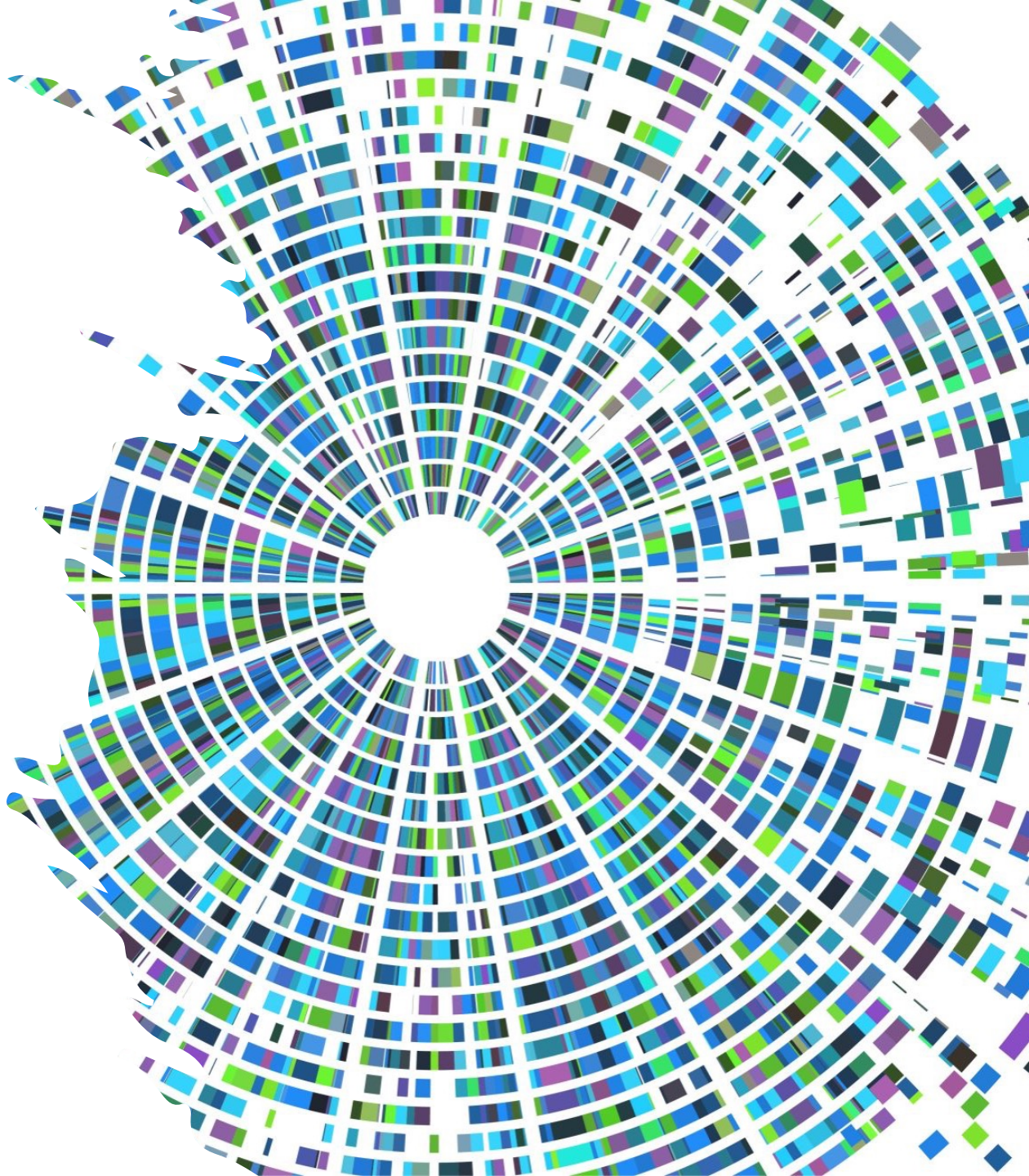
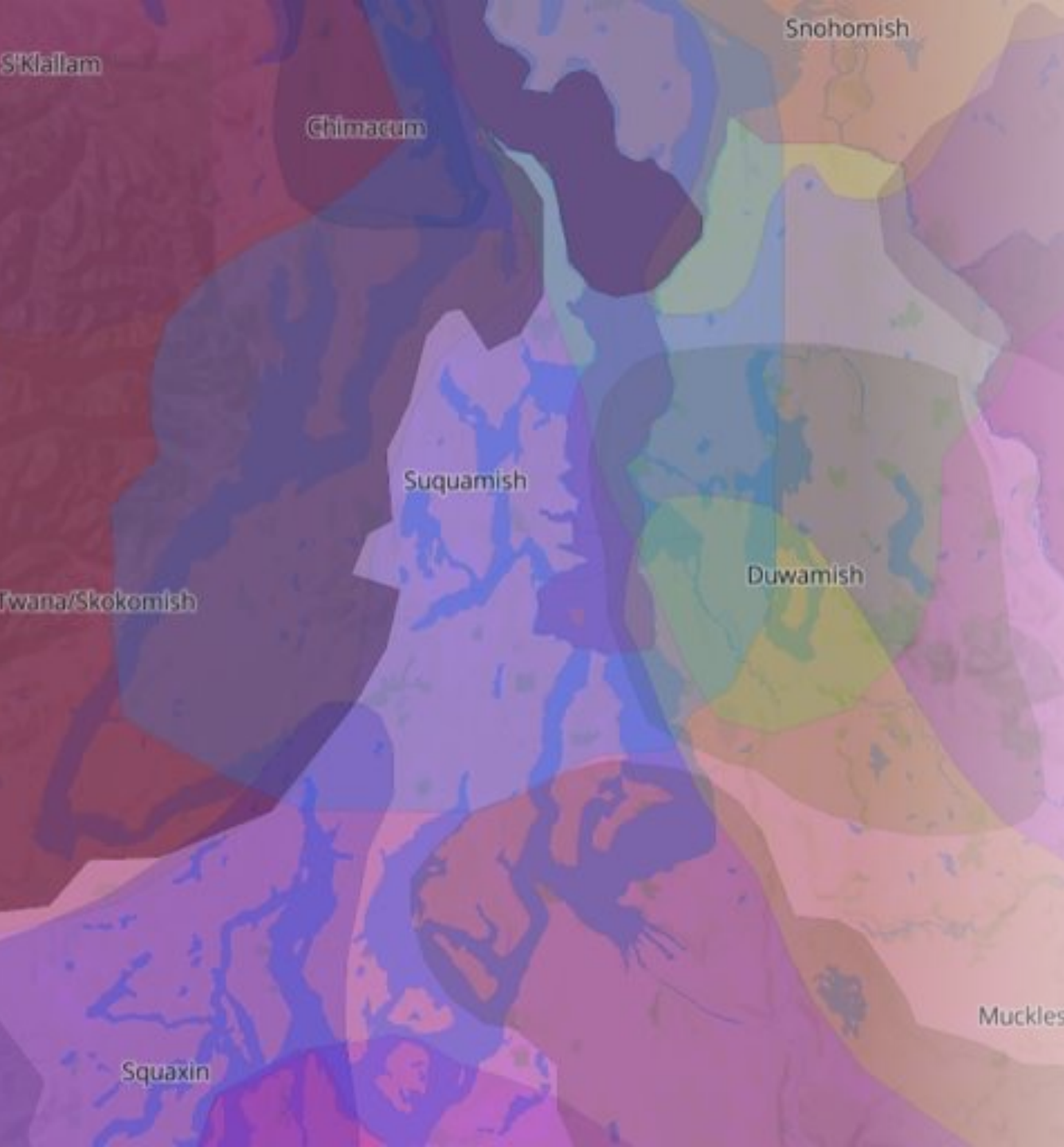
Design Review SLI Stakeholder Committee

18 January 2023



Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections

BROADVIEW PLANNING



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.

