

*Director's Report and Recommendation*  
**Seattle Design Guidelines Update**  
*April 2011*

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*March 2011*

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# Introduction

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## Updating the City's Design Guidelines: Purpose and Scope

In 2008 the Seattle Department of Planning and Development (DPD) launched an effort to update the design guidelines that are used to evaluate multifamily and commercial projects under the Design Review Program. The purpose of the update is severalfold:

1. To bring the original citywide design guidelines forward to the present day, incorporating lessons learned from the development of neighborhood-specific guidelines and almost 17 years of projects reviewed under the Seattle Design Review Program.
2. To maximize the effectiveness of the guidelines as a tool in encouraging better design while keeping the guidelines clear and easy to use by applicants, Board members, and the public.
3. To incorporate current best practices in design guidelines and address issues not contemplated during the drafting of the original design guidelines in 1993.

The scope of the update was initially focused only on the design guidelines that apply citywide outside of Downtown. However, as the update neared completion it became apparent that the City's neighborhood-specific design guidelines needed to be reformatted to match the organization and structure of the updated citywide guidelines simply in order to make it easier to use both sets of guidelines—citywide and neighborhood—for any given project. *Changes to the neighborhood guidelines are limited to formatting changes; none of the original content of the neighborhood-specific guidelines has been changed.*

## Principles Guiding the Update

Given the central role of the design guidelines in the Design Review Program and the history of project recommendations that have been made over the years based upon adherence to those guidelines, the update was not undertaken lightly. To guide its work, DPD established the following principles at the outset:

- Design guidelines must be clear, simply stated, and easy to use in order to be effective.
- They must facilitate, support, and reflect the architectural design process and the City's design review process leading to better local solutions and higher quality projects.
- They must be timeless and timely; embodying key principles of good design while reflecting best practices and current issues.
- All revisions to the guidelines should be undertaken thoughtfully in order to respect their history of use to date and the strong relationship that exists between citywide and neighborhood-specific guidelines.

## Process and Methodology

The early analysis phase of work included collecting, organizing, and analyzing information from a variety of sources with the purpose of assessing the adequacy of the existing guidelines and pinpointing where revisions were most needed. Analysis also included exploring design guidelines from other cities to better understand current practices in design review and design guidelines. Sources consulted besides the City's original guidelines contained within the document entitled Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily and Commercial Buildings include:

- Existing Seattle neighborhood-specific guidelines (19 neighborhoods represented);
- Design guidelines and similar documents from other cities; and
- Outreach to key constituencies including Design Review Board members, City Land Use planners, design professionals, and community members via focus groups, special meetings, and a website forum.

Information from all of the above sources is summarized in the Analysis section of this report, and was used to formulate the findings and recommendations for guideline revisions.

The second phase of work consisted of:

- drafting the guideline revisions based on findings from analysis,
- obtaining feedback from constituencies, and direction from DPD management, and
- vetting the revisions with those same constituencies.

The final product is a set of eleven design guidelines with citywide application that wholly replace the original guidelines in the [Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily and Commercial Buildings](#) document. As with the original guidelines, the updated design guidelines work in tandem with neighborhood-specific guidelines whenever a project is located within a neighborhood that has its own set of guidelines.

## **Supplemental Content**

This report includes an abridged version of the Analysis report prepared by consultants Weinstein A/U under contract to DPD. The full report can be read at [www.seattle.gov/dpd/planning](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/planning). Also available on the DPD website is a copy of the 1<sup>st</sup> draft of updated Seattle Design Guidelines published in January 2010 for public comments and a summary of public comment received on the 1<sup>st</sup> draft.

The analysis conducted by Weinstein A/U unveiled a number of concerns that fell outside the scope of the design guidelines update. These findings, although outside the direct scope, are critical to improved design in the City, and were included as a part of the Analysis report but are not described within this Director's Report.

