

**Design Review Program Improvements  
Stakeholder Advisory Group - Meeting #3**

Thursday, May 7, 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.

**Review and discuss priorities identified at April 27 meeting**

Diane reviewed the key priorities that emerged from the discussion at the April 27 meeting:

- Need to maintain the connection to the neighborhoods
- Have the applicant conduct outreach to the community prior to the Early Design Guidance (EDG) process
- Handle EDG administratively within Seattle Department of Planning and Development (DPD)
- Designate a facilitator and notetaker at Design Review meetings, as appropriate
- Explore opportunities for additional training for board members and staff

Diane asked members of the group for feedback on these goals.

**Key discussion points**

- Support for Ombudsman role to attend Design Review Board meetings and help ensure consistency
- General support for identified key priorities

Aly Pennucci, DPD, announced that she has accepted a new position with Council Central Staff, and will be leaving DPD. Geoff Wentlandt, DPD, will transition into her role in supporting the work of the Advisory Group. Geoff thanked the group, expressed excitement for the opportunity to support the Group in its work, and provided background on his experience in working with the Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda Committee.

**Review current and proposed Design Review process**

Lisa Rutzick, DPD, reviewed the current Design Review (DR) process. The current process includes five steps, during which the public has two opportunities to provide informal comments, followed by a formal Design Review Board meeting during the Early Design Guidance process where formal comments are accepted.

Based upon the feedback provided by the group at the April 27 meeting, Aly proposed an alternative EDG process with three steps: pre-application and coaching, submittal of the EDG application and a formal EDG public notice. The proposed process would require that the developer conduct outreach to the community prior to beginning the formal EDG process. While the public would still be able to

provide both informal and formal comments, there proposed process would not include a formal Design Review Board meeting during the EDG phase.

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

### Key discussion points

- Support for the applicant providing evidence of having conducted community outreach and involvement prior as part of the administrative EDG process, with public comments being made available for review
- Support for lack of formal City involvement in applicant-led community outreach
- Concern that making the EDG process administrative will result will weaken the DR process and eliminate important opportunities for design professionals to provide meaningful input to the applicant
- Interest in establishing clear thresholds for what types of projects should go through the DR process
- Interest in allowing developers to follow the existing EDG process if desired
- Support for making the pre-application coaching process more robust
- Need for more clarity about the role DPD staff would play in the process

### Detailed feedback

- Is the pre-application meeting the applicant's responsibility?
  - Yes. The developers who are doing this generally have an easier time doing it, and often do it anyway. It wouldn't be an added burden for those that are doing it already and for those that aren't it would provide for more dialogue with the community. The City would not be involved in this.
- Would you need to provide evidence that you had a meeting or a list of people who signed up?
- I think the City should be invited to these meetings.
- Will there be a City-led meeting during EDG?
  - No. There will be early outreach required for the public, but the developer would be the only participant at the meeting.
- I have concerns about the staff report. At a DRB meeting, the notes I was provided were only half a page long. Can you add recommendations on when the staff needs to respond?
- In the EDG staff report, respond to the comments the applicant has heard from the community. That way it shows that you have listened to.
- What if the community council says they don't want the project at all?
- Think this is fantastic and will make the process work much better. Why aren't the EDG and Recs meetings scheduled at the same time? We could expedite there.
- It would not be an EDG meeting. It's the developer presenting his idea. Design-related items would be captured in notes and carried forward through the DR process. The applicant would provide evidence of what they did and what they heard. The notes would be a part of the EDG report.
- Think it's a great idea. If a developer doesn't want to do it, let them opt out and do the longer process. You don't have to go to only LURCs, you can go to the broader community. We have 1-on-1 meetings first before doing a larger public meeting. There will always be people who give good feedback on design that you can respond to.
- It's a good idea to have a larger community meeting when the EDG meeting typically takes place.

