

**Design Review Program Improvements
Stakeholder Advisory Group - Meeting #4**

Thursday, May 21, 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 outcomes of May 7 meeting

Diane reviewed the key outcomes that emerged from the discussion at the May 7 meeting:

- Support for applicant-led community outreach
- Support for the applicant providing evidence of community outreach having been conducted as part of the administrative Early Design Guidance (EDG) process
- Concern that making the EDG process administrative could weaken the Design Review process and eliminate opportunities for design professionals to provide meaningful input
- Interest in establishing clear thresholds for projects going through Design Review process
- Interest in allowing developers to follow the existing EDG process, if desired
- Support for a more robust pre-application coaching process
- Interest in exploring opportunities to incentivize and reward good design
- Need for more clarity about the role of DPD staff

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

Key discussion points

- Should three massing alternatives be required as part of the EDG process?
- Need to better illustrate the iterations of the proposed process
- Allow the public to provide comments on the quality of public outreach conducted as part of the EDG process
- General support for identified key priorities

Review potential revisions to the Design Review process

Geoff Wentlandt, DPD, reviewed the existing Design Review process, the alternative process presented to the group on May 7, and a revised alternative process based on the feedback provided at the May 7 meeting. Geoff introduced the two-track concept and reviewed the key elements, as well as the characteristics that would help determine which track projects would follow. The group then reviewed several recent sample projects to see how the track approach might apply.

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

Key discussion points

- Support for the two-track Design Review process
- Emphasis on the need for clear criteria for Track A and Track B projects

Detailed feedback

- It seems that a Track A project would meet all three of the key elements and larger projects would be considered Track B, correct?
 - Yes, with one exception for priority policy projects such as affordable housing projects.
- For affordable housing, the definition is important. If you define it as Multi-Family property Tax Exemption (MFTE), that will include a lot of projects, some of which might not be appropriate for Track A. If you define it more narrowly, it would include fewer projects.
 - We have a sense of the types of projects that will require an extra level of scrutiny, but there is still a lot of work to be done and details to be worked out.
- What do you mean by “enrolled in adopted pilot program?”
 - The living building pilot program is the only active pilot program now. These types of projects are more experimental and will likely require more scrutiny.
- Would briefings to the board happen at a regularly scheduled Design Review Board (DRB) meeting and be open to public comment?
 - Yes. One possibility would be to have two project briefings and two staff briefings to the Board in the same meeting.
- I thought you would need more than half the frontage in a block since you cannot be more than 250 feet wide on most streets.
 - Keep in mind that if not all of these bullets apply, the project would be in Track B.
- Is the landmark status “potential landmark” or current landmark?
 - For now, it is a landmark “at time of application.”
- What if there are two items checked in Track A and two in Track B?
 - If there is anything checked in Track B, the project is a Track B project, unless “policy priority project” is checked.
- You mentioned that the DRB would only be for projects that are most needed. How do you define “most needed?”
 - Essentially the criteria of Track B would define “most needed.”
- I encourage you to talk to the Office of Housing to help define affordable housing. It should not count the MFTE, but should be 100% affordable housing. 75 units is the high end of the range for legitimate affordable housing projects. There needs to be a threshold for when then massing is too big, regardless of whether it is affordable housing.
- We have heard many complaints about Streamlined Design Review. Does any of this apply to projects that are currently going through Streamlined or Administrative design review?
 - The main focus so far has been full design review. We have not yet tackled Administrative or Streamlined design review. It is possible that Track A could replace one of them.
- I wonder whether the DRB members will feel comfortable with only one opportunity to comment on the design of a project, since they often have the desire to dig into the design of a project.

- With the proposed process, at the EDG phase it is a discussion about massing. Massing is one area where DPD staff are in a position to do that analysis. We have also added in a briefing to the DRB.
- Should there be, or is there, an option for developers to opt-in to a certain track? For example, if the developer thinks the project will be contentious and wants the extra assurance.
 - We can look into that option.
- By the time the developer gets to the DRB during the Recommendation phase, the packages that go out can be very good or very bad quality. I wonder if there could be certain requirements for what the developer needs to provide in the design review package. That could help us be more comfortable with the administrative process.
- Is there a more general way of thinking of what is important in neighborhoods? Is there a specific overlay that would cause a project to start to become a Track B project? They could want the applicant to come back prior to Master Use Permit (MUP) submittal.
 - This process would occur after MUP submittal.
- Would it be up to the planner to stop something that was bad from a design perspective? What stops a bad design from moving forward?
 - The planner could tell the applicant that their project has major issues and cannot go before the DRB.
- For the affordable housing component, it should not be approved simply because it is affordable, it should be because the design of the building is good.
 - Track A does not mean no DRB review, but rather that the process is streamlined.
- I think the tracked approach is very intriguing and exciting. I think it could be nice to explore opportunities for Track B projects to qualify for Track A if they can demonstrate they meet specific criteria. It would be great if this transition to a track program encouraged better design because people are trying to qualify for Track A.
- Ideally we would be shuttling some projects to a shorter, more streamlined review.
 - We need an objective way to codify this. We hear from applicants that they do not mind going through a process, but they want it to be predictable. We want people to be able know what track their project is in based on the code. The process needs to be objective and defensible.
- There is so much subjectivity in design. Are we going to start seeing people have to participate in two recommendations meetings? That is a potential risk. Have you anticipated this risk and built it in?
 - One thing we are not showing here is the iterations, where you have to go back to the board, as needed. This could still happen with an administrative EDG phase. We could also think about building an example of a successful recommendations packet.
- Is there more community outreach/opportunities for input that can be built into the pre-application phase, prior to any EDG community meetings? I'd suggest moving the neighborhood outreach to the pre-application phase. By frontloading it, we can reduce the risk of bottleneck at the end of the process. I'd also recommend changing EDG to "Early Design Focus."
- The Landmarks Board finds the Architectural Review Committee briefings very valuable. I suggest setting up separate briefings before a subset of the DRB, instead of taking time at Board meetings.
- I am still a little hesitant about the administrative EDG, but I'd like to discuss the Recommendation meeting and how to make it more efficient. I like the idea of providing online