# Background

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## Seattle's Design Guidelines for Multifamily & Commercial Buildings

Since 1994, Seattle's Design Review Program has been directing development within the city with the aim of achieving more thoughtful site planning and architectural design. The document entitled Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily & Commercial Buildings applies throughout the city (except for Downtown) and has been the cornerstone of the Design Review Program since its inception and the primary tool by which proposed projects are evaluated. These original guidelines have also formed the basis for 19 sets of neighborhood-specific guidelines and a set of Downtown guidelines. This Director's Report describes the process by which the original citywide design guidelines are being updated and the guidelines that are proposed to replace them.

For the last 17 years, the Design Review Program has been running continuously, evaluating thousands of projects and helping to create the best fit between new development and existing city fabric. Subsequent to the creation of the original design guidelines, neighborhood-specific design guidelines have been developed with substantial community interest and direction. The earliest set of neighborhood-specific guidelines drafted was the Ballard Municipal Center Masterplan Area Design Guidelines in 2001. The latest set of neighborhood-specific guidelines is the Northgate Urban Center and Overlay District Design Guidelines, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition adopted by City Council in 2010.

## The Role of Seattle's Design Guidelines

The overarching goal of the design guidelines—and the Design Review Program in general—is to foster design excellence in private development of new multifamily and commercial projects throughout the city. The guidelines also support the Design Review Program in its role as a forum for the public to participate in discussions about new projects in their community, and as a means of allowing flexibility in the application of Land Use Code requirements.

## Why Update?

Several factors contributed to the decision to update the citywide guidelines:

1. An audit of the Design Review Program prepared by the City Auditor at the request of then-Councilmember Peter Steinbrueck generally found the Program successful but noted some opportunities for improvement, including revisions to some of the design guidelines suggested by community members and design professionals alike.
2. After 17 years of applying the design guidelines to a wide variety of projects in all parts of the city, many lessons have been learned concerning the effectiveness of the guidelines and how they might be improved.
3. In the process of developing 19 sets of neighborhood-specific design guidelines, DPD found that although each set follows the model set forth by the citywide guidelines, it also added elements that build upon and strengthen the original guidelines. These elements represent valuable input that can be applied citywide and are therefore worthy of inclusion in the update.
4. Changing conditions in neighborhoods, emerging issues in design and development, and new best practices in the field of design review also suggested the time was right to revise the guidelines.
5. Last, the slowdown in real estate development of the last few years offered an opportunity to devote staff resources to the work that would not have been possible in the prior boom years of development.

Design guidelines are especially critical today as Seattle strives to go beyond having new development fit in to an existing context. The updated guidelines aim to reaffirm the importance of contextual fit plus help craft a city of walkable neighborhoods in which new development is a key element.

# Outreach

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## Overview

The project team met with key groups at several points during the analysis and development phases of the project as listed below. The comments received were instrumental in developing many of the findings in the Weinstein report and in the development of the final design guidelines. In addition, the project team met regularly with an internal Core Team consisting of DPD Planning and Design Review managers for direction and advice through the course of the project.

During the analysis phase, the focus was on hearing from a broad range of constituents on the effectiveness, usability, and clarity of the existing citywide design guidelines. Although suggestions for new guideline language and topics were sometimes offered, the majority of comments at this phase addressed how the existing guidelines work within the architectural design process and the City's Design Review process, impact of the guidelines on final project design, and the format and structure of the guidelines. The objective was to fully understand what was working, and not working, with the existing guidelines before beginning to revise them.

### Analysis Phase Outreach

- February 4, 2008: Meeting with Seattle Department of Transportation to discuss the relationship between design guidelines and the City's Right-of-Way Improvement Manual
- February 22, 2008: Meeting with members of the Department of Planning and Development Green Team to discuss the relationship between design guidelines and sustainability and "green" design
- February 25, 2008: Meeting at the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Urban Planning Forum
- February 26, 2008: Meeting with City of Seattle Land Use Planners who staff the Design Review Program
- May 22, 2008: Public Meeting open to all but targeted to former Design Review Board members and community members who had been involved in drafting neighborhood-specific design guidelines for various neighborhoods throughout the city
- Feb. 29, 2008: Meeting with Metro to discuss the relationship between design guidelines and principles/guidelines for transit-friendly design.
- March 10, 2008: Meeting with Northwest Design Review Board
- May 28, 2008: Meeting with current Design Review Board members and DPD Land Use staff

During the guideline development phase, the focus was on reviewing the project team's analysis with constituents, sharing key findings and observations, and presenting three options for updating the guidelines. Initially the project team worked with DPD Land Use staff and Design Review Board members to refine the proposal. Once a direction was set, the project team prepared and published a first draft of updated design guidelines for formal public comment. The first draft of updated design guidelines was published in January 2010 with a comment period through March 31, 2010. The draft was posted on the DPD website with an option for online comments, and articles were published in the December 2009 and March 2010 DPDInfo newsletters about the project.

