

# Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the role that traditional western-centric planning practices have played in harming, displacing, and attempting to erase Native communities. We commit to identifying racist practices, to practice allyship and strive to center restorative land stewardship rather than unsustainable and extractive use of the land.

We humbly recognize that we are on Indigenous land, the traditional and current territories of the Coast Salish people who have reserved treaty rights to this land, including the Duwamish, Suquamish, Muckleshoot, and Stillaguamish. We thank these caretakers of this land who have lived and continue to live here since time immemorial.

# Today's Agenda

October 26, 2022

*Please note this meeting is being audio and video recorded by the City*

9:45

## Welcome

- Land Acknowledgement
- Meeting Logistics
- Introductions

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9:55

## Review of Work to Date

- SDCI: Recap of RET Work

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10:10

## Analysis of Design Review Impacts on Housing Costs

- Overview of Community Attributes Report
- Q+A

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10:40

## Design Review in Other Cities

- Community Attributes: existing data research and proposed methodology

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10:55

## Next Steps

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11:00

## Adjourn

Join at  
**slido.com**  
**#DRMtg**



# Agreements for Discussion

- Assume best intentions.
- Engage openly and honestly.
- Acknowledge and embrace each other's diversity.
- Make space for others to share.
- Share using “I” statements.

## Racial Equity Toolkit

to Assess Policies, Initiatives, Programs, and Budget Issues



RACE & SOCIAL JUSTICE  
INITIATIVE

The vision of the Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative is to eliminate racial inequity in the community. To do this requires ending individual racism, institutional racism and structural racism. The Racial Equity Toolkit lays out a process and a set of questions to guide the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, initiatives, programs, and budget issues to address the impacts on racial equity.

### When Do I Use This Toolkit?

**Early.** Apply the toolkit early for alignment with departmental racial equity goals and desired outcomes.

### How Do I Use This Toolkit?

**With Inclusion.** The analysis should be completed by people with different racial perspectives.

**Step by step.** The Racial Equity Analysis is made up of six steps from beginning to completion:



# Quick Recap

## Responding to City Council Statement of Legislative Intent

This process will conduct a **Racial Equity Toolkit (RET)** analysis of the Design Review Program. SDCI and OPCD will report to the Council on the outcomes of that analysis.

**Councilmember Dan Strauss** has emphasized the work of the Design Review Stakeholder group:

*"I look forward to hearing from the Stakeholder group as to whether the program creates barriers for our residents who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) whether they are public participants, applicants or Board members.*

*I want to know if the program creates or reinforces racial exclusion.*

*My goal is to further improve this important program so that it is more accessible while also more predictable and less complex.*

*SDCI and OPCD will be looking at the work of the Stakeholder group, and will also review national best practices for design review, investigate whether the program increases housing costs, study the outcomes and review times of the program, and analyze departures requested through the- program."*

# Analysis of Design Review Impacts on Housing Costs



COMMUNITY ATTRIBUTES INC



# DESIGN REVIEW ANALYSIS

## IMPACTS ON HOUSING COSTS

**Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections  
SLI Stakeholder Presentation**

October 26, 2022

# AGENDA

**Project Background**

**Overview of Analysis**

**Findings**

**Discussion**

# PROJECT BACKGROUND

## 2021 Statement of Legislative Intent

1. Design Review Program outcomes since the program was modified in 2017;
2. An analysis of departures sought through the program;
3. **An analysis of whether the program increases housing costs;**
4. A review of national best practices for design review programs; and
5. Recommendations for how the program should be modified to address the findings of the stakeholder group.

# OVERVIEW OF ANALYSIS

## CAI Data Review and Analysis Includes:

1. Any **data available from the City** of Seattle
2. Any available **third-party reports** assessing the Design Review Program
3. **Case studies** summarizing design review processes and outcomes in other cities
4. Any available third-party reports assessing other similar design review processes in **other cities**
5. **Interviews with development community stakeholders** with experience taking projects through the design review process in Seattle

# OVERVIEW OF ANALYSIS

**This presentation primarily presents findings from:**

1. Any data available from the City of Seattle
2. Any available third-party reports assessing the Design Review Program
3. Case studies summarizing design review processes and outcomes in other cities
4. Any available third-party reports assessing other similar design review processes in other cities, including for cities included as case studies
5. Interviews with real estate developers with experience taking projects through the design review process in Seattle

# OVERVIEW OF ANALYSIS

## Interview topics included:

- Qualitative assessments of the **developer experience** with the design review program.
- Evaluation of the relationship between the design review process and **development costs**.
- Implications for development outcomes focusing on the **supply of housing**, comparisons with design review in other nearby cities, and **outcomes for disadvantaged communities**.
- **Recommendations** for additional information to be gathered and adjustments to the design review program.

