

**Design Review Program Improvements
Stakeholder Advisory Group - Meeting #2**

Wednesday, April 27, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Seattle Municipal Tower, Room 1610

Meeting Summary (DRAFT)**Opening remarks and introductions**

Diane Adams, facilitator, led a round of introductions and reviewed the meeting agenda.

Confirm revised goals

Diane reviewed the updated goals for the advisory group process, and asked members of the group for feedback on whether the revised goals captured the intent of the input provided at the previous meeting.

Key discussion points

- Support for making “better design” a separate bullet, rather than an overarching statement. Several members of the group stated their support for including the following statement in the goals: “...cultivate the Design Review program’s purpose of encouraging better design.”
- Interest in including the concept of efficiency in the goals.

Diane thanked the group for their input and noted that a revised draft of the goals will be distributed.

Update on recent public outreach and key findings

Justin McCaffree, EnviroIssues, provided an update on two ongoing outreach activities that will help to inform the work of the Advisory Group: stakeholder interviews and an online survey. To date, interviews have been held with six community representatives to get their thoughts on what works about the Design Review program, areas for improvement, as well as input on how well the program achieves its mission. An online survey is also live, with over 200 responses to date. The focus of the online survey is on how the public prefers to receive information and provide feedback about projects in their neighborhood.

The preliminary findings of each outreach effort indicate strong support for the Design Review program’s role in providing a forum to discuss upcoming projects, and provide various suggestions for how to better engage the public in the process. An update on the outcomes of these ongoing activities will be provided to the group, once they are completed.

Review summary of previous recommendations

Aly Pennucci, Seattle DPD, reviewed the key findings of a number of previous assessments of the Design Review program. Aly noted that the key findings and recommendations of each assessment are often similar. These findings have been compiled into a summary document that has been shared with the Group, and will also help inform the Group’s discussions at future meetings.

Discuss identified key challenges and recommendations

Diane explained that the project team has built upon the previous recommendations to develop a discussion matrix for the Group to work through. The matrix includes identified key challenges by topic area, previous recommendations and space to note next steps.

The key topic areas included in the matrix are:

- Design Review Board structure
- Meeting format and logistics
- Board and staff training
- Design review thresholds
- Community engagement and outreach

The group reviewed the matrix and shared their thoughts and ideas, which are captured below:

Key themes

- Support for having the applicant conduct outreach to the community prior to the Early Design Guidance phase and then handling Early Design Guidance administratively.
- Support for having a facilitator and notetaker at Design review Board meetings, as appropriate.
- Support for additional training for Board members and staff.
- Support for continuing to hold Design review Board meetings in the neighborhoods, as opposed to consolidating downtown.

Detailed feedback (organized by topic area)

- Design Review Board structure
 - Be clear on purpose of design review. Need a clear purpose statement.
 - Don't support first three recs for Board Structure
 - Support the regionalism – understanding of the neighborhood. If you centralize it you could lose that. Not sure that's the model you want, particularly in light of need of effective outreach to communities. Advocate for better, more consistent training rather than centralization.
 - Fundamental issue – will never get consistency from Board to Board with so many boards/board members. In my opinions, 3 boards of 12 people would provide more consistency.
 - You would lose the locality and association with the community.
 - Idea – combination? Paid members, as well as volunteer members who just attend meeting for specific neighborhoods?
 - Would lose consistency by having to bring in substitute boards all the time. Creates complications.
 - All ideas are on the table. Could have them all be paid, but some of them have to be from a certain neighborhood.
 - Idea of collapsing boards – I don't think that would help us achieve Purpose bullet #1 (ensure new development enhances character of City...enhances neighborhoods"). Lose the connection to the neighborhoods. People won't come downtown. Don't think having fewer boards and less headache meets the first bullet on the purpose of the Design Review program.

