

DESIGN COMMISSION REVIEW HANDBOOK

Introduction and Contents

This handbook explains the Seattle Design Commission (SDC) review process and the materials required for each review. The handbook contains the following sections:

1. Getting Started

These materials are the minimum needed by the SDC to begin project review.

2. Project Phases and Commission Policies

This explains the SDC evaluation and recommendation process for each phase of project review and including links to policies that guide reviews.

3. Presentation Guidelines

Please follow these formatting and submittal requirements to ensure a complete and thorough review.

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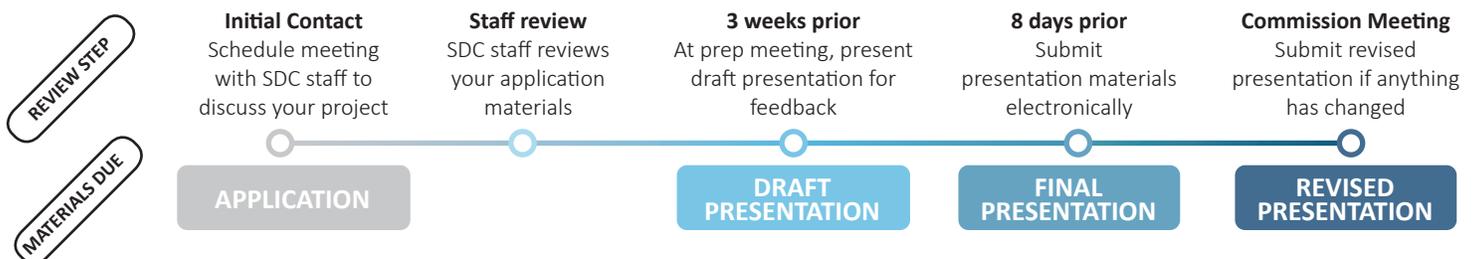
Commission Meeting Timeline

If your project has been identified for SDC review, you should contact SDC staff as soon as possible to set up an initial appointment to discuss your project. SDC staff will work with you to determine what elements of your project are subject to SDC review. Depending on the scope and status of the project and the SDC schedule, the first review will occur about two or three months after your initial appointment.

Three weeks prior to any Commission meeting where your project will be reviewed, staff will schedule a prep meeting with you. At this meeting you will present a draft of your presentation to receive feedback about its structure and content from staff and Commissioners. Be prepared to submit this draft presentation either on a flash drive or by email.

Your final presentation is due in PDF format 8 days prior to any meeting. This presentation will be distributed to Commissioners and posted to the public Design Commission website with a DRAFT watermark. While it is understood this is a draft document, the expectation is that it reflects what will be presented at the Commission meeting.

The following timeline outlines the materials due prior to every SDC review:



1. GETTING STARTED

When your project has been identified for SDC review, SDC staff will meet with you to discuss the scope of your project, the timing of the Commission review, the status of the design of the project, and other information to help guide the SDC review.

At that initial meeting, you should provide staff with information about the project. This includes both the information listed under All Projects below, as well as information specific to your proposal type, listed further below. As the project develops and is advanced to formal Commission presentations, additional information about the project will be required.

All Projects

- Project address and location
- SDCI project number, if available
- Project description including anticipated uses
- Vicinity map
- Site photos
- Site plan with dimensions and relevant program information (structures, landscape areas, site access, etc.)
- Zoning information
- Completed SEPA checklist or Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)
- Map of neighborhood context (surrounding nine-block area) including:
 - Iconic elements
 - Municipal facilities (e.g., community centers, fire stations, libraries, pump stations, power substations)
 - Transit stops and bicycle facilities
 - Parks, open spaces, and view corridors
 - Street classifications and types
 - Projects under construction or still under permit review
 - Overlap with planning efforts that impact site or nearby areas (e.g., Bicycle, Transit, and Pedestrian Master Plans; Streetscape Concept Plans; Neighborhood Plans; Major Institution Master Plans)

Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Projects

- Scope, budget, and schedule
- Proposed program elements
- Sustainability strategy overview that reflects City Sustainable Buildings and Sites policy and current approaches and methods
- Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) strategy overview, including initial public engagement strategies
- Concept drawings, if available

Street and Alley Vacations

Prior to petition:

