



# City of Seattle

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Office of Planning & Community Development  
Samuel Assefa, Director

## CITY OF SEATTLE ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

### SEPA Threshold Determination for revisions to 23.41.010 of the Seattle Municipal Code

- Project Sponsor:** City of Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development
- Location of Proposal:** The update to the Uptown Neighborhood Design Guidelines will apply to projects subject to Design Review in the Uptown Urban Center.
- Scope of Proposal:** The proposal is a legislative action to amend Section 23.41.010 of the Seattle Municipal Code to adopt updated Uptown Neighborhood Design Guidelines

## BACKGROUND

### Proposal Description

The Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) is recommending an amendment to Section 23.41.010 of the Seattle Municipal Code to adopt updated Uptown Neighborhood Design Guidelines.

The application of design guidelines and the design review process helps ensure that new development responds appropriately to its context. The design review process, as provided for in the Land Use Code Chapter 23.41, is a forum for community members, developers, architects, and city staff, aided by citizen design review boards, to identify design-related concerns early in the design development of a project to ensure that new development makes positive contributions to Seattle's neighborhoods. Design Review is a component of a Master Use Permit (MUP) application and is required for new commercial, multi-family and mixed-use developments that exceed SEPA thresholds in specific zones.

The design review process provides flexibility in the application of development standards through the granting of "design departures." Departures are granted when it is demonstrated that the modification of a prescriptive Code standard would result in a better overall building design through an improved response to unique site conditions or the compelling character of the surrounding area.

Citywide Design Guidelines for multi-family and commercial buildings are a compilation of broad urban design principles intended to address such aspects of development as site planning, height, bulk and scale relationships, architectural elements, landscaping, and the pedestrian environment. Zoning rules and prescriptive standards are intended to establish the primary use, intensity, and scale of development in a specific zone. As part of a past citywide neighborhood planning process, many neighborhoods expressed an interest in augmenting the Citywide Design Guidelines through the creation of neighborhood-specific design guidelines.

Neighborhood design guidelines are intended to reveal the unique character of a given neighborhood, to call one's attention to the specific goals for neighborhood development, the key locations for important design considerations, and thereby protect, to the extent feasible, the qualities and values that a specific neighborhood shares in the face of change. Where the City Council has adopted neighborhood design guidelines, new development must respond to both the applicable Neighborhood and Citywide Design Guidelines.

This non-project proposal would adopt updated Neighborhood Design Guidelines for the Uptown Urban Center. The current design guidelines were amended in 2013 to align with new Citywide Design Guidelines and were originally approved by the City Council in 2009. If adopted, these specific design guidelines would shape developments subject to design review within the Uptown Urban Center.

This non-project proposal would update existing Neighborhood Design Guidelines for the Uptown Urban Center. These proposed guidelines are consistent with and supplemental to the Citywide Design Guidelines. If adopted, these specific design guidelines would shape development projects subject to design review within the Uptown Urban Center.

The purpose of this update to the Uptown Neighborhood Design Guidelines is to provide design guidance that reflects the substantial change in the neighborhood since 2009 when the current design guidelines are approved, include new direction recommended by neighborhood stakeholders through the Uptown Urban Design Framework process, and provide guidance in the application of new development standards adopted as part of the 2017 Uptown rezone legislation.

### **Public Comment**

Proposed changes to the Land Use Code require City Council approval; opportunity for public comment will occur during future Council hearings.

### **ANALYSIS - OVERVIEW**

The following describes the analysis conducted to determine if the proposal is likely to result in *probable significant adverse environmental impacts*. This threshold determination is based on:

- the copy of the proposed text amendment, as well as the description above;
- the information contained in the *SEPA checklist* (dated November 8, 2018);
- an analysis of the changes prepared by City staff; and
- the experience of OPCD analysts in reviewing similar documents and actions.

## **ELEMENTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

Adoption of the Uptown Neighborhood Design Guidelines is not expected to result in short or long-term impacts in the Uptown Urban Center. The Design Guidelines are supplemental to existing development standards in Chapter 23 of the Seattle Municipal Code and Citywide Design Guidelines and would shape future development consistent with existing neighborhood plans and City codes.

### **Short Term Impacts**

As a non-project action, the proposal will not have any short-term impact on the environment. Future development affected by this legislation will be reviewed under existing laws, including the City's SEPA ordinance, to address any short-term impacts on the environment.

### **Long Term Impacts**

As a non-project action, the proposal is not anticipated to have any long-term impacts on the environment.

The natural environment includes potential impacts to earth, air, water, plants/animals/fisheries, energy, natural resources, environmentally sensitive areas, noise, releases of toxic or hazardous materials. Adoption of the proposed design guidelines is not anticipated to result in adverse impacts on any of these elements of the natural environment.

These Design Guidelines will affect the built environment but will not result in any adverse impacts. The impacts to the built environment include any impacts related to land and shoreline use, height/bulk/scale, housing, and historic preservation. Below is a discussion of the relationship between the proposal and built environment:

#### **Land Use**

Because design guidelines do not allow or prohibit land uses, the proposal would not allow or encourage any land uses that are incompatible with the existing Comprehensive Plan and neighborhood plans. The proposal is consistent with the

Uptown Urban Design Framework (2016), and the City's Comprehensive Plan, Seattle 2035 (2017).

Design guidelines do not restrict or allow uses, but modify development proposals, including those that contain housing, to better fit the local neighborhood context. The proposed guidelines would not directly impact the city's shorelines as the area is not located within a Shoreline environment.

#### Height/Bulk/Scale

The proposed area-specific design guidelines, in the same manner as the existing Citywide design guidelines, address height, bulk and scale issues by encouraging new development to integrate with the existing neighborhood scale.

#### Historic Preservation

The proposal does not encourage demolition of a landmark structure and would not disproportionately burden property owners whose property includes these buildings.

#### Noise, Shadows on Open Spaces, Light & Glare, Environmental Health, Public View Protection

The proposal would not make these types of impacts more likely. At the project level, the City's regulations, including SEPA regulations, will analyze and identify any needed mitigation of these impacts.

#### Transportation, Parking, Public Services and Utilities.

The proposal is not anticipated to result in any direct impacts on transportation or parking. Adoption of the proposal could increase the likelihood of transit oriented development and the creation of an increasingly pedestrian-friendly environment and streetscape. This would reduce auto dependence and the need for additional parking.

#### Public Services and Utilities

Adoption of the proposal would not create any impacts on public services or utilities.

### **DECISION – SEPA**

This decision was made after review by the responsible official on behalf of the lead agency of a completed environmental checklist and other information on file with the responsible department. This constitutes the Threshold Determination and form. The intent of this declaration is to satisfy the requirements of the State Environmental Policy Act (RCW 43.21C), including the requirement to inform the public agency decisions pursuant to SEPA.

- [X] Determination of Non-Significance. This proposal has been determined to not have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is not required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).
- [ ] Determination of Significance. This proposal has or may have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).

**RECOMMENDED CONDITONS--SEPA**

None

Signature: On File Date: November 8, 2018  
James Holmes, Strategic Advisor  
Office of Planning and Community Development