- With respect to board composition, I have heard that the unspoken issue is that many times the design professional works for a developer or wants to get a job with a developer. This creates perception that that person is not able to adequately represent the design professions because they don't want to be cast negatively by a potential future employer.
- Consistency is absolutely the most important thing to developers. Why do these two things have to be mutually exclusive? Why can't we have fewer boards, have more trained people and meet neighborhood issues? Some boards aren't well informed about the design guidelines specific to their neighborhood? Why can't we accomplish all of these things? Why is there an assumption that if you reduced the quantity you would have to meet downtown? You could still require meetings in the neighborhoods. Could require closer relationships with the local Land Use Review Committee. Can't we achieve both goals?
- Think being out in the neighborhoods is one of the most important things about the program. Knowledge of the community – "community capital" – that's what's great about the program. Going downtown feels like the opposite to me. Being out there is important. Can you do that and get that consistency? Think the solution to the consistency issue is in the training – "this is why you're here, here's how the process should work."
- There does seem to be some inconsistency in how projects are reviewed. Could we merge the Board Structure and Board and Staff training buckets? We need to ensure that Board members are putting their full weight into their volunteer position and reviewing projects.
- Consistency has been a recurring issue; it is worse when the economy is better and there are more projects.
- Strategy for consistency – could there be a person who sits on every board? An overseer/coordinator. Messaging is consistent, management of the public process is consistent, etc.
- The Planner is supposed to play that role. They each handle things differently though. That's an interesting idea.
- That person could have authority over the Planner and the Board.
- Planners seem to be way more customer service oriented than before. Appreciate the opportunity to meet with them. Helped us communicate better in our DRB package. Think the planners are very accessible. Ability to have dialogue with the planners is great, I hope that continues. Also important for the Planner to have a stronger role. Sometimes the Board gets out of control. Also like the idea of having someone play the role of facilitator.
- Maybe leave the architecture/urban design discussion for the design professionals. Board frustration because the public wants to talk about issues that are outside of design review.
- The conversation seems to be making the program bigger, which requires additional resources. If we're adding here, where are we making it more efficient, consistent, and predictable? These ideas seem to address the issue of other issues bubbling up at design review meetings, but we need to think about how to make design review more efficient.
- Idea – Each board could identify relevant/appropriate guidelines by neighborhood
- There's a lot of subjectivity between Boards
- Need more support for Board (backups/alternates)

- Board members don't have time to go through packets – they maybe get skimmed through. If it's a paid position would there be more/better focus on it?
- What does having less boards do for the schedule?
- If a neighborhood has a formal Community Council and Land Use Review Committee and a developer goes before them and they approve the project, could we say that they don't have to go through design review, or that they could go through a streamlined process?
- Meeting format and logistics
 - Maybe look at the EDG meeting more as an open house type approach.
 - Think it's important for these early meetings we're talking about to not follow the typical design review meeting format, since it doesn't allow for asking questions, etc.
- Board and staff training
 - How can we improve the consistency of the Planners?
 - Planners don't always consistently inform the Board on what the process is/should be
 - There is an orientation training when someone new joins the board. There are also quarterly meetings. Can't require people to show up because they're not paid. Training is important – but how much is a fair ask of these volunteers?
 - Could you pay them on the front end for the trainings?
 - Maybe we need to fine tune the way the trainings are formatted. More definition/clear requirements
 - There could be a cheat sheet for the Board chair could be expanded to include some of the expectations of the developer.
 - Being a Board member takes a lot of time. Sometimes the trainings weren't great. Maybe in lieu of something, the City could require cross-board attendance periodically, maybe twice a year?
 - That "person" we've all been talking about is the chair of the Board. And when it works well, it works beautifully. May need more training/mentorship.
- Design review thresholds
 - The issue of Board members being paid relates to when meetings occur (during workdays or outside of it). Regarding paid boards – it doesn't ensure greater consistency. If consistency is important, and if managing 36 people is difficult, the issues is about raising the threshold for what gets submitted to design review. Either expand staffing or simplify the thresholds.
- Community engagement and outreach
 - Educate people on materials costs
 - Have a community meeting with the applicant/public/city reps. Very informal. All issues come out. Have staff from other departments there to respond to public questions. Helps the applicant better understand what the issues are before going to EDG. Then the EDG presentation can be more informed. Could result in needing fewer meetings after EDG.
 - Think its fine to require developers to have a community outreach meeting before they submit to EDG. These projects are expensive, it's not a big deal to require a developer to do two community meetings – one before EDG and one before the final

Recommendations meeting to make sure you're meeting all the design guidelines. Most applicants do a really good job. Of those that didn't, some would have benefitted by going to the community to talk about their project and get a better understanding of what the neighborhood's goals are.

