

**Design Review Program Improvements  
Stakeholder Advisory Group - Meeting #6**

Monday, September 14, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Seattle Municipal Tower, Room 1610

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

Geoff Wentlandt (Department of Planning and Development) introduced City Council Member Mike O'Brien.

Councilmember O'Brien thanked the Advisory Group for their time, energy and progress on addressing several important issues related to the design review process. Councilmember O'Brien recapped some of the group's key areas of consensus, including requiring early and ongoing outreach on projects, providing a tiered approach to design review and creatively using technology to allow a broader range of stakeholders. Councilmember O'Brien noted that there is more work to be done to implement the recommendations of the group, and encouraged group members to feel free to contact him moving forward with any questions or concerns.

**Detailed feedback**

- The Advisory Group reached consensus on a number of improvements. Some members of the group also suggested adopting the recommendations of the HALA Committee
- There are continual struggles with how the design review process results in better design. An ongoing challenge is getting great buildings in Seattle.
  - There will always be some disagreement what good design is and what bad design is. The quality of projects and how they relate to human beings is an important factor. Hopefully the public will be able to say the process works better than it did previously.
- Good design is important, but so is cost. How do we strike a balance?
  - It is important to make sure interests of the public and owner are aligned.
- There needs to be more rewards for good design. You know good design when you see it – how can we meaningfully reward good design?

**Introduction of Nathan Torgelson**

Diane Adams, Facilitator, introduced Nathan Torgelson introduced as the Mayor's nominee to be the new Director of the Department of Planning and Development (DPD). Nathan noted that Design Review is one of the most visible ways that DPD connects to the community. He thanked the Advisory Group for their involvement in the process.

Diane reviewed the meeting agenda and materials, and reminded the group of the discussion ground rules.

**Update on community meetings**

Geoff noted that two community meetings are planned to share information with the public about the Design Review Program and the recommended improvements.

- September 29<sup>th</sup> (Columbia City Library)

- October 14<sup>th</sup> (University Heights Community Center)

Geoff asked the group to share information about the community meetings with relevant email lists and blogs and to attend the meetings, if possible.

#### **Key discussion points and next steps**

- Send Advisory Group formatted email in order to invite relevant lists and blogs.

#### **Update on other recent planning efforts**

Geoff reviewed the goals and process of the city's Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA) Advisory Group. Geoff explained that the recommendations that have emerged from the HALA process are intended to be considered as a comprehensive package and implemented over the next couple of years. A City Council Committee of the Whole will review all the legislation that comes out of the HALA process. Geoff noted that the work of the Design Review Advisory Group Board aligns with the HALA goals of efficiency, predictability and consistency.

#### **Key discussion points and next steps**

- Plan to evaluate how the revised design review process is working following implementation
- Ensure design review criteria are quantifiable and predictable
- Make sure that it's clear which track a project will be on at the beginning of the process.

#### **Detailed discussion**

- How do the HALA recommendations impact what types of projects go through the design review process? Does this have an impact on what or how many projects will be going through Design Review under Track A and Track B? If there are zoning changes, how will that affect the number and types of projects that will go through the different tracks? For example, the University District gets upzoned to 240 feet. How will this affect the Tracks?
  - The design review criteria intends to quantify the types of projects that will require additional review or public input. This may be a moving target, and we need to understand it better. As we gain a better understanding of what the HALA recommendations will be, we will need to take this into consideration.
  - If areas are upzoned, some areas will become transition zones. This is a question that needs to be addressed. There are limited opportunities to upzone, and we will evaluate the opportunity, but it may not have much of an impact.
- Will there be a way to evaluate how Track A and Track B are working to make sure that they are working as intended?
  - Oftentimes with legislation there are assessment points built into the process.
  - We may need to wait and see how that works over time.
- There should be guidelines for projects that vest when a project goes through Early Design Guidance (EDG) to provide more predictability.

