

**Design Review Program Improvements
Stakeholder Advisory Group - Meeting #5**

Monday, June 22, 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.

Outreach update

Justin McCaffree, EnviroIssues, provided an update on the design review online open house, which went live on June 15, 2015. The web address for the online open house is: seattledesignreview.publicmeeting.info.

Justin also provided an update on the initial design review online survey, which went live in late March, and closed on June 15. In total, 429 responses were received. Key themes of responses received included:

- Strong public interest in having opportunities to review and provide input on projects – particularly online
- Sense that public feedback is not being adequately considered/incorporated as part of the DR process
- Interest in providing more advance notices of projects
- Increased focus on how projects fit within their neighborhoods/potential impacts to neighborhoods
- Need to make the process more predictable

The online survey summary document is in the process of being updated to capture recent comments received, and will be distributed to the group once finalized.

Geoff Wentlandt, Seattle DPD (DPD), noted that a focus group is planned for this summer to share information and seek feedback about the Design Review Program from individuals and groups who do not typically engage in the process.

Detailed feedback

- The online survey and other outreach materials need to show people where the iterations in the design review process occur. This loop is one of the biggest issues from a predictability standpoint.
- Reach out to other community groups and organizations to get them up to date on the discussions that have taken place as part of this group

Review key outcomes of May 21 meeting and discuss process update

Diane reviewed key areas of consensus to date, which include:

- Early and ongoing applicant-led outreach
- The Early Design Guidance review process being conducted internally by DPD design review staff

- General support for a track approach to design review (Track A and Track B)

The group concurred that that general consensus has been reached regarding the elements listed.

The group also discussed recent email correspondence between group members, which are outlined below:

- How is the process supporting the goal of encouraging better design?
- There is a need for checks and balances between the applicant and the City.
- Considerations on how to do outreach and specific strategies to be mindful of.
- Having staff report out to the Board prior to recommendation would give the Board an opportunity to weigh in on projects outside of a formal meeting, after the community meeting has occurred.
- Concerns regarding design review criteria and thresholds.
 - There needs to be a way to codify the process in a way that is fair, clear and equitable. Considering transitional neighborhoods as one of the characteristics was meant to address that issue
- Concerned about piecemealing.
 - Challenge when writing code is we have to draw a threshold somewhere and we don't always know how/where people will find loopholes. We have to draw the line somewhere and then think of the potential ramifications. It is a challenge that we need to continue to look at. We'll be doing more thinking about what projects needs increased scrutiny.
- If projects did not have to go through Design Review (DR) today (but there were impacts to the community), is the intent to try to catch things like that so that they do go through DR? Or is the intention to make things efficient by cutting them out of the DR process?
 - We are trying to figure out, with the resources we have, how those resources can be best used. We are not trying to cut things out, but to maximize the resources we have.
- Is there a need for additional resources? I am concerned about projects getting shortchanged if resources are limited.
- I think the City could always use SEPA; in some circumstances there are impacts that meet SEPA thresholds. It's a matter of whether DPD is willing to go that route.
- Does this process intend to create a new filter for what goes through design review? Would the criteria you're intending to write replace the existing criteria?
- Are there any changes planned to the size of buildings that have to go through design review? Has there been any momentum from the City in lowering the threshold of what needs to go through either of these tracks?
 - There is a proposal to make projects in the Low Rise 2 zone have to go through design review.
- There needs to be a lot of thinking about the perception of the community outreach and public comments that come into the system now. The issue with Administrative Review is that it becomes more internal. We need to communicate very clearly what the criteria are and how decisions are being made. It could feel more like an internal process. People need to feel like they have a clear understanding of how the process works and how they can engage in it. The public needs to feel like they are connected to the process.

- That is the intent of the early and ongoing outreach. We are hoping that the conversations are more robust and tailored to the community that they are taking place in. That is a big assumption behind this track project.

Diane thanked the group for their thoughts and feedback and reiterated that the proposed changes to the Design Review Program are still being developed by DPD staff, and that there are a number of questions that will be addressed through this process. Throughout the process, DPD staff will share information with the group and seek the group's feedback.