# OVERVIEW OF ANALYSIS

## **Limitations of this Analysis:**

- Difficult to compare projects going through Design Review given various factors; similarly difficult to compare design review programs in different cities as processes vary significantly.
- Much of the analysis of and commentary on Design Review focus on projects that are unique.
- Design Review is just one part of a larger review and permitting process.
- This project did not include interviews with the community or city and did not include quantitative analysis or modeling.
- Eight interviews are helpful but cannot provide a perfectly representative set of cost data.

# FINDINGS

**Overall Observations**

**Possible Impact of Design Review on Costs**

**Benefits of Design Review**

**Possible Impact of Design Review on Housing**

**Comparison to Other Jurisdictions**

**Potential Reforms**

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## FINDINGS: OVERALL OBSERVATIONS

- Interviewees recognize that **the intent of Design Review is good**, and its purpose is generally understood and appreciated.
- Administrative review (**ADR**) is perceived as providing a thorough review of projects while interviewees generally believe that full review (**FDR**) does not result in better design outcomes (than ADR).
- Interviewees believe **the program is too complex, inconsistent**, and aspects of the review process **lack transparency**.
- Interviewees generally indicated that there is a need for building a better understanding among the public about the elements of design review that can or cannot be influenced, as well as the levers outside of design review to impact development outcomes.

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## **FINDINGS:** IMPACT ON COSTS

- There are **multiple challenges in evaluating the direct costs of Design Review.**
- **Packets for review are perceived to be increasingly complex,** with costs often passed on from architect to developer.
- **Identified costs (following slide) are incurred due to inconsistent application of guidelines** and their **variable impact on a project's timeline or complexity.**
- **Larger projects may have a larger project reserve to cover costs** associated with Design Review than small- or moderate-sized projects.

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# FINDINGS: IMPACT ON COSTS

## Interest on Debt

- Monthly carrying costs are particularly burdensome if there are multiple rounds of review.

## Project Timeline

- Design Review is sometimes associated with long timelines and bureaucratic hurdles across multiple departments.

## Numbers Cited by Interviewees

- 10%-25% additional fee on a 100+ unit project if there is significant design change.
- Initial architectural renderings can cost \$75,000 and monthly carrying costs can be 6%-7% with \$50,000 for each round (>75 unit project).
- Every month a project is delayed due to any part of the MUP process can add \$15-20,000 to a moderate (<15 unit project).

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## FINDINGS: BENEFITS

- **Interviewees indicated Design Review can be effective in maintaining a minimum level of good design**, but it requires tight adherence to the guidelines.
- Interviewees indicated that **Design Review is unlikely to yield cost savings** (e.g., through lower operations and maintenance costs). One interviewee indicated that there could be some savings if you compare having an administrative approach to design review to a larger public process, such as FDR, that may be present without it in place.

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# FINDINGS: IMPACT ON HOUSING

## Supply and Type

- There was general agreement that **costs are felt hardest among developers of moderate-sized projects**, while larger developments can better absorb costs.
- Interviewees indicate that amenities and design features required through **Design Review can influence the size of units** and discourage units that can accommodate larger groups or families.

## Affordability

- Interviewees generally believe it's essential to **maintain and enhance exemptions for affordable housing**.
- Interviews indicate **projects with affordable housing need more departures** to gain more units.

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## FINDINGS: COMPARISONS TO OTHER CITIES

- There was consensus that **Design Review in Seattle is on a longer timeline and does not yield additional benefits compared to other nearby jurisdictions.**
- **Design Review appears to favor experienced developers** who can navigate the process, making it difficult for outside developers to enter Seattle.
- There is a perception that **other cities rely on a more prescriptive code** (rather than a DR process) that makes review more predictable and consistent.