#### **Update on recent legislation related to design review process**

Geoff noted recent concerns about the piecemealing of projects and explained that the City Council has passed a rule change to address this concern.

### Detailed discussion

- This regulation would be required if the permit applications for adjoining projects were submitted on the same date.
  - There are other criteria. If there are follow-up questions, DPD staff can put Advisory Group members in touch with the appropriate staff.
- I appreciate the attempt to deal with loopholes and other means of not complying with the intent of the legislation. My community council has asked that we apply the same kind of rigor to see if there are other loopholes.
- The trigger is more on the final certificate of occupancy on the date of the building inspection, not just the date of permit application.
- Design review will also now be required for projects in the LR2 zoning designation.

### Discuss Recommendations Report Outline

Diane explained that the Recommendations Report outline was originally sent to the group for review on September 1, 2015. The final Recommendations Report will be approximately five to 10 pages, and will include information about the Design Review Improvements process, outreach efforts, and the key recommendation.

### Key discussion points and next steps

- Confirmed consensus on the following recommendations:
  - Early and ongoing outreach
  - Use of new tools
  - Revisions to the structure and composition of Design Review Boards
- Recommendation tabled pending additional analysis by DPD
  - Administrative EDG and tiered design review process

### Updates to the Recommendations Report Outline

- Early and ongoing outreach
- List outreach recommendations as “including, but not limited to.”
- Coordinate with the Department of Neighborhoods to include a short list of community groups that could be contacted during outreach.
- Under “Things to Consider,” there needs to be more to define how recommendations would be incorporated into the report, how tasks will move forward and how recommendations will be used.
- Include callouts of how each recommendation will meet goals one through four.
- Include headers on each page.
- Update flow chart to show how long the Admin EDG process will take and to make timeframes more explicit.

### Detailed discussion (Structure of Recommendations Report and Approval Process)

- When the Recommendations Report goes to City Council, what is our request?
  - The first version of the Report will be a broad description of all the changes that are being recommended. We expect that some of these will require changes to the code, which would be an ordinance.
- Would the report be sanctioned by the Advisory Group or DPD? Are we asking for Council approval?

- The Report is a full suite of recommendations, some are administrative while others will require code changes. The Report will be made this year and the code changes will occur next year.
- The final report that goes to City Council will be the Mayor's recommendations.
- City Council can vote to amend the changes.
- There may need to be weighting of the recommendations.
  - This is a diverse group. If the group is unanimous on a certain recommendation, then the Mayor will strongly consider that recommendation.

#### **Detailed discussion (Early and Ongoing Outreach)**

- It was asked that feedback from the Chamber effort and NAIOP suggestions, etc. be added to the first page.
  - This information is included in the Background Report, which will be included as an appendix to the Recommendations Report.
- Please include a short list of community groups that could be contacted when doing outreach.
  - This information will be provided to applicants as part of a Public Involvement Toolkit
  - The Department of Neighborhoods already has this information available.
  - The Department of Neighborhoods is very enthusiastic about being part of the process.
- On the topic "Things to Consider" we may need to define how these would be incorporated into the Recommendations Report and to define how this will move forward and be used. The details of how the outreach process would work need to be further defined.
- We may want to consider, "What is the point when an applicant has met the threshold for public involvement? Who decides when an applicant can move on?"
- Why is the second to last bullet point ("Consider seeking public comment on the effectiveness of the applicant's outreach") included?
  - This is to address where to go if there is a comment on outreach.
  - This may not streamline the process.
- I have concerns about using the term "required" regarding applicant-led outreach. What exactly are we requiring?
  - Applicants would be provided with specific expectations for public outreach and a list of suggested outreach tools and strategies options.
- There could be a public meeting by DPD once the project has been noticed.
- When an applicant reaches out to community groups, they could send an email noting who they met with during outreach.