Agenda

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

9:00	**Welcome** - Land Acknowledgement - Meeting Logistics
9:15	**Recap of Work to Date** - SDCI: Recap of RET Work
9:25	**Permit Data Analysis** - SDCI Data + Report - Discussion
9:55	**Design Review in Other Cities** - Recap
10:10	**Results of Focused Conversations** - Findings + Themes - Discussion
10:50	**Next Steps** - SLI response + Stakeholder Committee
11:00	**Adjourn**

Discussion Agreements

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

PROCESS RECAP

SLI Questions:

Does the Design Review Program create barriers to BIPOC participation, and does it reinforce racial exclusion?

What are average Design Review times since the program was modified in 2017, by design review type and project complexity?

What are design review departures (number and percentage of projects seeking departures, by design review type, project type, specific departures, and whether they were granted)?

Does design review increases housing costs?

How does Seattle's Design Review Program compare to other cities that require design review with significant public participation?

PERMIT DATA ANALYSIS

Permit Timelines Summary

- Goal – why we are looking at permit timelines?
- Methodology
- What impacts permit timelines?
- Findings
- Big takeaways

Permit Timelines – Goals

- Why are we looking at permit timelines?
  - Better understand overall permit timelines and how different permit types compare
  - Better understand time added by Design Review
  - Better understand time spent with SDCI vs. with the Applicant

Permit Timelines – Methodology

- What data we looked at?
  - TIME FRAME: Permits between July 2018-2022 (corresponding to when the current Design Review policy went into effect in 2018)
  - Linked EDG records to MUP records (FDR/ADR) or CN records (SDR) for full view of Design Review process
  - TYPES:
    - All 3 different Design Review types: SDR, ADR, FDR
    - Non-Design Review MUPs

Design Review Types	Number of Permits
Streamlined Design Review	158
Administrative Design Review	74
Full Design Review	62
Other MUPs	245
Total	539

Permit Timelines – Impacts to timelines?

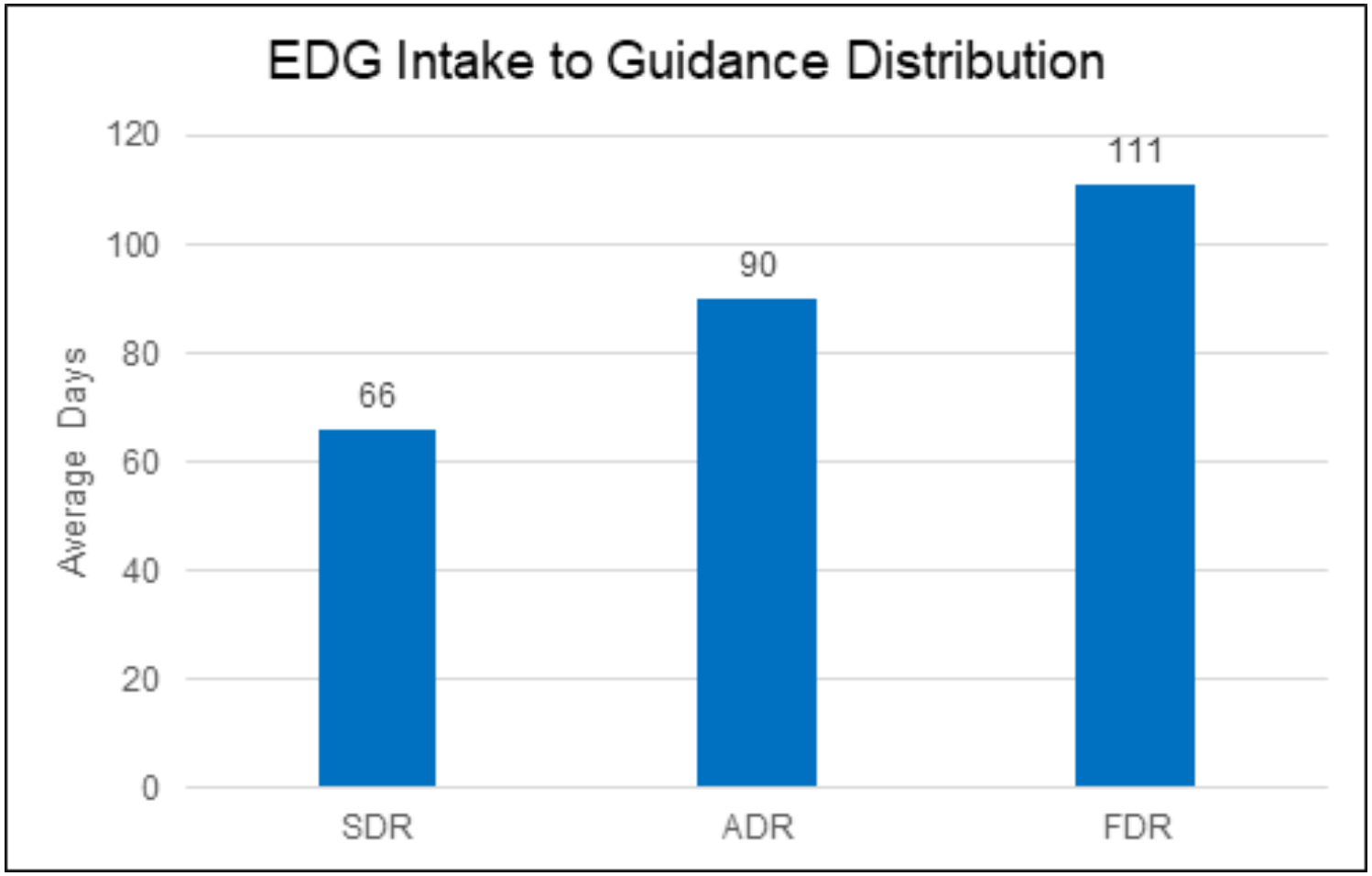
Project complexity impacts:

- The number of reviews on a permit (Ex. land use, zoning, mandatory housing affordability, incentive zoning, city light, public utilities, sustainability, housing, ECA, geotechnical, shoreline, tree, transportation, and historic reviews)
- Coordination with other departments and/or agencies
- Code requirements
- Appeals