*“There is a night and day difference in terms of having a smooth process between Seattle and nearby cities like Shoreline, and the level of good design outcomes is essentially the same.”*

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# FINDINGS: REFORM RECOMMENDATIONS

## Staffing

- Interviewees agreed that **addressing staffing capacity and consistency in skillset** would be the biggest factor in improving Design Review.
- **Design Review Board training and a better basic understanding of development** can also improve the review process.
- Some expressed a belief that **non-professionals are hired to have expertise in areas in which they are not well trained.**

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# FINDINGS: REFORM RECOMMENDATIONS

## Guidelines

- General consensus that there are **too many design guidelines**. Interviewees would prefer fewer guidelines that are more consistently applied citywide.
- There was **disagreement in how to honor adjustments by district or considering culturally specific neighborhoods**.
- Some interviewees would like a simplified process that **eliminates EDG or otherwise reduces the number of steps in the process**.
- Interviewees would like to see more **encouragement of departures** and **rewarding design innovations** and creativity.

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# FINDINGS: REFORM RECOMMENDATIONS

## Engagement

- There is a **desire to improve how engagement activities interact with Design Review** to address community concerns earlier and ensure that the weight of a single voice is evaluated within the context of broader community input.
- **Engagement activities should not be tied to a specific project.** One interviewee suggested that the Department of Neighborhoods could work to increase awareness amongst the public about what can and cannot be influenced at different stages of the development process.
- One interviewee recommended a **pre-EDG meeting between applicant, staff, and Dept. of Neighborhoods** to address public concern at the outset of a project rather than through DR.

# Thank you!

What questions do you have?

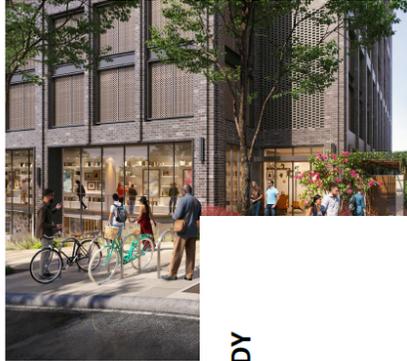


An aerial photograph of a city street, likely in New York City, showing multi-story brick buildings, a street with a white truck, and a semi-transparent circular overlay on the right side. The overlay contains the text "Design Review in Comparable Cities" in black and "Draft for feedback" in red. A horizontal line is positioned below the red text.

**Design Review in  
Comparable Cities**  
**Draft for feedback**

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# CASE STUDY AUSTIN



## SNAPSHOT

Population 978,908

a density of 3,141 people/sq mile

22.1%

growth from 2010 to 2019.

Why did we choose this example?

Comparable to Seattle size/growth

What projects are subject to Design Review?

Projects that opt into the Density Bonus Program

### WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE?

Austin's Design Review program is currently in Program, where projects which met the goal. All other projects are reviewed by staff to meet

Equity is not explicitly integrated; however, with a key focus to better align the guidelines not limited to, adopted city policies in environment, access to open space, mobility,

The scope Design Review includes site plan relief (like modulation), location of entrance consideration of materials/colors.

# CASE STUDY CHICAGO

## SNAPSHOT

Population 2,693,976

a density of 11,943 people/sq mile

-0.1%

growth from 2010 to 2019.

Why did we choose this example?

Suggested by stakeholder advisory group

What projects are subject to Design Review?

All public and private projects located along Chicago's commercial corridors.

**area-wide urban guidelines**  
The guidelines provide a framework for how the city's urban design guidelines are applied.

**guidelines for the public streetscape**  
The guidelines provide a framework for how the city's urban design guidelines are applied to the public streetscape, including sidewalks, streetlights, and the layout of the building.

**guidelines for plazas and open space**  
The guidelines provide a framework for how the city's urban design guidelines are applied to the public realm, including sidewalks, streetlights, and the layout of the building.

**guidelines for buildings**  
The guidelines provide a framework for how the city's urban design guidelines are applied to the building form, including height, massing, and the layout of the building.