- For all projects:
 - Development objectives (summary of program and program goals, project context, etc.)
 - Drawings and renderings that includes the information about key project features (building footprint, elevations that show conceptual massing, location of auto and pedestrian access, open spaces, project in context with surrounding development, etc.)
 - An analysis of the site in relation to the immediate area (generally 9 blocks around the site) that includes information about urban connections, onsite and nearby networks, public spaces, opportunities to impact public realm, etc.
- For project subject to the City of Seattle Design Review program:
 - Overview of public engagement strategies that reflect requirements in Joint SDCI/DON Directors Rule 4-2018
- For CIP:
 - Please see information to be submitted to the SDC for a pre-design (15%) meeting (see below)

Following the filing of a petition to the Seattle City Council:

- Copy of the filed petition
- Copy of any Early Design Guidance materials and minutes from all meetings before the Design Review Board
- Information in the Master Use Permit relevant to the vacation including traffic studies, SEPA determination, or similar documentation, etc.

Skybridges

- Copy of the petition filed with Seattle City Council
- Master Use Permit information, including any documentation from any Design Review meetings
- Recommendation from the Skybridge Review Committee, if any
- Interior building plans showing skybridge access points and related uses
- Exterior perspectives showing view of skybridge in context with attached structures
- Elevations and details of skybridge

2. PROJECT PHASES

This section outlines the phases of review for CIP projects, street and alley vacations, and skybridges. The number and timing of reviews varies according to type, scope, and complexity of each project. You should discuss the scheduling of the first review at your initial meeting with Commission staff.

The descriptions below explain what the Commission evaluates at each phase of review for each project type. You should tailor your presentation materials to align with the information about each phase. Refer to the Presentation Guidelines section at the end of this handbook for additional details on how to format and submit presentation materials.

You can find more information on the policies that guide the Commission in their reviews via the links below.

- The City's [Sustainable Building and Site Policy](#), per [Resolution 31326](#)
- The City's [Race and Social Justice Initiative](#) (RSJI)
- The Commission's policy on [Subcommittee Review](#)
- The Commission's policy on [Equity in the design of public space and public facilities](#)

For projects seeking a street or alley vacation:

- City Council's [policies on street and alley vacations](#) (Resolution 31809, adopted by Council on May 21, 2018)
- The Commission's [Public Art Policy](#) related to art included in proposed public benefit package
- The Commission's Policy on [programming of public space](#)
- [OPCD Directors Rule 1-2019](#) concerning formation of a subcommittee to evaluate funding of wage or social equity programs in public benefit packages

Capitol Improvement Program (CIP) Projects

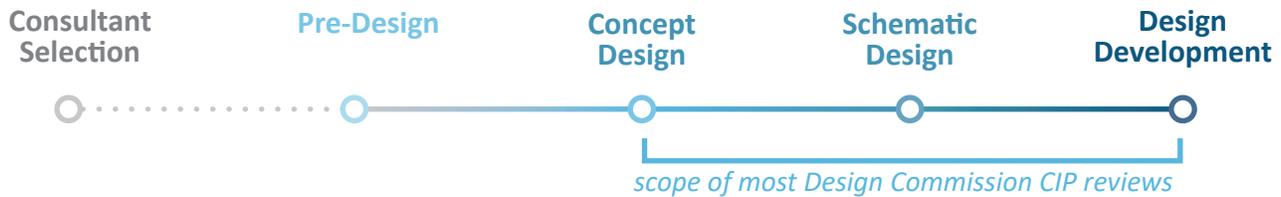
The Commission reviews Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects. CIP projects are City-funded, built on City property (including City-owned right-of-way), or require a City approval. Typical CIP projects include parks, fire stations, police stations, libraries, and other public facilities. The bulk of Commission reviews are for City funded capital projects. However, the SDC may review Capital projects proposed by other local or regional governments when a City approval is required.

City departments identify CIP projects as part of the City's yearly budget adoption process. You can browse these projects in the City's most recent CIP budget.

The City's code that established the Design Commission provides broad authority to review CIP projects:

No City capital improvement project shall be designed, placed under contract for design, or constructed without first being referred to the Commission for its review and recommendation.

The Commission reviews projects through the following distinct phases:



After the consultant selection phase, the Commission reviews most CIP projects three times: during the concept design (30% of final design), schematic design (60% of final design), and design development (90% of final design) phases. If the project is complex in size or its mission, the Commission may also review it at pre-design (15% of final design). Projects that assume a street or alley vacation are also subject to pre-design (15%) concurrent with an overview of alternatives to the vacation to accomplish the capital program. In general, the review should occur prior to the end of the specified phase of design.