Permit Timelines – Findings

SECTION 1: EDG PHASE

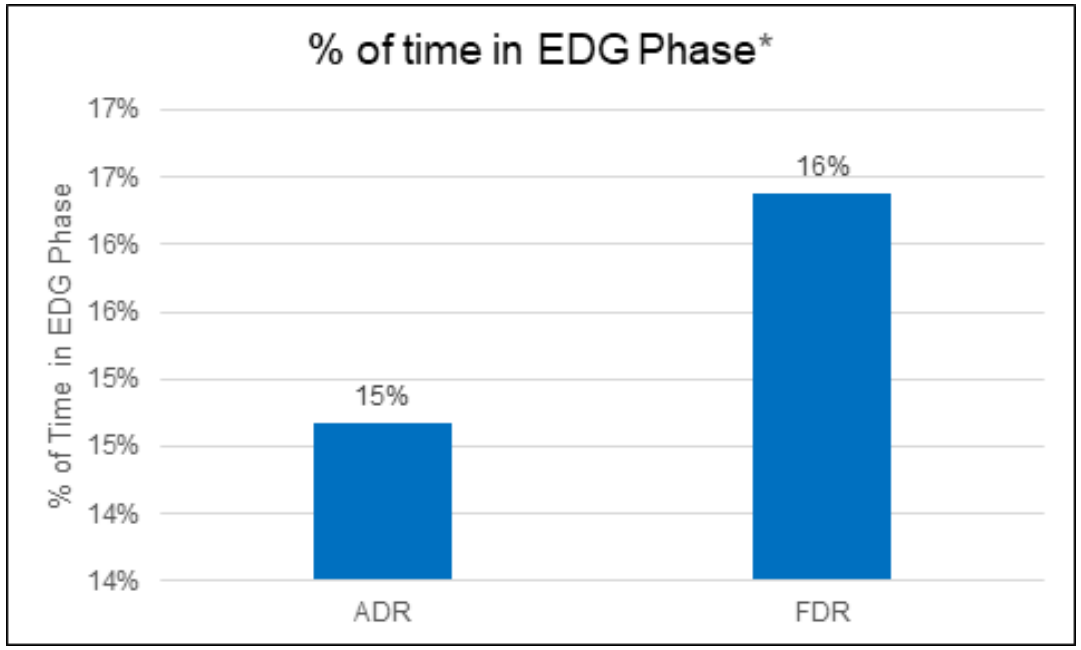
- Overall calendar time from Early Design Guidance Intake to Guidance Report Distributed