### **Development Phase Outreach**

- February 4, 2010: Presentation of draft updated design guidelines to the Seattle Design Commission
  - February 9, 2010: Public meeting presenting the 1<sup>st</sup> draft of the updated design guidelines with approximately 40 people in attendance
  - May 25, 2010: Presentation of draft updated design guidelines to DPD Planning staff
  - Spring 2010: Presentations to a variety of community organizations by request; groups included the Roosevelt Neighborhood Association, Judkins Park Community Council, West Seattle Junction Neighborhood Association, North Beacon Hill Community Council, and Queen Anne Community Council Land Use Committee.
- Letters and e-mails received from 27 individuals and organizations regarding the draft design guidelines

### **Summary of Public Comment Received**

The majority of comments on the 1<sup>st</sup> draft of updated design guidelines were supportive of the updated guidelines, citing their organization and brevity as positive changes. The few comments received that were critical and/or not supportive focused around concerns about how the new guidelines would be coordinated with the neighborhood guidelines. Another concern expressed was the usability of the new guidelines given the number of “sub-topics” identified under each guideline. A more detailed accounting of comments received is available at [www.seattle.gov/dpd/planning](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/planning).

# Analysis

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## Seattle's Existing Design Guidelines

The existing Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily & Commercial Buildings document is comprised of 31 design guidelines allocated among five sections:

- A. Site Planning
- B. Height, Bulk, and Scale
- C. Architectural Elements and Materials
- D. Pedestrian Environment
- E. Landscaping

Within each of the sections are one or more design guidelines. Each guideline includes the guideline text itself (in bold) along with explanations, illustrations, and/or subtopics within the primary topic of the guideline.

The document also includes several pages of information about how the Design Review Program works, a description of the development standard departures that are potentially allowed through the Program, a process diagram, a “how to” guide for using the guidelines, a discussion of context and the other categories of guidelines, and a guidelines checklist.

Although originally prepared only in hard copy format, over the years DPD has created an online presence for the design guidelines that pairs some of the text of the original document with photographs (instead of the sketches in the hard copy). The website does not include the lengthier explanatory text that comprises the majority of the printed version of the guidelines.

The Design Review Program is increasing its use of the website for posting other Program materials including project applications, examples of good applicants, and photos of finished projects. More and more applicants and members of the general public are using the website to access the guidelines.

### Initial Observations

DPD staff and consultant Weinstein A/U began their work with a review of the existing Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily & Commercial Buildings in terms of content, format and graphics looking for areas in need of improvement, and observed the following:

1. Overall the guidelines themselves have been holding up well; that is, as fairly broad principles they are still relevant and mostly provide the right breadth and depth to adequately review projects.
2. However, there is a lack of hierarchy among the guidelines that sometimes results in a relatively minor issue being placed on par with major design elements, and an overall imbalance in how issues are treated.
3. There is also substantial redundancy across the five categories (A through E) which, if eliminated, could simplify and shorten the lengthy document.
4. Several design-related issues have come up in Design Review Board discussions in recent years that are not addressed in the guidelines and consequently for which no guidance is provided, including sustainable design, transit-friendly design, and design of the “public realm”; e.g. those spaces accessible by the public and seen as important to city life, whether publicly or privately owned (sidewalks, plazas, parks, courtyards, etc.)
5. In terms of format, the guidelines are unwieldy in their length and presentation on the page. Sketches and examples are out of date and no longer as useful as they could be.