The Commission votes to approve a project at each phase. Multiple reviews may occur at a given phase if the Commission does not approve the project progressing to the next design phase. Commissioners may also require the project team to attend a subcommittee either to resolve a condition or project element that is needed to advance to the next phase of review. Please see the commissions [policy on Subcommittee reviews](#) for more information.

This process is designed for the review of traditional capital facilities. For questions about how engineering, infrastructure, or transportation projects align with this phase schedule, contact Commission staff.

In addition to the overview of basic project elements needed to begin project review, all presentations throughout each step of the process should include the following to ensure a thorough review:

- Floor plans, elevations, and sections with dimensions
- Site circulation diagram
- Landscape elements
- Program elements
- Lighting
- Sustainability in building and site design
- Stormwater facilities/infrastructure
- Pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular facilities
- A summary of the approach toward equity, as reflected in the Commission's [equity policy](#)
- An overview of RSJI strategies, including how a Racial Equity Toolkit review impacted the program or building and site design

The following sections explain in greater detail what the Commission evaluates at each phase of design for CIP projects and what additional materials are expected in the corresponding presentation. Staff will also guide the development of your presentation materials to reflect the various stages of the project review, commissioner interest, and issues raised in previous reviews.

Consultant Selection

Consultant selection for a CIP project can be crucial to its success. City departments developing a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) or Request for Proposal (RFP) for projects subject to Commission review should involve at least one Commissioner at the initial stages.

During the selection process, the Commission will recommend that you:

- Include preliminary design goals and objectives for buildings and site in the project scope
- Include sufficient design budget with schedule for implementation
- Review applicable City policies affecting the program and site development including the City's Sustainable Buildings & Sites Policy, and the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative and require a specific response in both the RFQ and RFP on meeting or exceeding the thresholds established in these and other policies
- How City WMBE requirements will be met or exceeded

For projects that seek a street or alley vacation, it is recommended that you retain a consultant with expertise in Seattle's review process. The street and alley vacation process is discussed in greater detail below.

Pre-Design

A pre-design review occurs when the Commission provides input on the multiple alternatives under consideration for programming and siting. The Commission reviews the project goals, a roadmap for achieving them, and any opportunities and challenges you have identified. When presenting to the Commission, you should include a thorough analysis of the project site, the goals for the project, program alternatives, and other relevant information that is being considered as part of the project.

A pre-design (15%) review is required for capital facilities before submitting a petition to vacate a right of way. The Commission will do a concurrent review of the pre-design for a capital facility and on the vacation request including the feasibility of a no-vacation alternative. Please review the Council vacation policies in Resolution 31809 for more information.

At the pre-design stage, the Commission evaluates and makes recommendations on:

- Overall project scope, budget, schedule
- Project goals and objectives
- Design alternatives under consideration
- Exploration and analysis of site conditions, constraints, and opportunities
- Analysis of urban context (urban form, character, uses, transportation and open space networks, etc.)
- Exploration and analysis of community and interdepartmental involvement and coordination
- Exploration of sustainability goals, challenges, and opportunities including options designed to implement the City's [Sustainable Building and Site Policy](#), specifically in the area of climate adaptation
- An overview of your community engagement strategies consistent with the City's [Race and Social Justice Initiative](#), including any initial findings from the Racial Evaluation Toolkit evaluation.
- How your approach on equity is reflected in the design of public space or facilities
- For project seeking a street or alley vacation, any initial guidance related to the proposed vacation

See the [October 15, 2015 Portage Bay Park materials](#) for a good example of a pre-design presentation.

Concept Design

At the concept design phase, the Commission will evaluate your preferred alternative for the program, site and building. The evaluation is intended to occur at a time when the Commission can provide comment and direction early on in the design of the project and in the concept for the overall program. As the project progresses through the schematic design and design development phases, the initial concept presented at this review provides a reference point to evaluate later decisions and solutions.

At the concept design phase, the Commission evaluates and makes recommendations on:

- Overall project scope, budget, schedule
- Project goals and objectives
- The preferred design concept including building, site, landscape, lighting, and program elements
- Analysis of urban context (urban form, character, uses, transportation and open space networks, etc.)
- Opportunities for interdepartmental involvement and coordination on project design and delivery
- Initial sustainability strategy, and the exploration and analysis of sustainability goals, challenges, and opportunities proposed to implement the [City's Sustainable Building and Site Policy](#), in particular the climate adaptation aspect.
- An overview of your community engagement strategies consistent with the City's [Race and Social Justice Initiative \(RSJI\)](#), including any initial findings from the Racial Evaluation Toolkit evaluation.
- How your approach meets the Commission policy on equity in the design of public space or facilities
- Initial ideas for integration of Artwork into the building, site, landscape or program

For projects seeking a street or alley vacation, the commission will include its recommendations on the Public Trust analysis phase of the vacation process. Information on this review is discussed below.

