

**Design Review Program Improvements
Stakeholder Advisory Group - Meeting #1**

Wednesday, April 1, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Seattle Municipal Tower, Room 1610

Meeting Summary**Opening remarks and introductions**

Diane Adams, Facilitator, introduced herself to the Advisory Group (Group) and introduced several guests for a round of opening remarks.

Councilmember Mike O'Brien, Seattle City Council, offered his thanks and appreciation to the members of the Group for giving their time over the next several months to figure out how to get even better results from the City's Design Review program. Councilmember O'Brien noted that the Design Review program has been evaluated numerous times over the past several years, and emphasized that there is now the political will on the City Council necessary to make structural changes to the program. Councilmember O'Brien encouraged the Group to engage in the process, and to help City staff understand the policy positions and tradeoffs associated with any potential changes to the Design Review program.

Kathy Nyland, Mayor Murray's Office, explained that the Department of Planning and Development is within her purview at the Mayor's Office and commented that she probably gets a phone call a week regarding the Design Review program - some of which are complimentary, others that are more critical in nature. Kathy expressed her appreciation to their Group for their participation and stressed that the Design Review program is a good product that can be made even better.

Diane Sugimura, Director, Seattle Department of Planning and Development (DPD), thanked members of the Group for helping in this effort. Diane noted that it's important to remember that the Design Review program is intended to evaluate a project to ensure that it fits well within its neighborhood, and is not intended to address a broad set of policy issues, nor is it the answer to all public engagement needs. Diane acknowledged that the City needs to explore other ways of engaging the community in a broader discussion on city policies. Diane concluded her remarks by thanking the group for their time and stated that she looks forward to hearing the Group's thoughts and recommendations.

Diane commented that it was very encouraging to hear the level of commitment and political will behind the process, and began a round of introductions.

Review and discuss advisory group responsibilities and ground rules

Diane explained that the Group's job is to build upon the work that has already been done to prioritize issues and concerns around the existing Design Review process, and to then propose some improvements to the process. Diane noted that the intent of the Advisory Group process is not to make drastic changes, but rather to look at where incremental improvements in the process can be made.

Diane reviewed the meeting agenda and walked through the meeting materials included in the binder provided to each member of the Group. Diane then asked the Group to take a moment to review the

proposed ground rules for the Advisory Group process and asked if they sounded appropriate. The Group agreed with the ground rules as proposed.

Review and discuss goals and process of advisory group

Diane reviewed the draft goals and asked the Group for their thoughts and feedback.

- Identify options to make the Design Review process more efficient and accessible.
- Improve community dialogue on design review
- Identify new and emerging technologies for more effective community engagement.

Key discussion points

- The current goals seem to be more about the process rather than ensuring a good process to ultimately produce better design.
- Interest in strengthening the phrase in the first goal from "identifying options" to "identifying recommendations".
- Support for adding the word "predictability" to the first goal.
- The use of technology should include both traditional and emerging technologies, and the use of technology should not be limited solely to support public engagement, but rather all elements of the design review process.
- Support for adding the word "flexibility" to the goals.
- Support for adding the word "consistency" to the goals.

Diane explained that the goals would be revised per the feedback received, and sent out to the Group for review. Diane then reviewed some of the other activities that will be occurring as part of the process, including stakeholder interviews, online surveys, two community-wide events, and potentially a focus group.

Provide background information on the Design Review program

Lisa provided an overview of the Design Review program, including:

- Overall structure
- Composition
- Design review thresholds
- Steps in the review process

Introduce findings of previous assessments and broad areas for improvement

Aly explained that a number of reviews and evaluations of the Design Review program have been conducted over the past several years. Some modifications to the program have been made based upon these suggestions, however there hasn't been a major review and implementation of broad changes, which is why the City has formed the Advisory Group.

Key topic areas addressed in the previous studies have included:

- Board structure
- Meeting format and logistics

- Staff and Board training
- Design review thresholds
- Community engagement and dialogue

A report is being prepared detailing the findings of each of these previous studies, and will be shared with the Group prior to the next meeting.

Key discussion points

- More thought needs to be given to how projects tie into existing neighborhood plans. The current Design Review process seems to be parcel-based rather than neighborhood-based. The Design Review program has the potential to provide oversight over the synergy of projects, but there is an inability to do so with the current program.
- There is a need for the Design Review program to provide more context and help the public better understand the purpose of the program.
- It often isn't clear to the community about which projects fall under the purview of the Design Review program and which do not. This leads to confusion and frustration.
- There is a lack of consistency between different Boards and how Board meetings are run.
- Interest in learning more about how other cities' design review programs are run.
 - A peer review is being conducted, and this information can be provided to the Group.
- Agreement that the current structure of Design Review Board meetings doesn't allow for enough dialogue between the applicant and the Board.

Introduce proposed topics and desired outcomes for upcoming Advisory Group meetings

Key discussion points

- A lot of work has already been done to evaluate the Design Review program. It will be helpful to review that information and build upon it.
- The Design Review program needs to be flexible enough to encourage new and creative ideas. The current program sometimes limits creative solutions.
- Encouraging additional, perhaps more informal, meetings between the applicant and the Board, and/or the applicant and community would be helpful.
- Local land use review committees can be a helpful resource and provide an opportunity for dialogue about land use issues that often fall outside the purview of the Design Review program.

Diane thanked the Group for the robust discussion and noted that it will help inform the agenda for the next meeting.

Attendees:

Advisory Group members:

- Abdy Farid
- Amanda Bryan
- Deb Barker
- Duncan Griffin
- Jay Lazerwitz
- Jeffrey Cook
- Joanne LaTuchie
- Joe Hurley
- Karen Kiest
- Maria Barrientos
- Michael Austin
- Murphy McCullough
- Renee Remlinger-Tee
- Richard Loo
- Stephen Yamada-Heidner

Project Team:

- Aly Pennucci, Seattle DPD
- Diane Adams, EnviroIssues
- Justin McCaffree, EnviroIssues
- Lisa Rutzick, Seattle DPD

Other Attendees:

- Councilmember Mike O'Brien, Seattle City Council
- Diane Sugimura, Seattle DPD Director
- Jasmine Marwaha, Councilmember O'Brien's Office
- Kathy Nyland, Seattle Mayor's Office
- Roberta Baker, Seattle DPD
- Susan McClain, Seattle DPD