Analysis also broadened to discuss whether the guidelines were actually being effective in fostering a higher quality of design in the city. While the guidelines are only one factor in the overall outcome of a project, all who participated in the design guidelines discussions admitted to frustration with the quality of design going before the Boards and wondered whether the guidelines needed stronger or more targeted language. In addition, user groups consistently encouraged DPD to use the update as an opportunity to reconsider not only the wording and the format of the guidelines, but to think more broadly about the interrelationship between them and the other tools that are needed to achieve the best quality design possible in the City.

### **Comparison of Citywide and Neighborhood Design Guidelines**

The 19 sets of neighborhood-specific design guidelines developed between 2001 and 2010 represent the most current thinking from community members on design concerns for each neighborhood. The project team was eager to see how these guidelines compared with the guidelines in the Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily and Commercial Buildings, and what lessons could be learned from them. Given that the neighborhood-specific design guidelines are intended to augment, but not replace, the citywide guidelines, the team was also anxious to see to what extent neighborhoods deemed it necessary to add to citywide guidelines—believing this might be one indicator of whether the citywide guidelines were remaining relevant over time.

Analysis of the neighborhood-specific guidelines revealed that for the most part, neighborhood guidelines differ from the citywide ones primarily in that they focus much more of the explanatory text on how to create a better public realm. Some neighborhoods also defined the characteristics of their community and listed what they term “heart” or “gateway” locations that make the neighborhood unique. Some neighborhood guidelines simply restate citywide guidelines in a slightly different way.

Detailed analysis of the neighborhood guidelines can be seen in the Weinstein A/U Analysis report. Overall the conclusion reached is that the neighborhood-specific guidelines have not substantially augmented the citywide guidelines, but have supplied a high level of adjustment or addition to the explanatory text, examples, and illustrations. Most of the neighborhood guidelines have used photographs instead of sketches to illustrate the guidelines.

### **The Design Review Program over Time**

A review of the conditions in place at the time the Design Review Program began and the conditions today also revealed some interesting facts that have bearing on revising the current design guidelines. At the Program launch in 1993 there were very few resources available on the Design Review Program besides the Design Review: Guidelines for Multi-Family and Commercial Buildings document. Chapter 23.41 in the Land Use Code provided authorization for the Program and described the design review process as did Client Assistance Memo (CAM) 238, but the guidelines document served as the primary outreach material.

Impetus for the Design Review Program came from citizens concerned about insensitive development occurring in their neighborhoods and desirous of a way to participate in discussions about new projects beyond basic land use and zoning review. The Program began with minimal staffing and very little (if any) web-based information.

By 2010, the Program and conditions within the city are quite different than in 1993. In addition to Chapter 23.41 in the Land Use Code, CAM 238, and the guidelines, the following additional materials exist that add to public knowledge and use of the Design Review Program in various ways:

- Updated Comprehensive Plan with Urban Village Strategy that supports basic principles of walkable, sustainable neighborhoods (1994, updated 2004)
- Design Review Guidelines for Downtown Development, with a subset of Belltown guidelines
- 19 sets of Neighborhood-specific Design Guidelines
- The Community Guide to Design Review brochure
- Publicly accessible web-based Design Review Program materials including applicant packets, description of Board members, Boards’ meeting schedules, Gallery of Great Examples, sample application packets, staff

reports from Early Design Guidance and Final Recommendation phases of design review, and an archive of past projects

- An assortment of internal document templates for drafting reports, correlating citywide and n'hood-specific guidelines, Board meeting agendas, etc.
- Comprehensive notebooks prepared for all staff and Board members
- Quarterly training for Board members
- Staff assigned exclusively to the Program plus the involvement of numerous permit review planners

The number of Program materials has increased greatly and is now primarily web-based. The materials are also becoming more differentiated by audience versus having just 2-3 documents that attempt to serve all. These observations led the guidelines team to rethink the format and contents of the citywide guidelines as just one tool among many, and suggested that focusing the updated guidelines document on just the guidelines (vs. Program description, process, and applicant “how-to’s”) might be worth considering.

## **Design Guidelines Research and Best Practices**

### **Other Cities**

A variety of guidelines from other cities were reviewed to gain an understanding of how design guidelines and design review processes are applied elsewhere. The Team gained valuable insight by analyzing other guidelines, selecting a handful from among the many that exist nationally and internationally.