See the [October 4, 2018 Green Lake Community Boathouse](#) for a good example of concept design presentation.

Schematic Design

At the schematic design phase, the Commission will evaluate how the overall design has evolved from the initial concept, including program, site, building, landscape and other project elements. The Commission review occurs when issues raised by the Commission in the concept review have been resolved and only minor changes to the program and the choice of project elements are anticipated.

At the schematic design phase, the Commission evaluates and makes recommendations on:

- Progress toward achieving the vision and concept for the project
- Response to previous Commission recommendations or conditions
- Shifts and refinements to the overarching design concept
- Any changes to scope and program
- Resolution of issues with, and refined design response to, site conditions, constraints, and opportunities
- How the project has advanced or refined the sustainability elements of the project.
- Refinements to sizing and configuration of site program elements, circulation, building uses, scale, massing, and orientation
- How the character and experiential qualities of buildings, site and overall design have been refined
- How Art integration into the building, site, landscape or program has been advanced including ongoing work from City's Public Art Advisory Committee
- How overall lighting concept has been advanced, including strategies for building and site
- Any changes in the program or design due to additional community engagement related to the Commission's [equity policy](#) or the [City's RSJI program](#), including any refinements from the Racial Equity Toolkit analysis

For projects seeking a street or alley vacation, the commission will include its recommendations on the Public Benefit analysis phase of the vacation process. Information on this review is discussed below.

See the [March 5, 2020 Overlook Walk & Ocean Pavilion](#) for a good example of a schematic design presentation.

Design Development

In this final phase, the Commission reviews the integration of all project elements that will be delivered with the final designs and project construction. The Commission will evaluate and provide final direction on project details including program, building and site details including materials and finishes, plant selections, furnishings, and lighting choices. During this phase the Commission will hear about sustainability implementation based on the overall sustainability strategy presented to the Commission at previous reviews, an update on how the art is being integrated into the project, and any remaining efforts to reflect community engagement strategies in the site, building or program.

At the design development phase, the Commission evaluates and makes recommendations on:

- A summary of how the design achieves the vision and concept for the project
- Response to previous Commission recommendations
- Shifts and refinements since the Commission's review of the schematic design
- Final design details of all project elements and spaces including specifics about materials, plantings, site furniture, lighting, signage and Art integration
- Final approach and implementation of sustainability measures in building and site design

For projects seeking a street or alley vacation, the commission will include recommendations on any refinements to elements of the public benefit package developed as part of the street and alley vacation process.

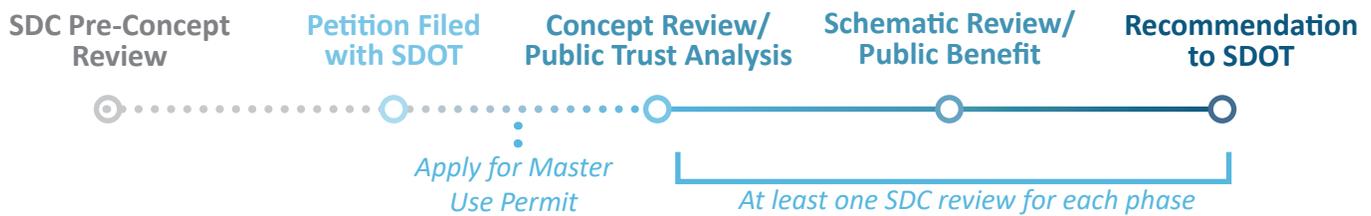
See the [August 1, 2019 South Park Pump Station](#) for a good example of a design development presentation.