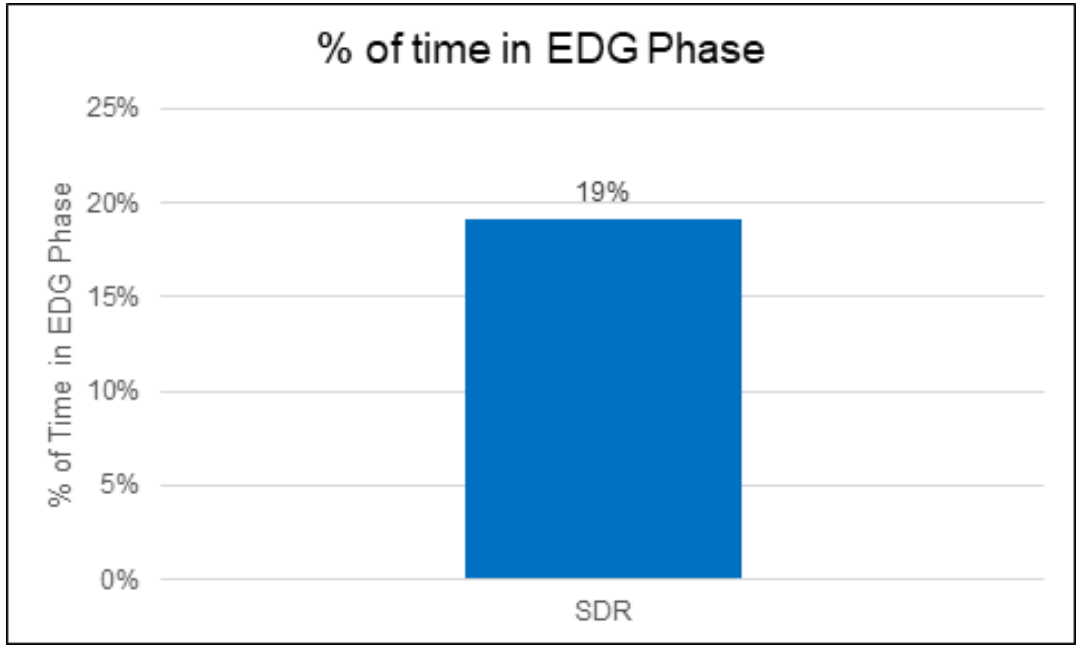


Permit Timelines – Findings

SECTION 1: EDG PHASE

- How much time EDG requires of the overall calendar time

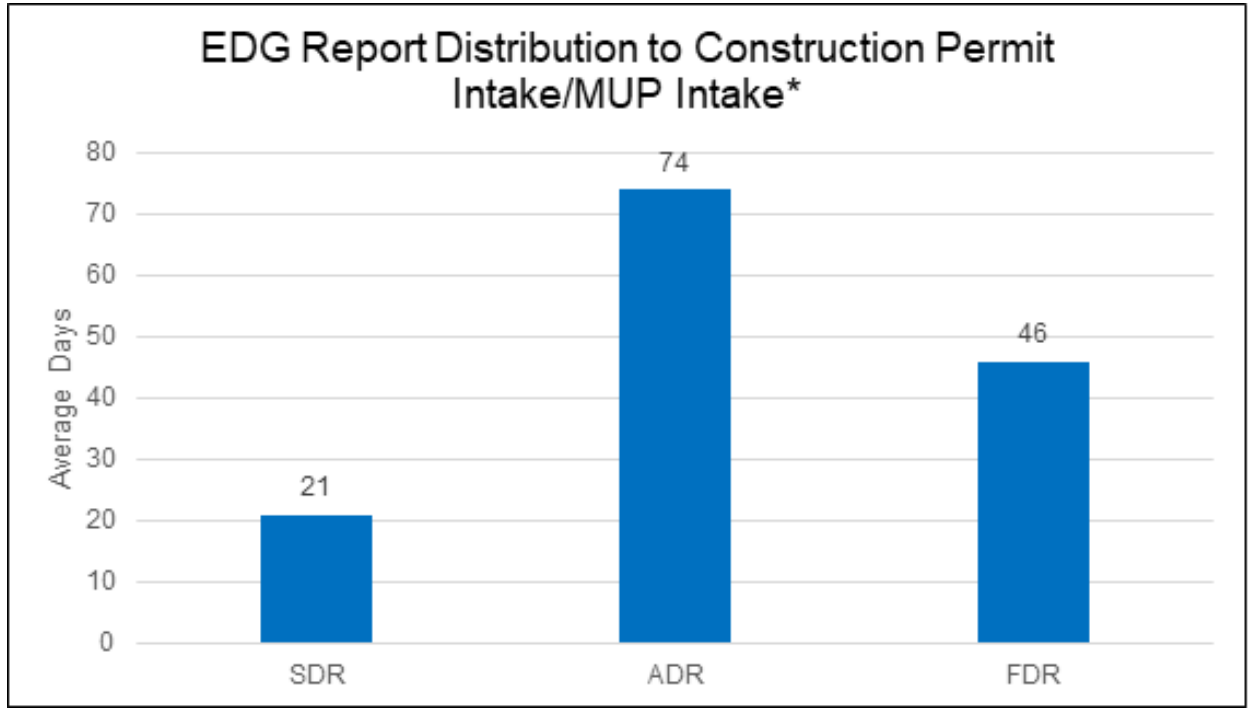




Permit Timelines – Findings

SECTION 1: EDG PHASE

- Time between EDG complete to Building Permit / MUP Intake



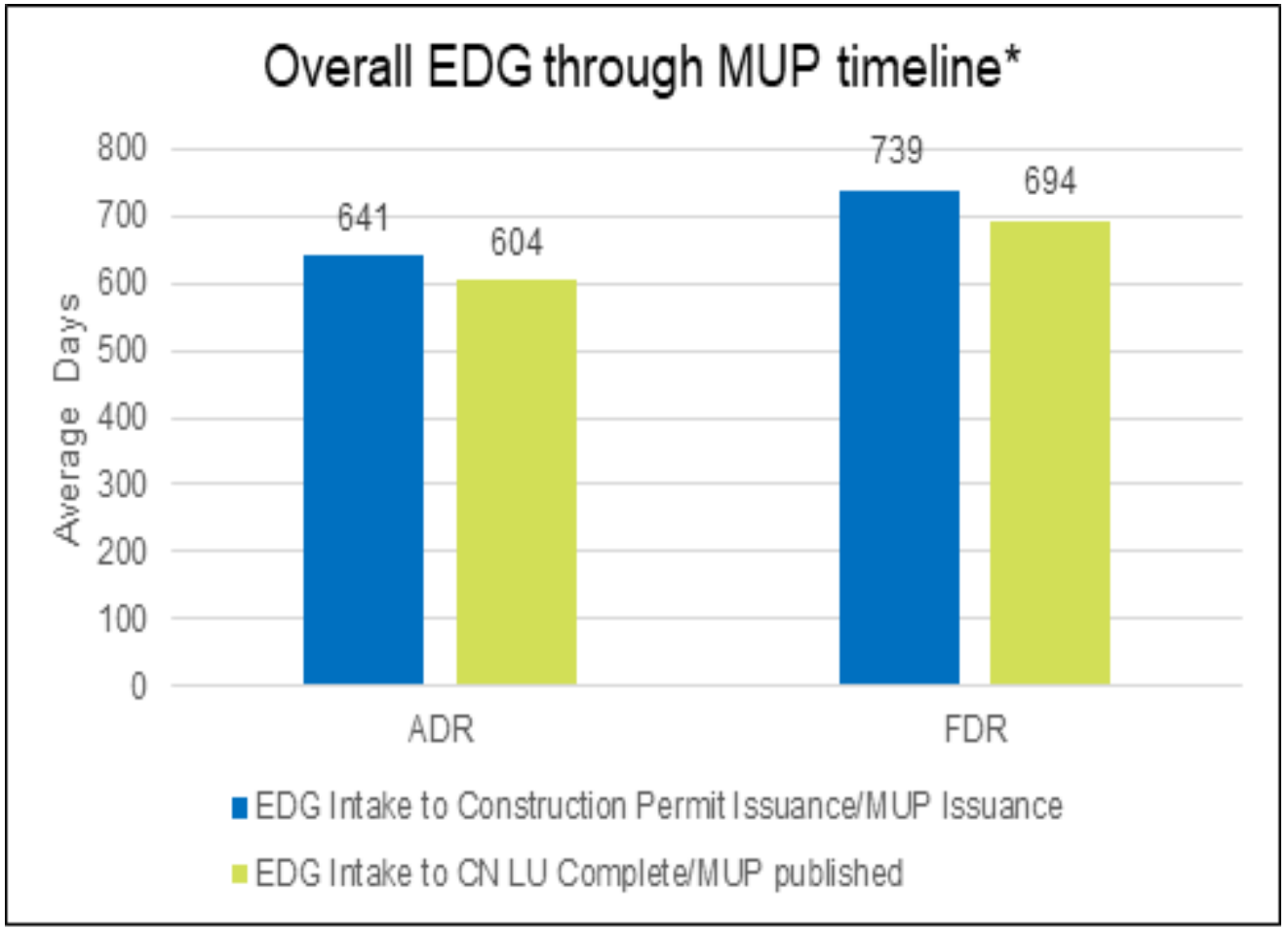
* SDR process moves from EDG to Construction Permit.
ADR and FDR processes move from EDG to MUP.

Permit Timelines – Findings

SECTION 2: EDG through MUP (ADR and FDR) or Construction Permit (SDR)

MUP Reviewers:

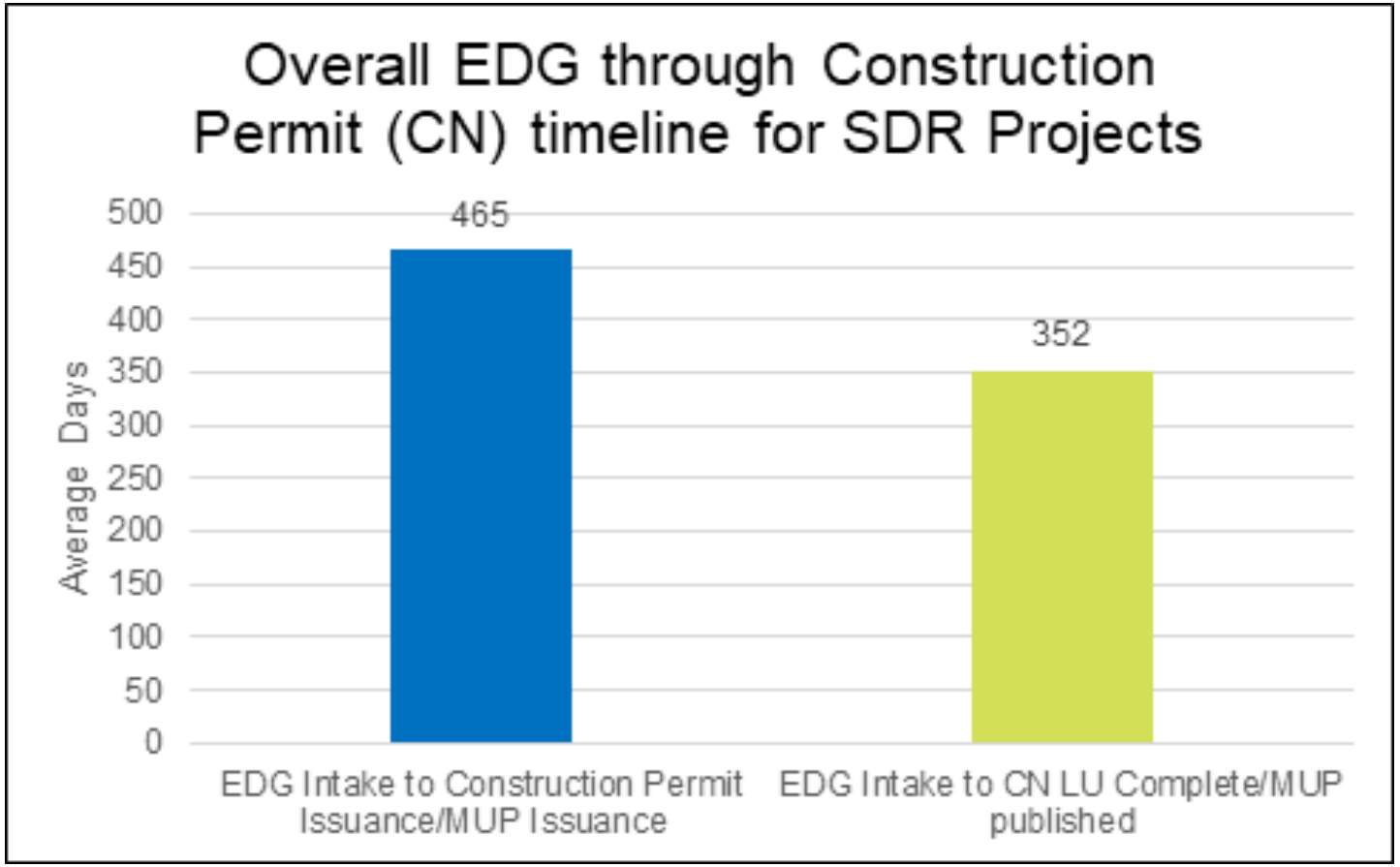
- Land Use (design review, environmental review, and others)
- Zoning
- Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA)
- Incentive Zoning
- Seattle City Light
- Seattle Public Utilities
- Sustainability
- Housing
- Environmentally Critical Areas (ECA)
- Geotechnical
- Shoreline
- Trees
- Transportation
- Historic Preservation



* Once the MUP decision is published there is a 14-day appeal period with possibility of appeal. SDCI conducts final reviews prior to MUP issuance if there are no appeals. The Applicant is required to pay any outstanding fees prior to MUP issuance.