## DESIGN GUIDELINES

Initially created in 1999, the process and guidelines were grounded through a values and vision process.

"Because the city is a community of people and not of buildings, and because people can come to community through shared values, the Commission sought first to articulate a set of commonly held values"

The current 2008 revision of the original Downtown Design Guidelines expanded the geography to include any areas in the city which, through general agreement, seek to create and shape dense development.

The proposed update includes four main priorities:

1. Having broader applicability throughout Austin's urban core, and therefore, the ability to serve a wider range of users and project types
2. To better align the guidelines with current community goals; including a focus on creating a vibrant, walkable, and equitable urban core.



### WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE? HOW IS EQUITY INTEGRATED?

In 2020, the City of Chicago launched a community led planning process called "We Will Chicago." In the process they devised a design review program and design guidelines based on community input. Initially the Chicago Department of Planning and Development engaged a Design Excellence Working Group to answer the question:

"How do we engender a culture that values design excellence in everyday life?"

From this question, several thematic principles emerged that collectively aspire to achieve design excellence for Chicago residents, businesses, and other local stakeholders. Equity is called out and integrated into these principles including commitments to:

- Equity & Inclusion; Achieving fair treatment, targeted support, and prosperity for all residents
- Innovation; Implementing creative approaches to design and problem solving
- Sense of Place; Celebrating and strengthening the culture of our communities
- Sustainability; Committing to environmental, cultural, and financial longevity
- Communication; Fostering design appreciation and responding to community needs

The scope of the Design Review program is similar to Seattle and includes the building program including uses, unit sizes, etc.



# CASE STUDY SAN FRANCISCO

## SNAPSHOT

Population 874,784

a density of 18,562 people/sq mile

8.5%

growth from 2010 to 2019.

Why did we choose this example?

Comparable in size to Seattle; more density, less growth.

What projects are subject to Design Review?

Required citywide for projects 10 or more units, or over 10,000 sq ft

## DESIGN GUIDELINES

Developed by DPD under Mayor Lightfoot and adopted by Plan Commission in March 2022, the Neighborhood Design Guidelines provide specific recommendations to enhance the planning, review and impact of development along the city's commercial corridors. As a complement to other City design resources and regulations, the guidelines are adaptable to the unique context of individual neighborhoods, corridors, and blocks.

The guidelines are organized across six categories:

- Sustainability



### WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE? HOW IS EQUITY INTEGRATED?

In general, San Francisco's Design Review program is quite similar to Seattle's regarding scope, process, and the content of the design guidelines. The major distinctions are the lack of public meetings, that more smaller scale projects are subject to design review, the larger role played by city design review staff, and that the Planning Commission provides final project approval.

Design review is part of the overall entitlement process. The scope of SF's design review includes massing, scale, articulation, materials, composition of open space, relation of the new building to existing buildings and street pattern, and location of functions especially as they relate to the public realm and aesthetics.

Equity is not explicitly integrated into the design review process or design guidelines. While the guidelines do contain references to "diversity" and "culture", those concepts are left up to interpretation. The guidelines do contain precedent images that reference BIPOC art, cultural events, and architectural forms.

A set of guidelines specific to projects that are in the Affordable Housing Bonus Program help to ensure that affordable housing projects are designed to an equal level of design excellence as typical private development.

## Urban Design Guidelines

- 01 Recognize and Respond to Urban Patterns
- 02 Harmonize Relationships between Buildings, Streets, and Open Spaces
- 03 Recognize and Enhance Unique Conditions
- 04 Create, Protect, and Support View Corridors
- 05 Create a Defined and Active Streetwall
- 06 Organize Mass to Complement the Public Environment
- 07 Integrate Common Open Spaces and Landscapes with Architecture
- 08 Respect and Exhibit Material Systems and Textures