Street and Alley Vacations

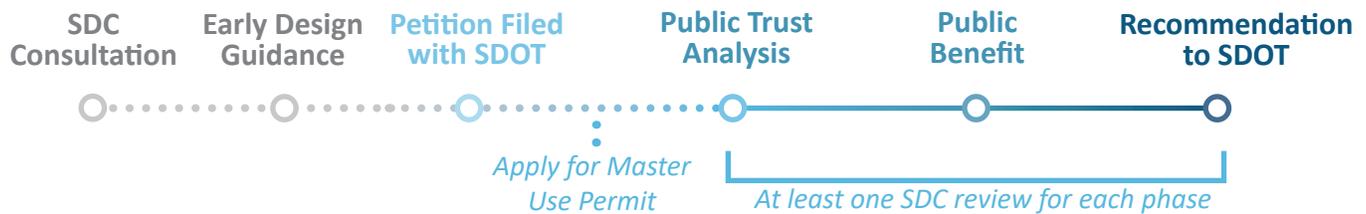
Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) [Section 3.58.080.D](#) requires the Commission to advise the Council on street, alley or public place vacations. The SDC provides its advice in two distinct phases: Public Trust Analysis and Public Benefit Analysis.

The goal of these reviews is to provide clear recommendations to the City Council about whether the request to vacate a street or alley should be approved, and what kind of public benefits should be provided to offset the public loss of the street or alley.

For CIP projects that request a vacation:



For projects subject to Design Review that request a vacation:



The Commission relies on a variety of documents and information, including:

- City Council's street and alley vacation policies adopted In May 2018 by [Resolution 31809](#)
- The documents in the vacation petition
- Reviews by City departments and other agencies with interest in the project
- The documents in the application for Commission review and any presentation materials
- Permitting documents submitted to Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections, including street- or alley-related impact analyses, environmental review documents, design review materials, and any relevant reports
- Public comment

Pre-petition review

[Resolution 31809](#) requires a proposed vacation to be presented to the SDC so that the Commission can provide early input before a petition is submitted to SDOT (Council vacation policy V.C). This initial review provides the proponent with an early evaluation of the project prior to submitting a petition for review including any commission recommendations about potential public realm impacts or public benefit strategies.

In the case of projects subject to Design Review ([23.41.022](#)), the SDC will provide written recommendations to SDCI on the proposed vacation before an application for early design guidance is submitted.

For CIP, the SDC will provide these recommendations concurrent with a pre-design (15%) review of the proposal. For additional information on the pre-design phase of CIP review, see the section above related to CIP.

Public Trust Analysis

After a valid petition is submitted to SDOT and has been circulated to City agencies for comment, the SDC will hold a meeting to evaluate the impacts that the vacation has on the rights of way and public realm at or near the project site. During this initial step in the vacation review process, the Commission determines how the vacation affects the functions of the remaining streets or alleys near the project and if impacts to the public trust functions of the right of way have been adequately addressed. The public trust functions that the Commission will analyze, as detailed in Council vacation policies, are:

- Circulation
- Access
- Utilities
- Free Speech
- Public Assembly
- Open Space
- Light and Air

- Views
- Land use and Urban Form

Your presentation should include all items outlined in the Getting Started section in the project handbook as well as any additional information developed in conjunction with City staff or the applicant team. The goal is to provide clear and concise project information for the Commission to evaluate and then make recommendations on the impacts to the public trust functions of the rights of way impacted by the vacation request.

Once the Commission has completed this phase of the review, they will vote on its recommendation and may add clarifying comments or conditions of approval.

See the [January 18, 2018 Trailside Vacation materials](#) for a good example of a public trust analysis presentation.

Public Benefit

When you request a vacation, you must develop a proposal that provides public benefits that offset the public loss of the street or alley. A successful public benefit package should adequately address the impacts related to the loss of the right of way, reflect community expectations based on your approved public engagement plan, and include a long-term or permanent commitment to the public. Council policy IV.A in [Resolution 31809](#) sets forth these expectations in greater detail.

Council policy IV.B in [Resolution 31809](#) sets forth an extended list of qualifying public benefits. The public benefits may occur on the right-of-way surrounding the project, or nearby the vacation site, and may include:

1. Physical public benefits including
 - Publicly accessible plazas or open spaces that are created or enhanced
 - Streetscape enhancements beyond code requirements including widened sidewalks, stairway, additional vegetation, lighting, etc.
 - Public Art
 - Spaces that support City goals for race and social equity like affordable housing or job creation
 - Preserving landmark buildings
 - Implementing an element from an Adopted neighborhood plan of City plan affecting development or transportation
2. Programmatic public benefits that provide long-term funding commitments addressing systemic inequities experienced by the public
3. Accepting real property
4. Payment of funds when it is not practicable to provide tangible physical public benefits

The Commission will also require you to address its policy on [Equity in the design of public space](#).

For projects that include the funding of wage or social equity programs, the SDC has developed an approach where they seek input from experts to advise the commission on the merits and approach of the funding proposal. OPCD Directors' Rule 1-2019 provides details on formation of a subcommittee to evaluate such proposals.