The Weinstein A/U Analysis report includes a detailed look at the design guidelines from the cities of Portland, Oregon; Sacramento, California; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Edinburgh, Scotland. Qualities from those guidelines that stood out as worthy of consideration for Seattle’s updated guidelines include:

- Strong emphasis on the pedestrian experience, streetscape design, and the public realm in general.
- Strategic use of photographs to show both desirable and undesirable outcomes, with comprehensive captions that leave no room for conjecture over the meaning and/or intent of the example shown.
- The value of a clear, consistent, and hierarchical graphic design format in making guidelines easy to follow and understand including strategic use of fonts, text sizes, titles, and other graphic design tools.
- Clear vision statements and images that underlie the individual guidelines and provide a sense of what the guidelines are aiming to accomplish as a whole.
- Brevity as an important aspect of ensuring that the guidelines can be easily used and referenced.
- Identification of specific features which represent or symbolize the uniqueness of a city and/or certain places within it, and which the design guidelines can help to preserve. In other words, a clear appreciation of the character or identity of a city as something of value to build upon.
- Consideration of context as broader than a building’s immediate neighbors; context at varying scales—citywide, neighborhood-wide, at the scale of the street or block, and at the scale of the public realm around the project site.

### **Guidelines for Downtown Development and Belltown Neighborhood Guidelines**

Seattle’s Guidelines for Downtown Development and the Belltown neighborhood guidelines are quite different from the citywide and other neighborhood guidelines. The numbering format and categories are different from the citywide guidelines, with 21 guidelines grouped into categories of:

- Site Planning & Massing;
- Architectural Expression;
- The Streetscape;
- Public Amenities; and
- Vehicular Access & Parking.

The downtown guidelines recognize that new buildings are creating context, not simply responding to context. Once a new development is completed, it becomes part of the context that the next new project should respond to, and so on as the city evolves. Like Edinburgh, the Seattle's downtown guidelines ask applicants to consider the larger scale of the city as a whole, "consider relating to elements that define Seattle's regional role" and how the building will be seen from important vistas, like Gasworks Park.

The downtown guidelines also integrate transit-related issues into the design guidance and place a stronger emphasis on "Design(ing) the architectural elements and finish details to create a unified building, so that all components appear integral to the whole."

### **Seattle Design Commission Project Review Handbook**

In contrast to the Design Review Boards that review private commercial and multi-family development, the Seattle Design Commission reviews projects being built by the City on City-owned land and/or proposals for projects in the public right-of-way; in other words, the public realm. The Commission has developed a handbook to clarify its role and the process of design review. The Design Commission's mission statement includes several key ideas that the project team deemed worthy of consideration for the updated guidelines:

- Champion design excellence in the public realm.
- Promote design practices that are compatible with sustainable development, equal opportunity and social inclusion.
- Ensure that the city's built environment makes Seattle a desirable place in which to live, work and visit.

### **Transit Friendly Guidelines**

The City of Seattle and Metro are working together to encourage and welcome transit riders and toward that end have developed a set of transit-friendly guidelines. Much of transit-friendly design is directly relevant to a desirable public realm—streetscape, open spaces, and street front facades—and thus provided the project team with another perspective on how to address transit and alternative transportation within the update.

### **Sustainability**

Since the development of the 1993 design guidelines, the City has updated its Comprehensive Plan, established a Green City Building team, implemented "Green Permitting" procedures, and developed a variety of mechanisms with which to encourage green and sustainable development practices. These efforts reflect the City's commitment to sustainability at all scales and levels, and suggest a legitimate role for sustainability within the design guidelines. In addition, the issue of aesthetic "fit" of new development within existing city fabric, while still of concern, has expanded to include broader issues of fit, or appropriateness, of design from the standpoint of resource consumption, energy efficiency, and embracing new materials and architectural styles.

# Findings and Implementation Options

Based on analysis and outreach, Consultant Weinstein A/U and DPD staff found the following issues critical to address in the update. These findings formed the basis for the approach taken by the project team in developing options for how to update the guidelines and, ultimately, greatly influenced the crafting of the new guidelines themselves.