resources to share good design packets and showcase great projects in general. I also want to plug the rewards idea to showcase great design.

- We are now discussing meeting flexibility. In our next meetings we will need to talk about what else we can do to improve design. I am not sure if the words “typical,” “large,” and “scale” are descriptive enough. How do those relate to fitting sensitively in neighborhoods? We need to make sure that people are notified of Track A projects.
- I am very supportive of the tracks and affordability aspect. We need to define the role of the planner and what they are doing. How do they support the process and facilitate the process and help the project advance?
- This language would apply to all the DRBs, correct? Would we then say that a high-rise office building Downtown could go into Track A? A lot of developers building tall buildings do not have predictability in the EDG process, so even if they are going through Track B it is difficult to ensure it is predictable.
 - We did talk a bit about high-rise buildings. A high-rise in Downtown Seattle or South Lake Union that is surrounded by other tall buildings could potentially go through Track A.
- It seems like people’s comfort level hinges on the quality of the planner. You need to set it up well in the beginning so that the outcome will progress in a good way. What are the key elements that will make the planners able to make judgment calls on a project in a better way than now, or in ways they’re not prepared to now?
 - A lot of the planner staff are very talented and knowledgeable and could provide that guidance, but don’t feel empowered to do so. My hope is that this process could provide that empowerment. If, as we go through the process, we discover we need to build up some skills, it is easier to train internal staff and we have more control over their training. We are also looking at ways that other cities are encouraging online dialogue.
- In Goal 4 we talked about emerging technologies. What are other technologies we could be talking about?
- I am wondering about planner teams for districts as a possibility. I’m excited to hear that you have weekly team meetings. A team approach at a district level might be something to think about to provide certainty and continuity.
- Do the criteria for streamline and administrative processes help add any more to the Track A and B characteristics?
 - It is currently based on thresholds and the zone the applicant is in.
- Do the team meetings include only land use representatives, or are there other disciplines there?
 - They typically include only Design Review planners. The applicant is the party that has to work with all the other departments, so they are often the most informed, although the planner may be aware of some of the other issues.
- I suggest inviting people from other departments to those team meetings. It could help avoid some problems later on.
 - When we do the pre-submittal meeting we try to get as many departments to come as possible.
- We need to think about potential loopholes and a way to ensure that loophole projects do not succeed in skirting the rules.
- A policy of encouraging more sustainable buildings even though they might be out of scale is something that should be considered.

- Take the opportunity to improve training the Board on their purview and scope. How can we empower the facilitator to run a smoother, more positive discussion, especially during the recommendation phase?
- On Track A I don't know if you want to consider passive design. Perhaps there are design opportunities that could help affordable housing buildings. Passive architecture should be encouraged, and perhaps that should be in Track A more than affordable housing because it is related to design.
- It is important for the applicant to have the opportunity to interject when the board is incorrect about something.

The group also discussed the practice of applicants providing three massing options as part of EDG.

Detailed feedback

- There is a fear that the DRB will pick your un-preferred massing study.
- Often the Board will ask for hybrid options, which makes for fruitful discussions. We can also ask people to show feasible massing options, and to now show ones they would not build.
- I suggest showing City staff three alternatives and work with them to present two alternatives to the DRB.
- Maybe there should be minimum requirements of how different the three alternatives need to be, and emphasis put on the evolution of the preferred alternative.
- You could ask for either three distinctly different ideas, or something that is less specific and instead show the work that went into their preferred massing.
- I think if you go to Track A under this proposal, a lot of this concern will go away.
- It is important to be able to see how you get into the building, how you move through it, and the public interface.

Diane asked the group if they support the concept of the track approach. The group all agreed that the track approach is a good idea and should be pursued further.

Review action items, announcements and next steps

Diane thanked the group for the discussion and noted that at the next meeting, the group will see an updated version of the two-track concept and discuss potential tools that could support this process.

Attendees

Advisory Group members:

- Abdy Farid
- Amanda Bryan
- Deb Barker
- Duncan Griffin
- Jeffrey Cook
- Joanne LaTuchie
- Joseph Hurley
- Karen Kiest
- Michael Austin
- Patrick Foley
- Renee Remlinger-Tee
- Richard Loo

Project Team:

- Aly Pennucci, Seattle DPD



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