The Commission will vote on its recommendation and may add clarifying comments or conditions of approval.

See the [July 6, 2017 1101 8th Ave Alley Vacation materials](#) for a good example of a public benefit presentation.

Skybridges

Similar to street and alley vacations, the Commission advises City Council on petitions for new skybridges or for reauthorizing existing skybridges. Following the process for street or alley vacations, the Commission develops their recommendation based on the merit of the proposal and the public benefit. The Commission makes their recommendations following submittal of an application to the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT).



The goal of the Commission’s review is to provide clear recommendations to SDOT and City Council about whether the request to approve or retain a skybridge is warranted, given its impacts on the adjacent or nearby rights-of-way, and what kind of public benefits should be provided to offset the impacts of the skybridge on the adjacent rights of way.

The Commission relies on a variety of documents and information, including:

- SDOT’s Director’s Rule and Client Assistance memos
- The application materials
- The documents developed by the Skybridge Review Committee, including their final report
- Permitting documents submitted to SDOT or Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections (SDCI) including street- or alley-related impact analyses or reports

Merit

As part of its review and recommendations, the Commission first considers the merit of either installing or retaining the existing skybridge. The Commission considers the following standards found in [SMC 15.64](#):

- Adequacy of horizontal and vertical clearance
- View blockage
- Interruption or interference with existing streetscape or other street amenities
- Impacts due to reduction of natural light
- Reduction of and effect on pedestrian activity at street level
- Number of pedestrians that currently use the skybridge
- Effect on commerce and enjoyment of neighboring land uses
- Availability of reasonable alternatives
- Effect on traffic and pedestrian safety
- Accessibility for the elderly and handicapped

In addition, when evaluating requests to reauthorize an existing skybridge, the Commission will also consider:

- Changed conditions in the vicinity since original installation
- Any changes to existing public benefit mitigation elements provided under the original City Council ordinance that authorized the skybridge
- Any known conflicts with existing or proposed utilities, street lighting, traffic control devices, or other upcoming transportation projects

Once the Commission has completed this phase of the review, they will vote on its recommendation and may add clarifying comments or conditions of approval in its final report to SDOT and City Council.

Public Benefit

A public benefit package is required to offset the impacts to the right of way as a result of the skybridge. Similar to street or alley vacations, the public benefit package must go beyond any project elements that are required by City codes or required to mitigate project impacts.

The public benefits should generally be designed to enhance the adjacent and nearby rights-of-way that are impacted by the skybridge. Consistent with public benefits provided under a street or alley vacation, such public benefits can include:

- Creation or enhancement of publicly accessible plazas or open spaces
- Sidewalks wider than required by regulations
- Pedestrian connections
- Enhanced landscaping

- Street elements including seating, lighting, or art
- View easements or corridors
- Wayfinding improvements

The Commission will also require you to provide a summary of the approach towards equity, as reflected in the Commission's equity policy, in the design of public benefits.

The Commission will vote on its recommendation and may add clarifying comments or conditions of approval.

3. PRESENTATION GUIDELINES

Once you have had an initial meeting with Commission staff, you can schedule a Commission review. Every presentation to the Commission should adhere to the following guidelines:

Formatting

- Ensure all text is at least size 11 font. Keep in mind Commissioners primarily view your materials as a presentation, not as a packet.
- Ensure all images and photographs are at least 1600 x 1200 pixels and ideally 2048 x 1536 so they do not degrade when printed or enlarged.
- Ensure all maps and plans contain a north arrow, legend, and scale bar.
- Ensure all elevations and site plans have dimensions for all relevant project elements.

Saving

- Save the presentation as a single PDF. Do not submit a PowerPoint file or split into multiple PDF files.
- Do not convert the PDF to black and white or grayscale.
- Reduce the file size without compromising its legibility on screen and in print. A good way to do this is with Adobe Acrobat Professional's "PDF Optimizer" tool (File / Save As / Optimized PDF). As a reference, 40 pages should not exceed 20 MB.
- If you are scanning documents to create your preview materials, set your scanner to a sampling rate/resolution of at least 300 dpi.

Submitting

- To reduce paper usage, submit your presentation materials electronically to Commission staff. Staff will inform you if any handouts or copies are required for the meeting.
- If you have any technical or formatting questions, contact SDC_Administration@seattle.gov
- Refer to the timeline on page 1 for submittal due dates.