted as part of the design review recommendations phase. Design Review is particularly helpful in preventing negative project design outcomes that could be highly incompatible with a neighborhood.

Providing Flexibility

Flexibility helps a project design respond to unique conditions present on a site. Many design review projects request and are granted at least one design 'departure' - a flexibility to depart from a rigid code standard in order to better meet a design intent.



A citizen provides public comment on a development proposal during a Design Review meeting.

Project Goals

Goals for the Design Review Program Improvements project are listed below. The goals are based on input from members of the community, designers, and project applicants, and findings in other past studies of design review.



Design Excellence

Cultivate the program's purpose of encouraging better design.

- There is room for improvement on encouraging exceptional design. Some designers may defer to previously approved approaches to reduce risk and unpredictability, instead of striving for more innovative or creative design solutions.



Consistency, Predictability and Efficiency

Improve the level of consistency, efficiency and predictability in how the City administers the program.

- The full design review process can be time consuming, adding to total project cost, which can translate to higher rents in the new building.
- It can be difficult to maintain consistency in how projects are reviewed by different boards, or how the boards operate.



Set Clear Expectations

Ensure the design review process is transparent, understandable, and accessible to community members, applicants, and board members.

- There is sometimes confusion on the purpose of design review, how the process works and which issues design review addresses.



Support Communication and Dialogue

Increase accessibility to encourage better dialogue between the boards, applicant and community. Use communication strategies and tools to improve how information is presented, shared and reviewed.

- Opportunities for meaningful participation in the process with online tools are too limited.
- It is not always clear to community members how comments are incorporated into the Board's review.
- Limits on two-way conversation between boards and applicants sometimes make it difficult to respond to and resolve issues.



The Design Review process helped shape design of the Stack House Apartments in South Lake Union.

Draft Recommendation #1

Early and Ongoing Engagement

As part of the design review process, the project applicant would be required to conduct and demonstrate outreach to the community prior to permit submittal at a very early stage of design, and continuing throughout the permitting process.

Details To Consider

(based on input received to date)

- Create an outreach guide to help applicants conduct effective outreach to communities.
- Set clear standards for what outreach is acceptable or 'enough'.
- Work with existing community organizations and groups to prepare for new engagement requests by developers.
- Work with other City departments including Department of Neighborhoods to help make connections between community members and applicants.
- Make sure outreach is accessible to diverse audiences.

Project Goals Addressed



Communication & Dialogue

- Creates relationships and dialogue directly between community members and applicants.



Predictability / Efficiency

- DPD has found that applicants who conduct early engagement with communities usually have more predictable and timely design reviews.



Design Excellence

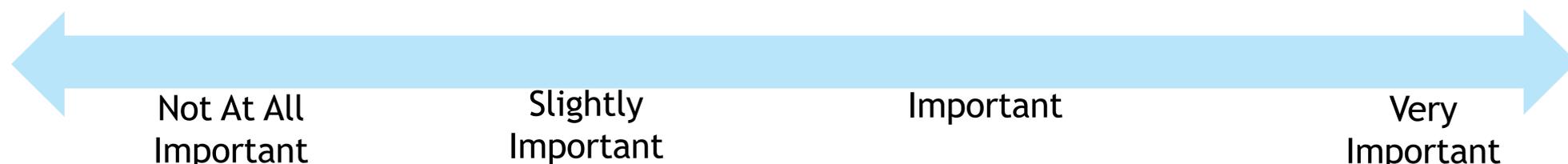
- Could encourage more design responsiveness to local concerns.



Clear Expectations

- Additional forum for dialogue (outside of formal Design Review meetings) allows the design review process to focus more directly on relevant issues.

How important do you think Early and Ongoing Engagement is to improving the Design Review process?



Draft Recommendation #2

Set Design Review Thresholds Based on Site Characteristics & More Administrative Design Reviews

The steps in the Design Review process would be tailored to meet the unique characteristics of different types of projects.

Projects that are more complex or have greater impacts would go through formal review by the Design Review board for both major phases of Design Review. (Track B). Other projects with fewer impacts or fewer design challenges would have one of the two phases led by the DPD design review planner. (Track A).

The intent is to focus board reviews on the projects that need the most attention, and open more available board review times so there are fewer 'bottlenecks' in the process.

Details To Consider

(based on feedback received)

- The characteristics for determining the tracks needs to be clear. Draft characteristics include:
 - The project's context & surroundings
 - If the project is very large in scale
 - If unique features are present (ie. a landmark)
 - A policy priority is present (ie. affordable housing)
- Provide clear expectations on the role of design review staff and board for reviews where there is a greater administrative (staff) role than today.

Project Goals Addressed



Design Excellence

- Focuses the attention of Design Review Boards on the most complex projects with greatest design challenges.



Predictability / Efficiency

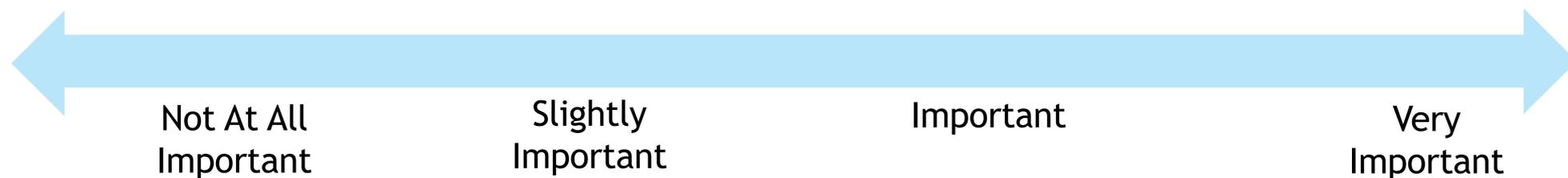
- Opens more timeslots for Design Review Boards (over 70 per year), reducing scheduling 'bottlenecks'.