## **Finding #1: Important issues are missing from the current guidelines.**

Guidance on current architectural issues is not adequately provided in the existing guidelines.

### **Recommendations:**

- Incorporate updates in architectural practice over the last fourteen years, and current information about new design issues and standards being implemented by the City of Seattle, such as the Green Factor. However, use discretion in adding information, keeping the guidance on specific topics at a high-level so that the guidelines are manageable and offer the appropriate depth of guidance relative to the needs of the Design Review process.
- Incorporate lessons learned from the neighborhood guidelines, particularly noting the neighborhoods' emphasis on pedestrian-friendly design and quality of the public realm.
- Consider providing more in-depth guidance on issues such as sustainability, transit-friendly design, CPTED, family and youth-friendly design, building typology-specific guidelines (such as for townhouses, whole block buildings/long facades), and appropriate design responses to neighborhoods with strong ethnic or historical contexts in separate documents that could serve as companion pieces to the guidelines and/or stand-alone information for projects that do not go through Design Review.

## **Finding #2: The current guidelines contain redundancies.**

Information in the current guidelines is often repeated between sections, making it difficult for Board members and applicants to choose the most applicable guidelines for a given project.

### **Recommendation:**

- Streamline the guidelines so they are more direct, cohesive and work together as a whole.

## **Finding #3: The Parent guidelines are generally standing the test of time.**

The individual guidelines reflect time-tested principles of good design, and have served well since the inception of the Design Review program. The language in several of the guidelines, however, is not as clear or strong as it could be.

### **Recommendation:**

- Strengthen guideline language in order to clearly convey the intent of the guideline with greater attention paid to prioritizing and organizing the design guidelines as a whole.

## **Finding #4: Explanatory text and graphics need to be updated.**

The guidelines are supported with hand sketches and explanatory text. The images are not clearly labeled and it is often difficult to understand what they're attempting to illustrate. The explanatory text is often lengthy and lacks clear and compelling language that would give the guidelines more weight.

### **Recommendations:**

- Update graphics with photographs and diagrams that clearly illustrate the guideline points.
- Provide photographs of positive local examples to give designers the opportunity to understand the quality of design the city expects.
- Use language in the explanatory text more precisely to emphasize the guidelines without repeating the guideline itself.

### **Finding #5: The current guidelines lack hierarchy.**

The existing structure of the guidelines gives equal weight to every guideline. Some guidelines are based upon broad concepts that are integral to the design process, such as (A-1) site planning and (C-1) architectural concept. These guidelines deserve more importance than guidelines that are focused on a specific aspect of building design, such as signage or lighting.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Emphasize the broader principles that drive architectural design by graphically formatting the updated design guidelines to illustrate a clearer hierarchy of issues.
- Include guidance on more specific design issues as a “subtopic” within each broader guideline so that appropriate direction is provided but within the context of those broader design principles.

### **Finding #6: The current guideline format does not encourage conceptual thinking.**

The design guidelines were originally intended to follow the architectural design process. However, as design is not a linear process, any guidelines need to be based on conceptual thinking that integrates site planning, open space, and architectural direction simultaneously.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Reformat and organize the guidelines to better reflect the design process.
- Shift to an approach that presents sets of guidelines that work together across categories to address the different aspects of architectural design.

### **Finding #7: The public realm should be prioritized.**

Neighborhood groups and the design community have expressed a desire for a more active and engaging public realm—those spaces accessible by the public, whether publicly or privately owned. The public realm was the highest priority of every set of neighborhood guidelines written subsequent to the original guidelines. Existing citywide design guidelines refer to the elements of a good pedestrian environment but do not address the public realm more broadly.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Emphasize the creation of an active public realm in the updated guidelines, learning from best practices and the priorities set forth in the neighborhood plans.
- Provide clear guidelines, images and text to illustrate positive examples of design in the public realm.