Permit Timelines – Findings

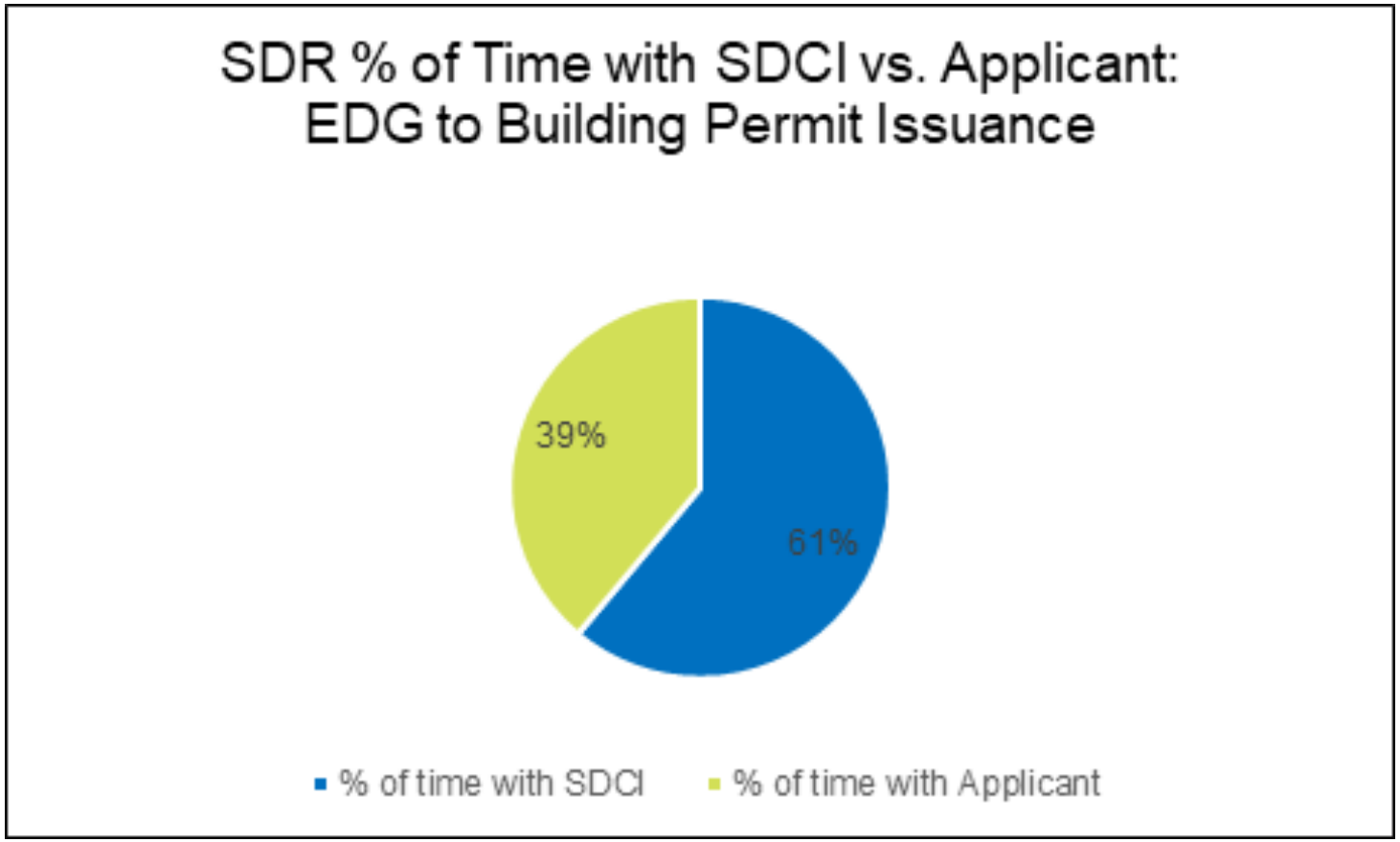
SECTION 2: EDG through MUP (ADR and FDR) or Construction Permit (SDR)



Permit Timelines – Findings

SECTION 3: Percent permits are with SDCI vs. with the Applicant

- SDR % of Time with SDCI vs. Applicant



Permit Timelines – Findings

SECTION 3: Percent permits are with SDCI vs. with the Applicant

Time when permits are "with SDCI" include:

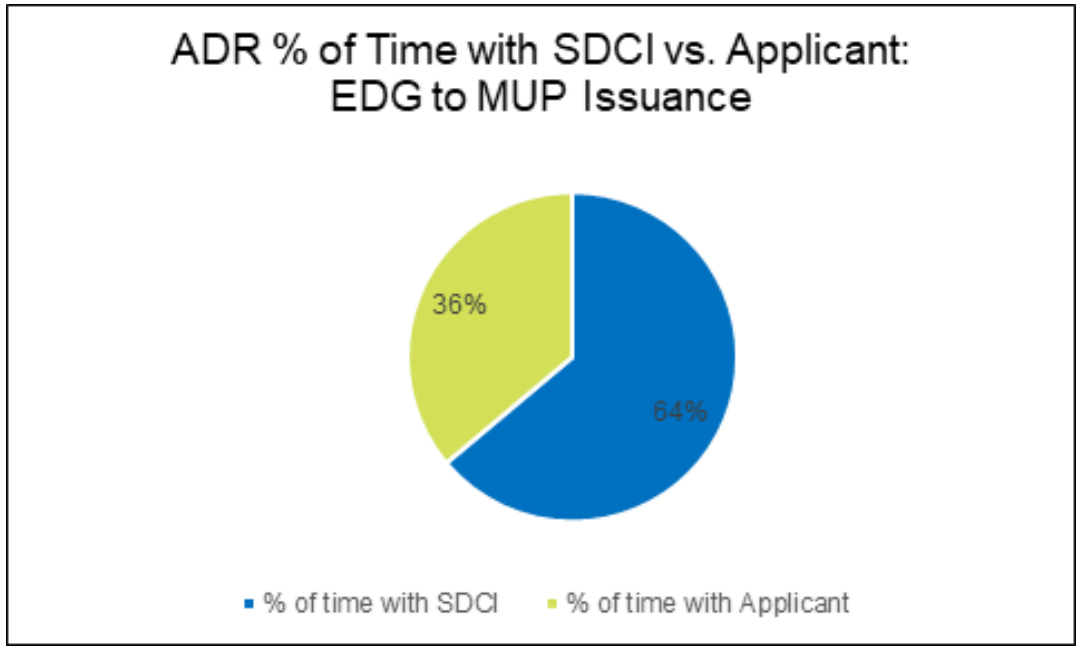
- Preparing public notice
- Assigning reviews
- Conducting reviews
- Writing design review reports or decisions
- Processing permits for issuance