Communication & Dialogue

- Could relieve some time pressure on board reviews of difficult projects, enabling room for more two-way dialogue at the meetings.

How important do you think Design Review Thresholds Based on Site Characteristics & More Administrative Review is to improving the Design Review process?



Draft Recommendation #3

New Tools & Techniques

Explore the use of new tools and techniques to support the Design Review program, which could include, but are not limited to:

- Online tools (e.g. online commenting, online streaming, web-based mapping and project information)
- Revised formats for Design Review Board meetings (e.g. allowing for dialogue between Board members and applicants)
- Additional training for Design Review Board members and staff.
- A formal program to reward and publicize design excellence.

Details To Consider

(based on feedback received)

- Venues and resources needed to achieve on-line commenting or streaming of meetings.
- Potential to ‘pilot’ new tools and techniques using City resources at the Downtown board.
- Make it easy to find and use web-based resources and tools supporting design review.
- Training of Board and Staff in areas including:
 - Facilitation and mediation techniques
 - Local neighborhood issues of concern
 - City policy and planning background
 - Affordability / cost impacts of design choices

Project Goals Addressed



Predictability / Efficiency

- Changed format could allow more dialogue at meetings, reducing unpredictability by allowing clarifying information.



Communication & Dialogue

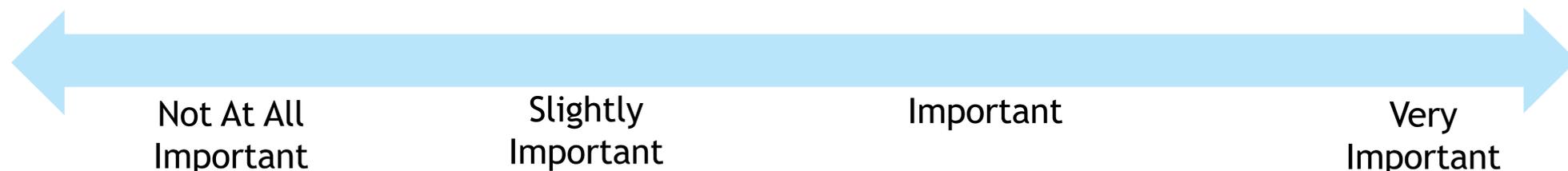
- Potential to broaden participation in design review through web-based tools.
- Potential to receive comment on designs in more ways.



Clear Expectations

- More training of board and staff could help establish clear expectations for all meetings and steps in the process.

How important do you think New Communication Tools and Techniques are to improving the Design Review process?



Draft Recommendation #4

Changes to Board Composition & Structure

Changes could include a reduction in the number of boards (from 7 to 5), while increasing the number of design reviewers on each board (from 5 to 7). Boundary revisions would largely keep the NE, NW, SE, and SW boards in tact, but would expand the Downtown Board to include South Lake Union and other nearby areas where highrise development is allowed.

The intent of such changes would be:

- Using city resources at a downtown location to pilot new tools and techniques.
- Add more design and community expertise to each board.
- Increase the stability and balance of perspectives on each board.
- Reduce the number of cancelled meetings and board substitutions due to lack of a quorum.

Details To Consider

(based on feedback received)

- Careful review of the final makeup of the expanded board slots. (ie. number of community members, number of designers etc.)
- Any boundary adjustments must consider logical neighborhood boundaries and should not split any neighborhood or urban village.
- Make sure the expanded downtown board would be set up with capacity to review the required number of projects.

Project Goals Addressed



Design Excellence

- Adds more design expertise to each board, such as a landscape architect, or urban designer position.



Predictability / Efficiency

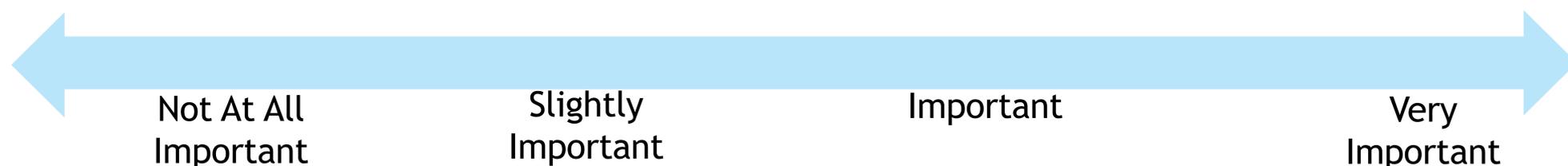
- Reduces meeting cancellations and board substitutions due to board member absences.
- Larger number of reviewers on each board builds more 'checks and balances' into the process.



Communication & Dialogue

- Expands opportunity for community participation on boards, possibly increasing participation by greater diversity of perspectives.

How important do you think Changes to the Board Composition and Structure are to improving the Design Review process?



Open Houses - Sept. 29, Oct. 14 2015

Schedule

2015 | 2016

Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sept Oct Nov Dec | Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sept Oct