### **Finding #8: The guidelines and the Design Review process need better integration, especially with the neighborhood guidelines.**

Board members and land use planners have explained that they often use the current guidelines as a framework for their recommendations on after the Design Review presentation. In spite of the 31 guidelines, there is occasionally no appropriate guideline to address a desired recommendation. The large number of individual neighborhood-specific guidelines also makes it logistically difficult for Board members to reference the primary guidelines during meetings. Combined, these issues make the guidelines seem more an afterthought to the process rather than integral to it.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Develop materials to help Board members frame their critique and advice during meetings.
- Limit the number of individual guidelines and create a system of hierarchy so it is easier for the Boards to give a more conceptually-based design critique.
- Create simple tools that cross-reference the neighborhood guidelines with the citywide guidelines and allow Board members to quickly reference and utilize pertinent information.

## Implementation Options

DPD and consultant Weinstein A/U developed three options for moving forward to update the citywide design guidelines. The options were discussed internally within DPD and presented to members of all the Design Review Boards at one of their quarterly training and coordination meetings.

Option 1 and 2 are similar to each other and to the existing design guidelines, while Option 3 entails a broader reorganization, rewriting, and reformatting of the guidelines. Each is described with illustrations in the Weinstein A/U Findings and Alternatives report of September 2008, available online at [www.seattle.gov/dpd/planning](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/planning).

The consensus of the Design Review Board members and others participating in the update process was to proceed with a hybrid of Options 2 and 3 incorporating the best elements of both that were consistently attractive to the majority of reviewers. The hybrid option is what informed the recommendations for the update that are contained in this report.

# Recommendations

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## Updated Design Guidelines

DPD recommends the proposed updated and restructured design guidelines which consist of 11 guidelines in 3 major categories; each guideline including several issues and strategies to consider plus illustrations and photos. The new guideline organization is as follows (summarized in outline form; full text with illustrations attached in the Appendix):

### CONTEXT AND SITE

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**CS1: Natural Systems and Site Features:** Use natural systems and features of the site and its surroundings as a starting point for project design.

- A. Energy Use
- B. Sunlight and Natural Ventilation
- C. Topography
- D. Plants and Habitat
- E. Water

**CS2: Urban Pattern and Form:** Strengthen the most desirable forms, characteristics, and patterns of the streets, block faces, and open spaces in the surrounding area.

- A. Location in the City and Neighborhood
- B. Adjacent Sites, Streets, and Open Spaces
- C. Relationship to the Block
- D. Height, Bulk, and Scale

**CS3: Architectural Context and Character:** Contribute to the architectural character of the neighborhood.

- A. Emphasizing Positive Neighborhood Attributes
- B. Local History and Culture

### PUBLIC LIFE

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**PL1: Public Space:** If public space is provided or authorized by law, its design should complement and contribute to the network of public spaces around the site and the connections among them.

- A. Network of Public Spaces
- B. Walkways and Connections
- C. Outdoor Uses and Activities

**PL2: Walkability:** Create a safe and comfortable walking environment that is easy to navigate and well-connected to existing pedestrian walkways and features.

- A. Accessibility
- B. Safety and Security
- C. Weather Protection
- D. Wayfinding

**PL3: Street-level Interaction:** Encourage human interaction and activity at the street-level with clear connections to building entries and edges.

- A. Entries
- B. Retail Edges
- C. Residential Edges

**PL4: Active Transportation:** Incorporate design features that facilitate active forms of transportation such as walking, cycling, and use of transit.

- A. Entry Locations and Relationships
- B. Planning Ahead for Cyclists
- C. Planning Ahead for Transit

## **DESIGN CONCEPT**

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**DC1: Project Uses and Activities:** Optimize the arrangement of uses and activities on site.

- A. Arrangement of Interior Uses
- B. Vehicular Access and Circulation
- C. Parking and Service Uses

**DC2: Architectural Concept:** Develop an architectural concept that will result in a unified, functional and harmonious design that fits well on the site and within its surroundings.

- A. Massing
- B. Architectural and Façade Composition
- C. Secondary Architectural Features
- D. Scale and Texture
- E. Form and Function

**DC3: Open Space Concept:** Where open space is required, integrate its design with the building.

- A. Building-Open Space Relationship
- B. Open Space Uses and Activities
- C. Design

**DC4: Exterior Elements and Finishes:** Use appropriate and high quality elements and finishes for the building and its open spaces.