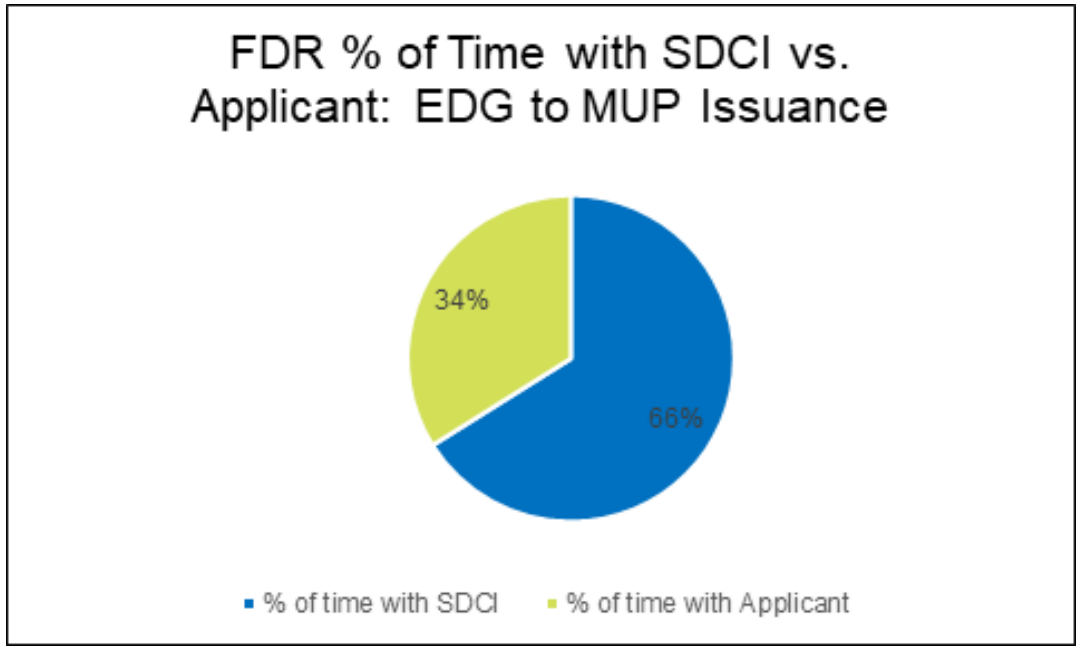
Time when permits are "with the Applicant" include time spent waiting for:

- Scheduling a permit intake appointment
- Submitting required materials for permit intake
- Paying fee
- Install and confirm a public notice sign on site
- Submitting responses to corrections

Not within SDCI or Applicant control:

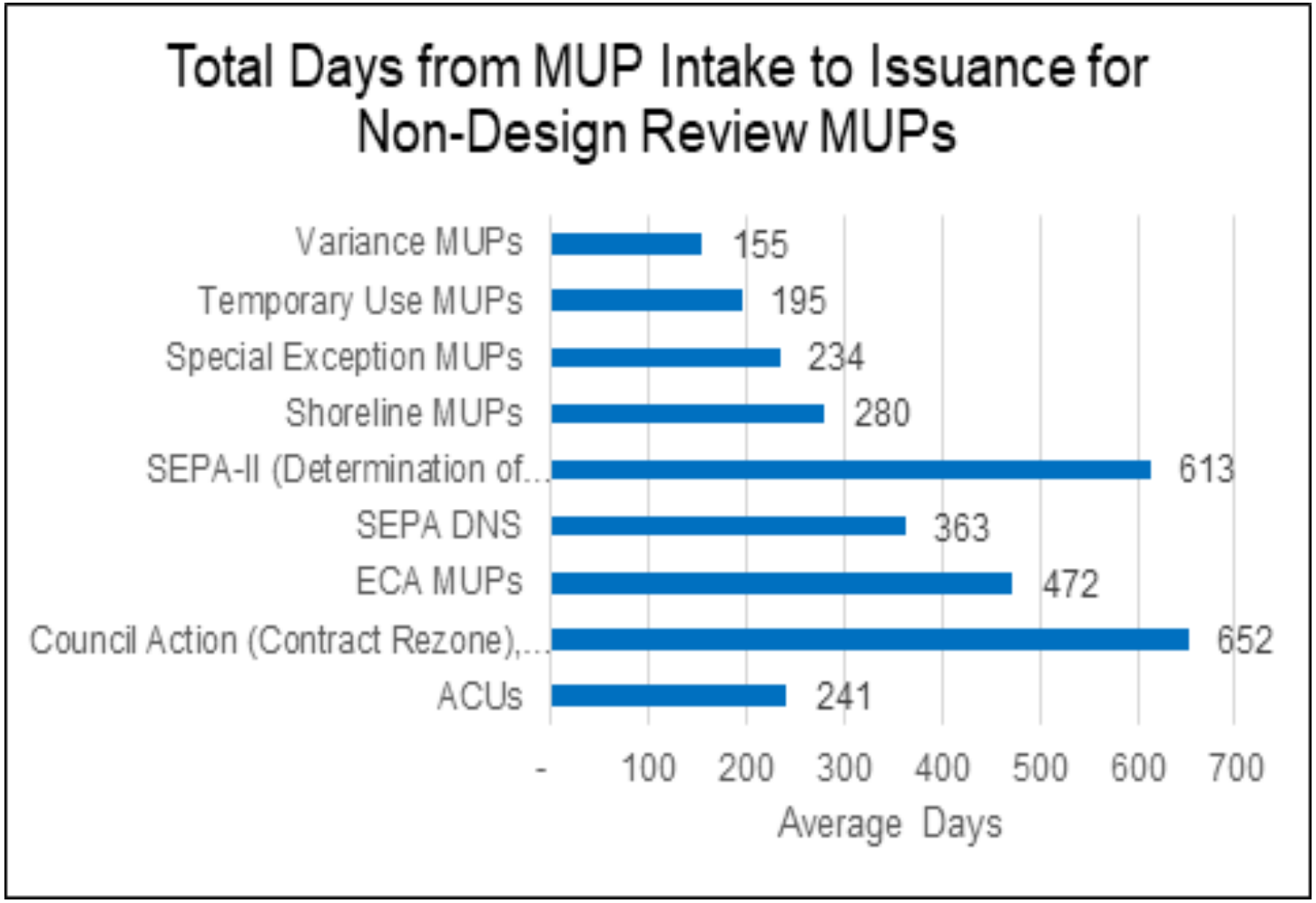
- Appeals
- Code required public notices