Discuss Design Review Board (DRB) structure

Lisa Rutzick, DPD, introduced a proposal to revise the structure of the Design Review Boards and discussed the rationale. She noted that the intent of the proposal is to improve consistency and predictability.

Geoff Wentlandt, DPD, walked through the key points of what is included in the proposal, addressing:

- Board structure
- Board composition
- Geography
- Board workload

The group discussed and provided feedback on the structure. The details of this discussion are captured Below.

Key discussion points

- General support for having DPD continue to develop the proposed Design Review Board structure.

Detailed feedback

- I think it makes sense. Consolidating the different districts and having a broader Board sounds good. It would be good to have an urban design person on the Board(s) – especially on the downtown Board. One of the keys is to increase bandwidth overall so that applicants can get through the process at a pace that works for them.
- It would be good to have an urban designer. Could you have a floater position (e.g. someone with high rise expertise) as well, particularly as neighborhoods will change with light rail coming in?
- I think there are interesting ideas coming out of this. The way the proposed Downtown Board is spreading east of I-5 and then into First Hill and Capitol Hill – putting those into the Downtown Board could cause some concern. Even though they are close to each other, those areas are very different. I think spreading toward South Lake Union makes sense, but I do not see it spreading too far east of I-5. If one of the key concerns is backlog, what if fewer projects were permitted every month so that there is not as much of a backlog? It currently feels like there is a lot trying to go through the funnel at any one time.
- Overall we have to make the process more streamlined, faster, and more predictable. Otherwise I am not sure how the public will receive this. We need to build as much housing as possible and make the process as fast as possible. I am not too concerned about spreading the downtown Board east of I-5. If you are doing good community outreach it should not be a problem.

- We are not only talking about faster, but also about better. We need to hold on to the quality of things. Moving the central core too far east of I-5 could result in consistency issues with one Board trying to straddle two very different communities. It would be better if NE was capturing one part of Capitol Hill and SE could focus more on the Central District and Downtown could focus on high rise type projects.
- There is a high rise zone in First Hill; the proposal does not intend for Pike-Pine to be part of the Downtown Board; it would be handled by the Southeast Board.
- What if there was a broader pool of community representatives, each of whom represents an urban village overlay zone? Those individuals could rotate into the Board when a project in their community is reviewed.
- Consider three year terms rather than four year terms for Board members. Also, there should be three design professionals on the Board and only one real estate development professional. And would it be possible to have three community members instead of two?
- I think a floater representative could address a lot of the concerns: an urban village floater who is aware of the design guidelines for the community that is being addressed.
- Noon to 6:00 pm business day meetings for the DT Board could reduce access for people who want to engage in that meeting.
- I like the idea of reducing the number of Boards in general, and of having 7 Board members for each Board
- Outreach is good but does not replace anything in the current process. People could feel like their concerns weren't addressed.
- This new Board structure is predicated on fewer meetings, which is great. Last time there was a lot of discussion about the thresholds for Type A and Type B meetings. When is the public meeting for a Type A meeting?
 - That would be the DPD-led meeting. There is the expectation that the applicant would conduct outreach prior to EDG, which could take a lot of different forms.
- I think it is important to have the opportunity for the Board to look at a project and weigh in before the Recommendation phase. While there will be community meetings, those won't have as much teeth as comments made by the Board. I think it would be great to have a traditional meeting with the Board early in the process.
- As you are thinking about the borders of each area, think about zones and transitions and how that defines neighborhoods. For example, under this proposal, the area along Jackson in the Central Area would be bisected. Be really cognizant of neighborhood boundaries.
- We have guidelines and zoning, so projects cannot be stopped but they can be changed. If we have clear guidelines the Planners can provide that guidance.
- Is there value in the Board providing feedback?
 - Yes, to some degree, but it is subjective. And I hire a design firm to provide me with that expertise.
- One thing I think I heard was the idea was that a planner might not let a project get to the Recommendation phase if they hadn't done "X" amount of public outreach.
 - That is the general concept, but none of the details have been sorted out. However, we would not be waiting until the Recommendation phase for that documentation of public outreach. The documentation would be provided on an ongoing basis throughout the process.
- The ombudsman/facilitator role we had previously identified as being useful is only happening occasionally for certain meetings. What is the consistency of that role? What is the trigger for having that person?

