

Changes to Design Review Program

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November 2017

City Council recently approved a series of Land Use Code amendments that will impact which development proposals go through design review, and what the design review process will involve.

This document provides a summary of the changes.

For more information, see [Council Bill 119057](#)

Overview

▶ **Project Thresholds**

Changes to thresholds that determine which projects go through design review. More info on page 2.

Go into effect on July 1, 2018

▶ **Early Community Outreach**

New requirement for early community outreach for projects going through design review. More info on page 3.

Go into effect on July 1, 2018

Other Changes

- ▶ Some changes to the rules for tree protection. More info on page 4.
Go into effect on July 1, 2018

- ▶ Some limits on the number of board meetings for projects going through full (board) design review. More info on page 4.
Go into effect on July 1, 2018

- ▶ Some changes to the composition of the design review boards. More info on page 4.
Go into effect on January 1, 2018

- ▶ Changes to the approval process for departures for some projects reviewed by the landmarks preservation board or special review district board. More info on page 4.
Go into effect on January 1, 2018

Changes to Design Review Program Project Thresholds

Changes to thresholds in Section 23.41.004 SMC that determine which projects go through design review

Go into effect on July 1, 2018

- ▶ **Thresholds are no longer determined by dwelling unit count**
Previously, thresholds included the number of units proposed

Downtown & Industrial Zones

Full (Board) Design Review = 20,000 and 50,000 gsf

Applies to projects above 50,000 gsf in DOC or DMC zones and above 20,000 gsf in other Downtown zones and IB and IC zones. Similar to previous thresholds in Downtown zones. Only non-industrial development in IB and IC is subject to thresholds. Previously, only projects in a few specific industrial areas went through DR.

Other Zones

Thresholds in multifamily, commercial, and mixed-use zones

Previously, thresholds varied for each zone and only projects in certain commercial zones went through design review.

Full (Board) Design Review = 35,000 gsf

See an exception for affordable housing projects below. Previously, projects as small as 4,000 sf or 4 units would be reviewed by the DR Board.

Administrative Design Review = 15,000 gsf

Applies to projects between 15,000-35,000 gsf. Previously, only a few types of projects went through ADR.

Streamline or Administrative Design Review = 8,000 gsf

For projects 8,000-15,000 gsf, a list of complexity characteristics now used to determine whether SDR or ADR. Previously, projects as small as 5,000 sf or 3 units would go through SDR, and thresholds did not consider the complexity of project.

Complexity Characteristics

- Adjacent to SF zone or zone with a 20 ft lower height limit
- Street frontage over 200 feet
- Development site over 43,000 sf
- Includes a rezone or other Council approval
- Includes a landmark or character building

Single-Family Rezone areas = 5,000 gsf

Projects between 5,000-8,000 gsf in areas rezoned from SF to LR1 or LR2 go through SDR, and in areas rezoned from SF to LR3/NC/C/etc go through ADR. This special lower threshold expires in five years.

Uses

Affordable Housing Projects

Publicly-funded affordable housing projects now default to review through ADR. MHA-performance projects outside of Downtown can be reviewed through ADR instead of Full DR. Previously, affordable housing projects went through the same type of DR as other buildings.

Institutions

Certain institutional uses now subject to design review thresholds. Schools, religious facilities, city facilities, and major institutions are still exempt. Previously, all institutional uses were exempt from DR.



Changes to Design Review Program

Early Community Outreach

New requirement in Sections 23.41.014, .016, and .018 SMC that all projects complete community outreach before beginning design review

Go into effect on July 1, 2018

Code Requirements

Early Community Outreach

All projects going through streamline, administrative or full (board) design review now must conduct community outreach before their early design guidance meeting. The outreach should establish a dialogue with nearby communities in order to share information about the project, better understand the context, and hear community interests and concerns about the project. The outreach must include print, digital/electronic, and in-person methods. Applicants must demonstrate that they completed the required outreach before SDCI will schedule their EDG meeting.

Previously, some applicants would voluntarily conduct outreach to the neighborhoods near their projects, but it was not required as part of the DR process.