#### **Detailed discussion (Administrative EDG and Tiered Design Review process)**

- HALA recommends limiting the extent of packet materials required. DPD should look at why the three alternatives are required.
  - We're attempting to get at that idea with the fourth bullet under "Things to Consider." We need to be clear about this language.
- We should track departures that are commonly granted and then change the code to accommodate these departures.
  - Departures are not addressed. If a negotiation is done, what are the guidelines?
- If the thinking is that the Planners will represent the applicant before the Board for EDG, we need to have well-trained planners who can clearly document how the developer responded to their recommendations. We also need to receive staff reports quicker.

- We need to explicitly callout how long the Administrative EDG process would take.
  - We can update the flow chart and make the anticipated timelines more explicit.
- The EDG meeting will have actionable conversation. The Recommendations meeting will ensure that nothing is missing and will be a conversation between the applicant and the Board.
- We receive several correction notices from the Planner. We respond to these corrections and meet with the Planner to discuss. As an applicant I participate in a lot of dialogue about the Design Review guidelines. Why do we need more dialogue? Is the concern about not having enough dialogue with the Board?
  - The intent is to provide additional training to staff, and to have the Board in more of an oversight role.
- Does it make more sense for the EDG meeting to be with the Board, and to have the Recommendations meeting be administrative?
  - The reasoning behind having the EDG review be administrative review was that the planners are best equipped to address issues related site design guidelines. The Board brings more design expertise, which some planners don't have. Most of the people interested in serving on the Board are in the design profession.
  - We will take note of a consensus decision.
- It feels as though the Planner needs to be more engaged at Board meetings. If Planners handle EDG administratively, they need to play a bigger role in the Recommendations meeting.
  - Yes, the Recommendations meeting would look very different than now.
- I agree that EDG should stay as it is and the Recommendations meeting should be handled by the Planner.
- We keep saying this is one meeting. If EDG meets with the Board, is that one meeting or will it take more? These tend to be more than one meeting.
  - It has to be once. After that, the Planner would take the lead.
- If the Recommendations meeting was not a public meeting, the public may not see what the proposed building will actually look like.
- Notices could show that drawings are available online.
- When would outreach occur? There needs to be a way to provide public feedback during the Recommendations phase.
  - Ongoing outreach would be required.

**Potential revised design review process:**

- Early Design guidance phase – Full Board meeting
- Recommendations phase – Administrative

DPD staff will conduct additional analysis on this revised approach and provide feedback to the group.

**Detailed discussion (New Tools)**

- What about sending updates to neighborhood blogs?
- The key challenge is that the community issues are typically not related to Design Review. Is there an outlet for that?
  - The City needs to address this.

**Detailed discussion (Changes to Board Structure and Composition)**

- The map is great. Why does the Board have three year terms instead of four? Four year terms may provide more continuity for Boards.
- How would design professionals serve if the meetings of the Central Board occur during daytime hours?
- Is there any discussion of the frequency of the meetings?
- Is there a process to excuse a Board member?

**Next steps**

- Geoff discussed next steps in the implementation process and noted that the process to implement the recommendations will include a long lead time, as well as training for staff and Board members. An assessment of the revised program would likely occur 12 or 18 months following implementation, and would include a report to the City Council.
- Letters and correspondence received to date will be distributed to the group.
- The draft Recommendations Report will be distributed for comment in October
- Send Advisory Group draft Recommendations Report

Lisa thanked the Advisory Group for their participation in the process.

**Attendees**

Advisory Group members:

- Abdy Farid
- Amanda Bryan
- Duncan Griffin
- Erik Mott
- Jeffrey Cook
- Joanne LaTuchie
- Joseph Hurley
- Maria Barrientos
- Patrick Foley
- Renee Remlinger-Tee
- Stephen Yamada-Heidner
- Jay Lazerwitz
- Deb Barker
- Murphy McCullough
- Michael Austin
- Richard Loo

Project Team:

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

Elected officials and City staff

- Councilmember Mike O'Brien
- Nathan Torgelson, Seattle DPD
- Aly Pennucci, Council Central Staff
- Sara Belz, Mayor's Office