- The value the Board provides is when the applicant asks for departures. Under Track A, if there is a request for a departure, who looks at that and decides whether that makes sense?
 - That conversation would still happen with the Board. Departures are never granted at the EDG phase. The Board gives indications of whether they are inclined or not inclined to support the departure request. Staff would make their recommendation on the departure request to the Board.
- It seems like there are some risks with the Track A and Track B approach since they involve putting a lot of trust in a closed meeting with the planner. The applicant and the public could have some concerns about not knowing what happened during that discussion. Instead of holding on to the existing process (EDG/Recommendations) we could just say that there will be a minimum of one meeting with the Board, and if you have to come back, you have to come back. The Planner could act as the expert adviser.
- May want to encourage adding another design professional without specifying a specific role. Rather than requiring members to serve for 4 years, you could require “at least a 2 year term” to give them an option.
- I agree that educated engagement at these meetings is important. Listening to those conversations between the Board and the applicant can be helpful. I think there should be a DRB representative at some of the Track A public meetings to provide some consistency and expertise. Putting together a list of community members who are educated and informed, and who can volunteer to go to these community meetings for a Track A project would also be way to encourage community participation in the Track A meetings.
- I like the idea of having Board members from a particular area taking turns going to community meetings.
- I disagree with many of the comments that have been made. I do not think we need more design professionals, and think we need at least two real estate development professionals. I do not think we need Board participation at the community meetings. I think that community members are generally well-informed. Overall, we need to focus on how to make the process faster.
- Will there still be two reviews during the Recommendations meeting?
 - That will be worked out as the process is further fleshed out.

Review of map app

Lisa Rutzick, DPD, provided a preview of a mapping application the City is developing to provide information on upcoming projects.

Detailed feedback

- It would be good to be able to see what other people are saying in the comment section.
- It would be good to explain somewhere on the site what the purpose of the Design Review Program is and provide some background.
- Is someone monitoring the comments? How do you manage them?
 - All the comments, once submitted, will go in the public file for the project and will get posted.
- One of the mechanisms the Design Review Board is supposed to be using is the Design Guidelines. It would be great if this tool could link to those neighborhood design guidelines.
- We would likely be reaching people who already have some knowledge about this. It needs to be general public friendly and provide the ability to dive deeper.

- I like Seattle in Progress because it has a very casual, human touch. It looks like this tool will get there. I do not want it to have too much jargon. We need to think about how this tool could be hosted by other websites (local blogs, etc.).
- It would be useful for the City post responses to those comments. It is a good tool, but the missing link is to have the City's responses to those comments. Some might not be design related but those comments could be sent to the appropriate department to respond to.

Explore tools to support the revised Design Review process

Diane reviewed the Tools Worksheet and requested that group members provide their thoughts and recommended priorities for the tools listed and send their completed worksheets to Geoff Wentlandt by July 27th.

Review action items, announcements and next steps

Diane thanked the group for the discussion and noted that the group's next meeting will be held on September 14. Over the next several months, DPD staff will continue to develop and refine the proposed changes to the Design Review process, and will share information with the group on a regular basis.

Attendees

Advisory Group members:

- Abdy Farid
- Amanda Bryan
- Duncan Griffin
- Erik Mott
- Jeffrey Cook
- Joanne LaTuchie
- Joseph Hurley
- Karen Kiest
- Maria Barrientos
- Patrick Foley
- Renee Remlinger-Tee
- Stephen Yamada-Heidner
- Jay Lazerwitz

Project Team:

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

Other City staff:

- Roberta Baker, Seattle DPD
- Aly Pennucci, Council Central staff