- A1 Express a Clear Organizing Architectural Idea
- A2 Modulate Buildings Vertically and Horizontally
- A3 Harmonize Building Designs with Neighboring Scale and Materials
- A4 Design Buildings from Multiple Texture Points
- A5 Shape the Roofs of Buildings
- A6 Render Building Facades with Texture and Depth
- A7 Coordinate Building Elements
- A8 Design Active Building Fronts
- A9 Employ Sustainable Principles and Practices in Building Design
- F1 Design Public Open Spaces to Connect with and Complement the Streetscape
- F2 Locate and Design Open Spaces to Maximize Physical Comfort and Visual Access
- F3 Express Neighborhood Character in Open Space Design
- F4 Support Public Transportation and Bicycling
- F5 Design Sidewalks to Enhance the Pedestrian Experience
- F6 Program Public Open Spaces to Encourage Social Activity, Play, and Rest
- F7 Integrate Sustainable Practices into the Landscape

## DESIGN GUIDELINES

Urban Design Guidelines are the default guidelines used; Residential Design Guidelines; Ground Floor Residential Design Guidelines are layered on as supplemental depending on the project zone and uses. There are a handful of neighborhood specific design guidelines. A separate set of Affordable Housing Bonus Program Guidelines are provided for projects that are 100% affordable housing, as they receive extra height and FAR and are generally larger than surrounding context.

The content, organization, and style of the three main sets of guidelines are similar to Seattle's, focusing on designing to respect and enhance context, contribute to vibrant and active streetscapes, and create visually rich and textured facade and building design. There is perhaps a bit more deference requested to fitting in to existing historic context, direct rejection of expanses of large cementitious panels, and desire for secondary architectural elements and quality ground-floor residential design.

## DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

Design Review is led by the Urban Design Advisory Team (UDAT), an internal staff team comprised of staff planners with expertise in architecture, landscape architecture, historic preservation, and urban design.

Design review occurs in two phases: Initial Design Review, in which the intent is to identify and respond to basic design issues early on, and the second stage, which occurs before entitlement action and encompasses a more detailed review of the project design. There may be multiple rounds of review and revisions to the project design. Design findings are documented in case reports, which the Planning Commission uses as the basis of review in their final review motions. There is no public meeting exclusively on the proposed design of a project

# CASE STUDY

AUSTIN



WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE?

HOW IS EQUITY INTEGRATED?

## SNAPSHOT

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**What projects are subject to Design Review?**

Projects that opt into the Density Bonus Program



### area-wide urban guidelines

This describes issues which apply generally throughout any area where the urban design guidelines are applied.



### guidelines for the public streetscape

The major focus is on the streetscape environment which affects the pedestrian. This includes all the elements that can make a pedestrian comfortable such as the sidewalk, street trees, street furniture, and the facade of the building.



### guidelines for plazas and open space

These guidelines propose the adoption of a uniform philosophy through shared vision for open spaces and plazas within urban centers. This vision would result in the focus of pedestrian activity pre-eminently over vehicular modal transport in urban settings.

These guidelines adopt the principle that open spaces and plazas are public spaces, and that these natural public amenities encourage human occupancy.



### guidelines for buildings

These guidelines include recommendations for the physical makeup and shape of construction inside the property lines.

B.1 - Build to the Street

B.2 - Provide Multi-Tenant, Pedestrian-Oriented Development at the Street Level

B.3 - Accentuate Primary Entrances

B.4 - Encourage the Inclusion of Local Character

B.5 - Control On-Site Parking

B.6 - Create Quality Construction

B.7 - Create Buildings with Human Scale

## DESIGN GUIDELINES

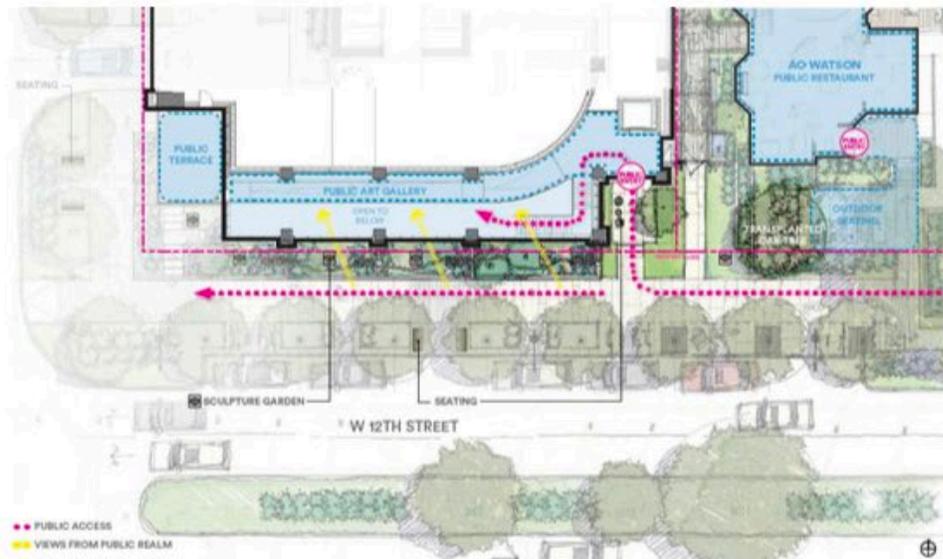
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The current 2008 revision of the original Downtown Design Guidelines expanded the geography to include any areas in the city which, through general agreement, seek to create and shape dense development.