- Designs that are presented to the Board during EDG are so advanced that many times they don't leave room to adjust for comments.
- Without outreach prior to pre-application, I feel there's the potential for disconnect from the planner, between what you hear from the community and your pre-application process.
- I think not having the City involved in early outreach is not a bad thing. Time, resources, etc. Won't help with efficiency and predictability. We want the applicant to have these conversations early on. In terms of the potential for disconnect, the developer needs to submit a summary of what they heard and how they responded that could be made publicly available. There would also be the comment period when the EDG report gets posted. Those comments need to be public and they need to be provided to the applicant and responded to at the recommendations meeting. This would create more dialogue about development
- We are trying to create more dialogue about development. The goals of the DRBs and Boards are about urban design and architecture. This provides for forums to address both.
- Trying to overlay a lot of City staff hours and structure could be detrimental although it can provide some benefit. In some ways it means more to the community to see that people have voluntarily gone and done the outreach. Is one pre-application meeting enough? In a lot of ways your planner should be the coach the whole way through and not just a touchstone. That would help add some consistency and predictability.
- The City being involved would make it a formal process with comments. For our projects we try to reach a broad list of groups and create a one-page handout that has a preliminary illustration. It's a good dialogue and we get good information about key design elements, such as where to locate ingress and egress.
- One of the challenges is that the design guidelines aren't known by the people in the neighborhood. It would be great if you came with the design guidelines in hand and presented to the community with those in mind. That will help inform future comments. That gets at the format of those meetings. Would be helpful to have the design guidelines as a consistent thread. I understand that having the planner there might make it too formal, but there should be a meeting with the community council if there is one, and the planner could be there to hear comments. I like the idea of a one page handout; it demonstrates flexibility.
- People would like that it feels more like a discussion, but it could be taken advantage of by some developers. The standards need to be very clear, and somebody from a Design Review Board or the City to be there as a witness, to help steer the conversation in a helpful way. Perhaps this kind of a meeting could happen up to a certain threshold of building size; if a building was larger than the threshold, they would have to go through the regular process. Would like to see the streamlined Design Review get this kind of treatment. If the first meeting is more informal, how do we structure the second meeting?
- Don't necessarily think of this as a meeting that the developer is hosting. It is a larger process that is documented. It also gives them some ability to be creative in how they implement it. Want these meetings to be open for the developer and the community to talk about whatever they want to talk about.
- The community process in Design Review has been wonderful because something is at stake. Losing a meeting and replacing it with community process is of concern. If we want to reduce the expense, maybe we need to raise the threshold of the types of projects that go through Design Review.
- Regardless of what the process is, the needs will remain the same. You need strong facilitation to provide consistency and efficiency. The City needs to define things in the meeting so that that education and outreach is very clear and coherent. Could improve the existing system or create

a new system. Like the idea that the community will participate early but don't think it will solve everything.

- Think it is useful to have city reps at the meetings, since often issues other than design come up at the meetings. If it's early enough, the applicant can make meaningful changes. Still encourage City involvement, but don't think it needs to be formal.
- Think we should look at the EDG meeting as a casual forum and make the EDG process simpler.
- Wonder when design review actually happens? Oftentimes the developer wants big, cheap and fast work and that's not good for the community. You need that Board pushing back
- There needs to be flexibility to address big picture community issues. Need to make design review more focused on design. Can you put more pressure on the Design Review meetings without making people feel like they've done something wrong for having to go back to the DRB several times?
- How would the developer be held accountable for accurately reflecting what was discussed? What is the mechanism to address a split in community views?
- People like the idea of the early outreach. Obviously there are some details that need to be worked out. If we are adding early outreach, there has to be give somewhere else in the program. Need to think about the fact that staff have expertise and empowering that.
- When I think about the expertise within staff, it's better situated to tackle issues at the EDG phase rather than in the Recommendations phase. We may not know the latest materials, but we know the city, we know the issues, we know the design guidelines. That's why I think it would be better to make EDG administrative rather than the Recommendations phase. The planners also have a good understanding of what's applicable and what's not.
- Disagree with some of the previous comments. It is good to have diversity of design. The Design Review gets us to a better place than if we had zero regulation, but you don't want to over-regulate. No process is ever going to be perfect.
- Where did the concept of early outreach come from and what was the driver behind making EDG administrative?
  - Applicants want something more efficient and predictable that doesn't add cost. From the public side there is a lot of change happening. The public wants to be heard, engaged, listened to, and for the input to have meaning. Trying to balance these two pieces. If we can allow the early dialogue it will address a lot of the issues that have bubbled up. And by having EDG be administrative it can provide for more efficiency and predictability and provide more info early on to the community, so when they come to the REC meeting, they can know what staff said and how it was addressed. The Design Review Board would then add expertise to what we have in house, rather than replicating it.
- The boards are volunteers and a limited resource. By eliminating the EDG board meeting it frees up their calendars and helps speed up the process. Creates some more capacity there.
- I think handling EDG administratively could work, especially from what was described. Have some concerns about the Board first seeing projects at the Recommendations phase.
- The City's administrative design guideline process feels anonymous and like there is no way to participate. Is the product that comes out of an administrative EDG process something that is useful to all parties?
- Supportive of an EDG that is administrative in some form. Like the idea of the additional engagement with them.

- Sometimes requiring designers to go back to the Design Review several times limits creativity. Need to document the iteration when something goes awry and be clear about the purpose of Design Review.
- Another mechanism for building in rewards is to have tiers. If a project does well, the developer can skip certain steps, and there can be a checks and balances mechanism to reward good behavior.
- There should be a way to recognize projects that do an exemplary job in terms of design. The Design Commission does this for projects in the public realm.
- From a consistency standpoint we need to limit the number of different pathways. Concerned about incentivizing things and creating different pathways. Need fewer opportunities for subjectivity when it comes to writing the code for what this process is.

Diane thanked the group for the discussion and noted that DPD staff could provide additional detail at the next meeting about what an administrative Early Design Guidance process might look like.

### **Review action items, announcements and next steps**

- Continue the discussion regarding the Early Design Guidance phase.
- Discuss project thresholds.
- Discuss roles and responsibilities of staff.

### **Attendees**

Advisory Group members:

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

Project Team:

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

Other Attendees:

- Roberta Baker, Seattle DPD
- Jasmine Marwaha, Councilmember Mike O'Brien's Office