Permit Timelines – Findings

SECTION 4: Non-Design Review Permit Timelines



Permit Timelines – Findings

SECTION 4: Non-Design Review Permit Timelines

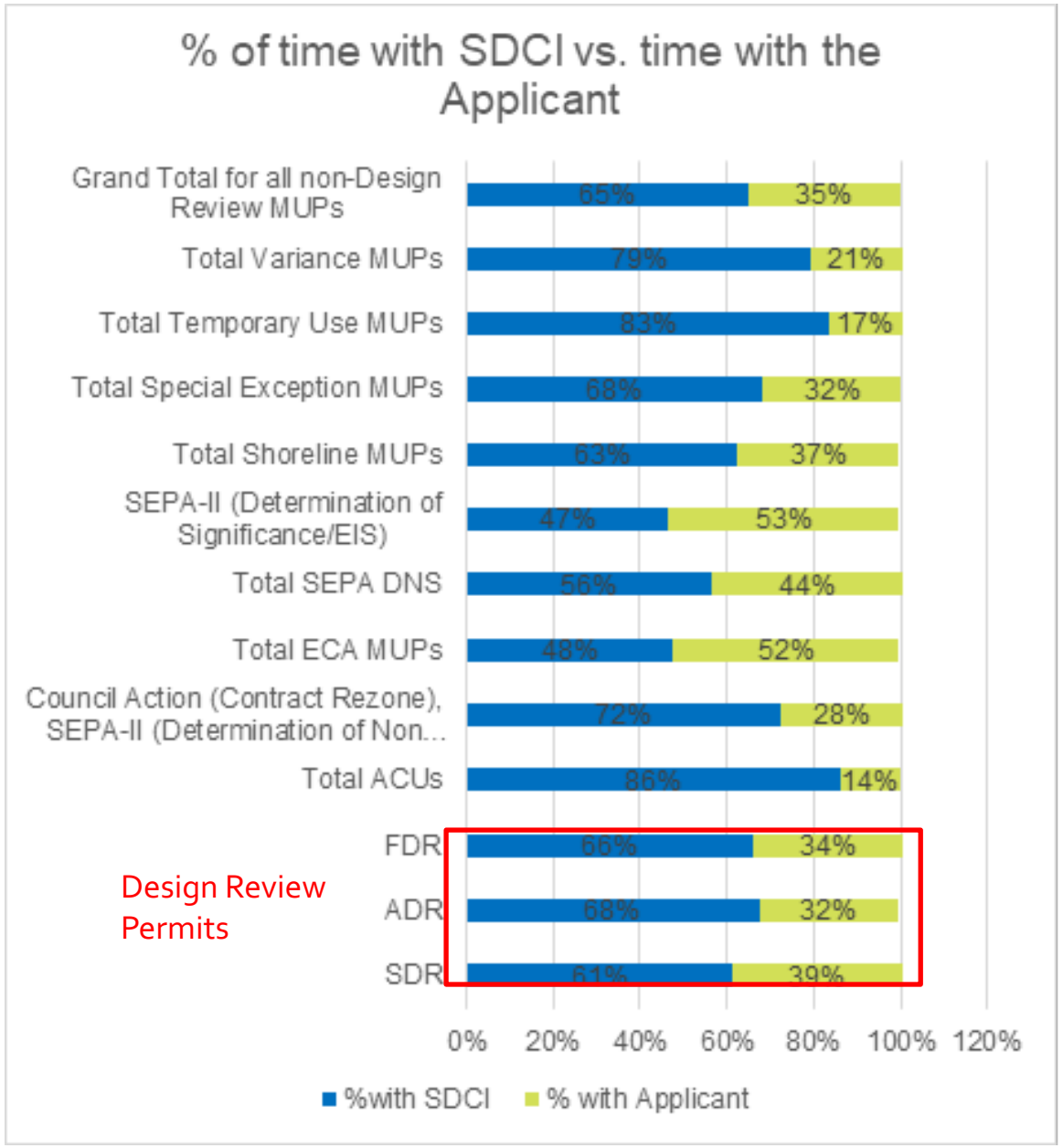
The range for the percent of time with SDCI and Applicants for non-Design Review Permits was comparable to the Design Review permit ranges:

Non-Design Review permits

- 47%-79% with SDCI
- 17%-53% with Applicants

Design Review permits

- 51%-81% with SDCI
- 19%-49% with the Applicants for



Big Takeaways

- **Permit timelines overall** reflect project complexity. These project require more reviewers, greater coordination, and more time with both SDCI and with the Applicant

- **Permit time with SDCI vs. with the Applicant** were very similar for both DR and non-DR projects

- **Percent of overall permit time for EDG Phase was higher for SDR**, but also has a different permit process than ADR or FDR

- Overall, the data showed that **SDR and ADR had shorter review times compared to FDR times.** In addition to the Design Review Board public meetings which may add time to FDR projects, there are other possible reasons for this difference in time:
  - SDR and ADR projects are smaller in size and usually less complex
  - FDR projects are larger in size and tend to be more complex with additional coordination between different departments and agencies and more complex code requirements, appealed more frequently

DESIGN REVIEW IN OTHER CITIES

Design Review in Other Cities

Why do cities have design review?

- Design impacts our daily life be it parks, roadways, or the buildings we move through and around
- Design has the potential to enhance our experience of the built environment

Who creates design review?

- Design professionals, city staff, and the public serve as stakeholders in creating a shared vision for their cities

What does Design Review provide?

- Design review then provides the mechanism by which cities then cast this vision forward by setting standards and guidelines

Design Review in Other Cities

THIS REPORT COMPARES:

1) Required vs. optional Design Review
2) Inclusion of Early Design Guidance phase
3) Inclusion of Public Comment / Public meetings
4) Design Guideline scope
5) Inclusion of equity design guidelines

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? HOW IS E

Austin's Design Review program is currently more limite
Program, where projects which met the guidelines we
All other projects are reviewed by staff to meet Type 1

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

The scope Design Review includes site plan and the buil
relief (like modulation), location of entries, pedestri
consideration of materials/colors.

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;

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.

WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE? HOW IS EQUITY INTERGRATED?

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
BELLEVUE

[No Title]

SNAPSHOT

Population 149,440

a density of 4,335 people/sq mile

14.7%

growth from 2011 to 2021.

Why did we choose this example?

Similar regulatory environment (Washington); geographically proximate urban center.

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

WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE?

HOW IS EQUITY

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 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

WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE? HOW IS EQUITY INTERGRATED?

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

- D1 Recognize and Respond to Urban Patterns
- D2 Harmonize Relationships between Buildings, Streets, and Open Spaces
- D3 Recognize and Enhance Unique Conditions
- D4 Create, Protect, and Support View Corridors
- D5 Create a Defined and Active Streetwall
- D6 Organize Uses to Complement the Public Environment
- D7 Integrate Common Open Space and Landscape with Architecture
- D8 Respect and Exhibit Natural Systems and Features

- 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 Vantage 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

- P1 Design Public Open Spaces to Connect with and Complement the Streetscape
- P2 Locate and Design Open Spaces to Maximize Physical Comfort and Visual Access
- P3 Express Neighborhood Character in Open Space Designs
- P4 Support Public Transportation and Bicycling
- P5 Design Sidewalks to Enhance the Pedestrian Experience
- P6 Program Public Open Spaces to Encourage Social Activity, Play, and Rest
- P7 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 façade 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

PORTLAND

DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

Population 660,398

a density of 4,994 people/sq mile

11.5%

growth from 2010 to 2019.

Why did we choose this example?

Comparable to Seattle size/growth

WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE?

HOW IS EQUITY INTEGRATED?

CASE STUDY

DENVER

SNAPSHOT

Population 727,211
a density of 4,532 people/sq mile

21.2%
growth from 2010 to 2019.