- Agree that community has the right to oppose a project. But what if that is a lone person? At a meeting they can hear the comments of their peers and gain context. If everyone dislikes a project, that's instructive too. The applicant needs to know if the community thinks their project is bad.
- It's important to have a facilitator at these meetings. They can be the manager of the conversation and ensure consistency. You have a facilitator and a scribe. Worthwhile investment.
- Need to have someone there to take notes – "here's what we heard, do you agree?" It would be easy for the applicant to do.
- For affordable housing projects, the City has a very prescribed notification process (mailings, door to door, meetings, meet with community orgs – and that's all before EDG. It also addresses a lot of things the Board doesn't cover.
- Anchoring Boards with the Community Councils could help provide that enhanced engagement with the community. The Boards could be more regional, but still responsible to the Community Councils in their communities. There could be one person who could be connected to all the boards to help ensure consistency.
- What about neighborhoods that don't have LURCs?
- The relevant neighborhood organization would need to designate one. The Board would need to appoint someone.
- Outside of the district council system the process isn't that formalized. Would need to think about how to formalize that process. Communicating meetings, open meetings, etc. How to require the developer to work with the community beforehand.
- If you go one direction you have to spend money and time and add steps to build upon what you lose. If you're going to consolidate, can you stay out in the neighborhoods for the meeting locations? Should we take some of the pressure off of feeling like you did something wrong to have to come back for another design review meeting? Could we provide a way for applicants to have the conversation with the community earlier?
- Maybe the conversation is about the Early Design Guidance (EDG) meeting and how that's constructed. Maybe it's more casual conversation early on. Make the Planner more of a useful facilitator.
- Design Review Boards are very interested in architecture and urban design. That may not be the case with community councils, etc. We need to think about how that expertise would be represented. Would love for outreach to be between the applicant and the community, the Planners have enough on their plate as it is.
- Agree with the initial comment (re: affordable housing project outreach). There's a potential concern about trying to wrap too many City processes into this. It's important to require the developer to demonstrate to the Board their outreach and what they heard and how it was addressed.
- Concur that it's not a big deal for developers to meet with Land Use Review Committees and/or the community. Some form of requirement, or a strong recommendation for a meeting would be wise.
- Would every project do that? Like those types of meetings – smart to do in advance. Unclear on whether that would be in addition to/required or voluntary.

- It would be good for the Planner to attend those public meetings as well.
- Get all the issues out there up front. Saves time and money later on.
- Could a Department of Neighborhoods representative provide some consistency in the neighborhood coordination element? Provides better tie-ins to neighborhood groups/other city depts.
- Support idea of adding a public meeting. How do you encourage that though? What's the benefit to the developer? What's the threshold?
- Other
 - Missing bucket item – Quality/usefulness of the overall design guidelines
 - Perhaps this group shouldn't focus on the design guidelines. That's a huge issue

Diane thanked the group for the robust discussion and noted that the matrix would be updated based upon the group's input.

Attendees:

Advisory Group members:

- Abdy Farid
- Amanda Bryan
- Deb Barker
- Duncan Griffin
- Erik Mott
- Jay Lazerwitz
- Jeffrey Cook
- Joanne LaTuchie
- Joe Hurley
- Karen Kiest
- Maria Barrientos
- Michael Austin
- Patrick Foley
- Richard Loo
- Stephen Yamada-Heidner

Project Team:

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

Other Attendees:

- Sara Belz, Council Central Staff