The proposed update includes four main priorities:

1. Having broader applicability throughout Austin’s urban core, and therefore, the ability to serve a wider range of users and project types
2. To better align the guidelines with current community goals; including, but not limited to, adopted city policies related to affordability, connectivity, equity, environment, access to open space, mobility, sustainability, and resilience.
3. More clarity by creating a more inviting and user-friendly document that all Austinites can seek insight from
4. The guidelines must evolve to become a predictable resource for everyone. To achieve this, an easy-to-use document is needed with a simple graphic format (including illustrations and photos) to visually communicate the desired (and undesired) outcomes.



## DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

Most reviews are staff only and there is no public meeting.

There is a notice of application only, no public comment period or public meetings. Rarely projects go to a Land Use Commission, which does include comment and appeal period. When there is opportunity for public comment, the comments are rarely "entertained" due to politics.

An "Equivalent path" allows applicant to propose an equivalent to the code required standard. Small adjustments are possible (ex. lighting, different amenity like a bench in the common area, etc.)

# CASE STUDY

## CHICAGO

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The guidelines are organized across six categories:

- Sustainability  
Features that have long-term environmental, sociocultural, and human health impacts.
- Program  
Targeted uses that complement a property's surrounding context.
- Site Design  
Building orientation, layout, open space, parking, and services.
- Public Realm  
Improvements within and near the public right-of-way adjacent to the site.
- Massing  
Bulk, height, and form of a building.
- Façade  
Architectural expression of a building's exterior, including entrances and windows.

The guidelines are intended to be used for all public and private projects located along Chicago's commercial corridors. Projects that require the City's review and oversight should substantially correspond to their parameters, especially Planned Developments, Lakefront Protection Ordinance projects, and projects that receive City grants, funding, or other incentives.



*Harper Court  
Hartshorne Plunkard*  
A mix of commercial, hotel, and office uses brought needed neighborhood amenities as well as customers.



*Vue 53  
Valerio Dewalt Train*  
Active ground floor, easy resident access to upper floors, and hidden parking make complementary uses work.



*Independence Library and Apartments  
John Ronan Architects*  
Retail isn't the only way to create active uses - this library fronts the street with affordable housing above.



## DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

After initial zoning and planning and design review, qualifying projects are presented to the COD (no fee for COD review). DPD staff writes up the COD recommendations. Applicant follows them or justifies why they are unable to follow them, and proceeds to Chicago Plan Commission hearing. Applicant can disagree with recommendations, then staff will review further or make a negative recommendation to Plan Commission. Or applicant can withdraw their proposal. It seems applicants can choose a staff review process instead (like ADR) which may require multiple review cycles prior to Plan Commission.

# CASE STUDY

SAN FRANCISCO

WHAT DOES DESIGN  
REVIEW LOOK LIKE?

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## SNAPSHOT

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  - S6 Organize Uses to Complement the Public Environment
  - S7 Integrate Common Open Space and Landscape with Architecture
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- P1 Design Public Open Spaces to Connect with and Complement the Streetscape
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A photograph of the Space Needle in Seattle, Washington, taken during a vibrant sunset. The tower is silhouetted against a sky filled with orange, yellow, and purple clouds. The city of Seattle is visible in the foreground, with houses and trees. The text "Next Steps" is overlaid on the right side of the image in a white, sans-serif font.

# Next Steps