Administrative Rule

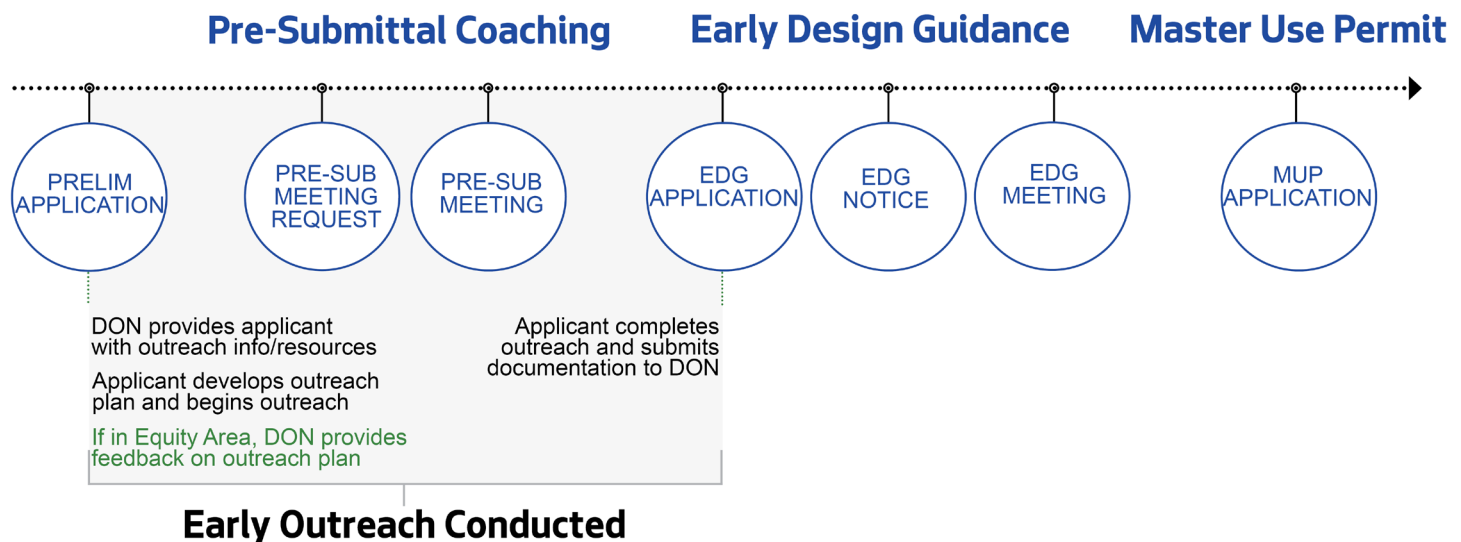
Joint Director's Rule

SDCI will create a Joint Director's Rule with the Department of Neighborhoods that provides more detailed requirements for the early community outreach. The rule will be finalized by May 1, 2018.

A staff-draft is currently available for review online at:

www.seattle.gov/dpd/codesrules/changestocode/designreviewprogramimprovements/projectdocuments

Process



Changes to Design Review Program

Other Changes

Changes to other sections of code related to Design Review

Exceptional Trees

Go into effect on July 1, 2018

Departures

New language in Section 23.41.012 SMC. Projects going through administrative or full (board) design review may now request a departure from height limits (up to 10 ft) and floor area limits (up to 0.5 FAR) if it will help them save an exceptional tree on the property. Previously, applicants did not have as many options to adjust a project to save trees.

Removing a Tree

Removes a requirement in Sections 25.11.070 and 25.11.080 SMC that a project which would not otherwise go through design review is required to go through SDR as part of the approval process to remove a tree, even if the SDR process could not help save the tree.

Board Meeting Limits

Go into effect on July 1, 2018

Full (Board) Design Review

New language in Section 23.41.008 SMC. Some projects will now only have two EDG meetings and one recommendation meeting with the board. Any additional review would be handled by SDCI staff, building off of the guidance from the board. Previously, all projects could be brought back for any number of additional meetings with the board.

Exceptions

There are no meeting limits if the project is next door to a Single-Family zone, includes a request for departures, includes a rezone or other Council approval, or if SDCI decides that another meeting is necessary.

MHA Performance Projects

For projects that perform on-site to meet MHA requirements, the limits on the number of board meetings apply even if the project is requesting departures.

Board Composition

Go into effect on January 1, 2018

Representation

Changes to Section 23.41.008 SMC. Each district board now has a citywide business seat that includes landscape professions, and two local residential/community seats. Also, there can now be more than one Get Engaged member serving on the board. Previously, the business seat was a local seat, there was a citywide "general community interests" seat, and there was only one local resident seat.

Landmarks & Special Review Districts

Go into effect on January 1, 2018

Departures

Projects reviewed by the Landmarks Preservation Board or the Special Review Districts Board that are not also required to go through design review may now request departures from development standards from the Landmarks or SRD Boards directly. Previously, projects would have to opt into design review in order to request departures.

More Information

Read the adopted language
See [Council Bill 119057](#)
or [Ordinance 125429](#)

Not sure how these changes will impact your project?
Design Review projects will continue to be subject to the vesting rules in SMC 23.76.026.

Questions?
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