- A. Exterior Elements and Finishes
- B. Signage
- C. Lighting
- D. Landscape and Hardscape Materials

## **Reformatting and Reorganization of Neighborhood-specific Design Guidelines**

To promote ease of use and coordination, DPD also recommends that all current sets of neighborhood-specific design guidelines be reorganized from the existing organizational and numbering system to the new one used in the citywide guidelines. In completing this reformatting, the text of the actual guidelines remains unchanged, although some of the introductory language has been revised and text about the Design Review Program overall has been deleted, this material being available elsewhere in a more complete form.

In addition to the outline above, DPD recommends the following actions to complement the updated design guidelines:

- ✓ **Switch the design guidelines to a primarily web-based document**, with options for the reader to print out sections as desired; noting that this approach has been successful with SDOT's Right-of-Way Improvement Manual and allows the user to print only what s/he needs with considerable savings of money and natural resources to the City.
- ✓ **Imbed clickable links** to related photos, diagrams, drawings, and other relevant documents within the online design guidelines.
- ✓ **Maintain a web-based photo gallery** that can be frequently updated by staff to show the most recent and relevant examples of projects that have successfully met the intent of the design guidelines.
- ✓ **Develop a range of supplemental materials to complement the design guidelines and help constituents use the guidelines effectively** such as checklists, a reader's guide, charts to summarize guidelines for each Design Review district, and other materials. A variety of materials is necessary because users vary in their background, design expertise, and involvement with the Program. For that reason, it is difficult to create one document that serves all constituents without becoming unwieldy again in length or organization. This task will rest with the Design Review Program staff as it was not a part of the consultant's scope of work.
- ✓ **Amend the Land Use Code to recognize and support sustainable design considerations as part of the full range of issues to be addressed through Design Review.** Also included are several amendments to align code language with the updated guidelines and address other items of housekeeping.

## Code Amendments

The amendments recommended to Chapter 23.41 of the Seattle Land Use Code are only those necessary to enable the updated and reformatted guidelines to be authorized for use in the Design Review Program, plus coorection of an existing error and some clarifying language regarding the purpose and intent of the Program and the authority and scope of the Design Review Board. Specific recommendations include:

1. Changing the name of Chapter 23.41 to "Design Review" from "Early Project Implementation" acknowledging the central purpose of the Program and the name recognition of the Design Review Program after 17+ years of operation.
2. Amending 23.41.002 Purpose and Intent to reflect the chapter name change and clarify the Program purpose in line with the updated Seattle Design Guidelines' focus on design that enhances the character of the city and is complementary to the natural, built, and planned context for new development.
3. Adding a new subsection A. to 23.41.008 regarding the authority and scope of the Design Review Board in light of the absence of any language to this effect in the current code. The authority remains unchanged from current practice, and the scope is described as entailing four elements that are in concurrence with the updated Seattle Design Guidelines; citing the Boards' authority to address all aspects of the siting and design of projects such as:
  - a. Location on the site and relationship to its natural features or systems;
  - b. Issues of compatibility with existing or planned development, and project massing and scale;
  - c. Quality and features of open space and public areas within the project site; and
  - d. The architectural and open space concepts of the project as a whole and their relationship to one another.
4. Correcting an error of capitalization in 23.41.008.
5. Substituting reference of the updated Seattle Design Guidelines and reorganized neighborhood-specific design guidelines as the approved guidelines providing the basis for Design Review Board recommendations and City Design Review decisions.

## Summary of DPD Recommendation

DPD recommends adoption of:

- The updated Seattle Design Guidelines as formatted in the Appendix to the report;
- New versions of neighborhood-specific design guidelines that reformat the guidelines under the new Seattle Design Guidelines organizational and numbering system for all 19 neighborhoods currently having adopted guidelines; and
- Land Use Code amendments to align code language with the updated guidelines and address other items of housekeeping described above.

These actions together will give the Design Review Program the tools it needs to move forward into another generation of design review with the assurance that the guidelines reflect best practices of the day. By defining the qualities of architecture, urban design, and public space that make for successful projects and communities, the updated design guidelines reflect the values and expectations held by the City, community members, and design professionals for design excellence in the development of new multifamily and commercial buildings.