Why did we choose this example?
Comparable to Seattle size/growth

What projects are subject to Design Review?
New Construction as required by the applicable Small Area Plan

WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE?

HOW IS EQUITY INTEGRATED?

CASE STUDY

BOSTON

SNAPSHOT

Population 692,600
a density of 14,073 people/sq mile

12.1%
growth from 2010 to 2019.

Why did we choose this example?
Comparable to Seattle size/growth

What projects are subject to Design Review?
Projects with 15 units or more and/or 20,000 sf or more

WHAT DOES DESIGN REVIEW LOOK LIKE?

HOW IS EQUITY INTEGRATED?

CITY	Required	Early Design Guidance Phase	Equity Design Guidelines	Public Meeting	Review Component: Site Plan	Review Component: Materials	Review Component: Program	Departure/ Code Deviations
Austin								
Bellevue	R							
Boston	R							
Chicago	R							
Denver	R							
Portland	R							
San Francisco	R							

FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS

Process Methodology

- Focused conversations with internal + external stakeholders
  - Internal (staff): Four groups, 17 participants
  - External (committee members): Five groups, 17 participants
- 90 minutes with two types of questions:
  - Three standard poll question
  - Standard script, with some variation based on the direction of the conversation

Organizing Results

- **Primary Focus:** identifying barriers to implementing a RET process.

- Created a tool to track insights + recommendations across all inputs:
  - All interviews + Paradigm Shift findings
  - Focused conversations
  - SDCI's Departures Analysis + Permit Times report
  - Community Attributes Report on Housing Costs
  - Previous RET analysis on virtual meetings

- Recommendations Organized:
  - Barriers to a RET Process
  - Transparency + access to power
  - Design guidelines
  - Land use + other codes
  - Program design + review processes
  - Design review boards
  - Outreach/engagement

In 1-2 words, what's the purpose of Seattle's Design Review Program?

External

Internal

What words would you use to describe your vision of a design review program that achieves both racial equity and design excellence?

External

Internal

What does racial equity mean in the context of design review?

- Valuing each of the neighborhoods we serve
- It is hard to form an answer. it is not a visible aspect of the process now.
- All projects are subject to similar standards for material quality, neighborhood responsiveness, and contribution to community. Neighbors and community leaders have agency in design. Extra weight is given to the voices of traditionally underserved peoples
- An aspiration, difficult to address, I wish it meant more.
- A process that provides equal opportunity for participation from the single-family owner to commercial developer. Needs to be less complex and allow for all to participate following the process involved.
- There are two equally important elements of racial equity, the first being inclusion and access to power, and the second being delivering tangible, material outcomes that change conditions with racial equity in mind. Design review currently provides the first and does not do anything with the second.
- City voice doesn't carry more weight.
- Community voices are heard and BIPOC voices are elevated.

Key Themes: Internal Stakeholders

- Staff are bright, engaged, and deeply committed to the program, but almost universally recognize that process improvements need to be made, and have lots of ideas for improving the program.
- Design Review has to absorb/have accountability for all the non-design related comments that come in through various channels.
  - This has changed over time and worsened in the past 5 or so years.
- Keep review as simple as possible – nobody likes having too many cooks in the kitchen, and too many layers of review have been added over the years.
- Very challenging to focus on racial equity over process improvements when equity isn't truly and meaningfully part of the design review process.

Key Themes: Internal Stakeholders

- There’s a lack of understanding about the intent of design review program, and education is needed across the board from the public to elected officials.
- Attending a design review board meeting does not constitute meaningful public engagement.
  - There should be more engagement accountability for the City as well as developers.
  - Outreach should happen early and at multiple points during the process.
- There's a structural disconnect between SDCI + DON. If true engagement and accountability to the public are priorities, the responsibility for managing EDG outreach shouldn't be with DON.
- Restructure Design Review Board meetings to make them more productive and meaningful.

Key Themes: External Stakeholders

- Seattle is better off with design review than it would be without it.
  - Near consensus that design review is a force for good; only one person said they wanted to eliminate design review entirely; everyone else says process is broken and they are hoping to be meaningfully engaged to help fix it.
- Community engagement at Board meetings can usually be boiled down to views and parking.
  - People show up and are told that this isn't the appropriate venue for their concerns to be addressed; they leave frustrated and become soured to all City engagement processes.
- Some feel a general sense that design review affects housing affordability but limited data to substantiate this.
  - If true, how could we ensure cost savings get passed on to people who live there?
- Amount of paperwork and documentation required for correction cycles is costly and cumbersome.

Key Themes: External Stakeholders

- The design review program seems insufficiently staffed.
  - In a city that is growing as quickly as Seattle, design review needs more staff and resources.
  - Staff and board members need more training and education so that decisions are consistent, timelines are predictable, nothing feels arbitrary.
- Many people noted how many missed opportunities there are.
  - Rather than adversarial, there are missed opportunities for collaboration between City staff and developers to make the city more vibrant and welcoming.
  - Rather than tick-the-box engagement, there are missed opportunities to build community capacity so community members can meaningfully engage in the development of their neighborhoods.

Findings from Paradigm Shift

Two anchor requirements of the Racial Equity Toolkit.

We should be:

1. Prioritizing transformational change (decision-making process) over merely relying on transactional change (products of decisions).
2. Analyzing how White supremacy culture contributes to these racial inequities and identifying what cultural changes need to be made.

"Specifically, our recommendations seek to combat a sense of urgency. A sense of urgency drives us to focus on timelines and getting it done over investing in relationships and change that can transform systems and outcomes. It also leads us to not look at the whole picture of contributing factors to success or failure."

Findings: Barriers to Completing a RET

- Relationships are broken and there's a severe lack of trust. Without rebuilding trust, there's no path for transformational change.
- There's no clear Design Review "program" and without a distinct program with a vision, goals, and objectives there's no way to measure progress.
  - This includes process improvements and racial equity
- Miscommunication and misunderstandings about the Stakeholder Committee process and how input would be used.
  - By beginning the process with outcomes already created, there was a missed opportunity to build a meaningful, collaborative process.
  - Many people felt their time was not respected, and their professional reputation was on the line.
  - Aggressive and unrealistic timeline did more to harm relationships than advance the conversation on equity + process improvements.
- There's no indication that the City, at its highest levels, is interested in, or committed to, transformational change.
  - This includes the City acknowledging the need for process improvements and committing to embedding equity into Design Review.

Findings: Outreach + Engagement

- City needs a process to improve community engagement and take the pressure off Design Review meetings as the only place where the city routinely engages with community and bears the brunt
- ***Question: Currently, meetings aren't seen as equitable or of value to BIPOC communities, but neither is the absence of meetings. What changes should be made?***
    - *Example: Pilot program where City invests in CDAs in every neighborhood so they can do the hyperlocal and equitable engagement, including childcare, translation/interpretation, food; makes City and developers accountable to community.*

Findings: Process Improvements

- Broad acknowledgement that there are options for process improvements that can increase predictability and improve review timelines.
- ***Question: What process change do you think would most meaningfully improve design review? Who would benefit and who would be burdened?***
    - *Example: Design review becomes an entirely administrative review process. Benefits? Burdens?*

Next Steps

- Initial response to Council Committee 1/25
- Staff presentation 1/25
- Draft recommendations early February
  - How does this group want to review recommendations?

Adjourn