



# DESIGN COMMISSION REVIEW HANDBOOK

## Introduction and Contents

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

### 1. Application

The application is the minimum information the Commission needs to begin the review of a project. Submit all of this information electronically either prior to or at your initial meeting with Commission staff.

### 2. Project Phases

This explains what the Commission evaluates and makes recommendations on at each phase of design.

### 3. Presentation Guidelines

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

## Staff Contacts

**Michael Jenkins, Director**

(206) 386-4024

[michael.jenkins@seattle.gov](mailto:michael.jenkins@seattle.gov)

**Valerie Kinast, Coordinator**

(206) 233-7911

[valerie.kinast@seattle.gov](mailto:valerie.kinast@seattle.gov)

**Aaron Hursey, Planner**

(206) 386-9132

[aaron.hursey@seattle.gov](mailto:aaron.hursey@seattle.gov)

**Juliet Acevedo, Administrative Staff**

(206) 684-0435

[juliet.acevedo@seattle.gov](mailto:juliet.acevedo@seattle.gov)

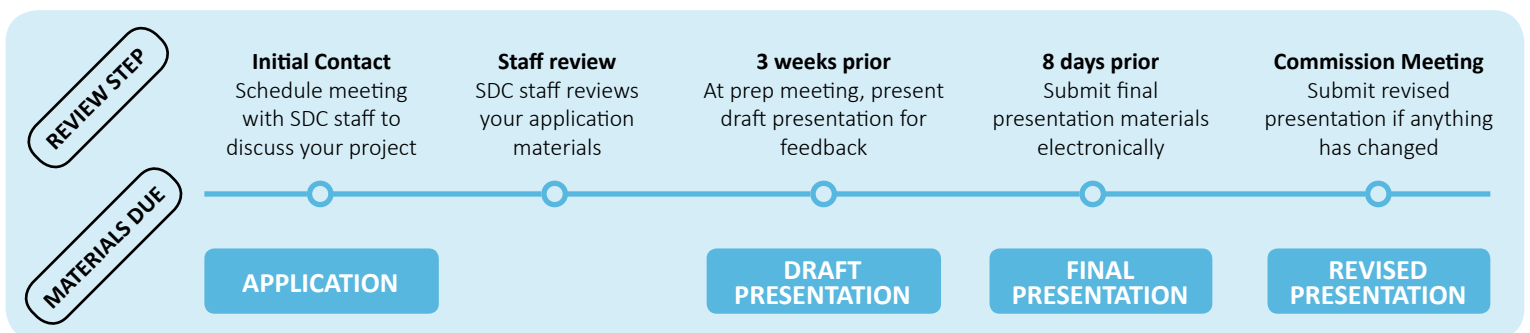
## Commission Meeting Timeline

If your project initiate a Design Commission review, email or call Commission staff to set up an appointment to discuss. If your project is subject to Design Commission review, first contact Commission staff to set up an initial appointment to discuss your project. City-funded projects are sometimes not subject to Design Commission review. Staff can help you determine if your project is subject to Commission review. Depending on the scope and status of the project and the Commission schedule, the **first review** will occur about two or three months after submission of an application.

Three weeks prior to every Commission review of your project, we 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 the Commission meeting. These slides will be distributed to Commissioners as preview materials and posted with a DRAFT watermark to the public [Design Commission website](#). While the Commission understands 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 Commission review:



# 1. APPLICATION

Submission of the following items will initiate a Commission review. Some materials on this list may be altered or revised following consultation with Commission staff. Submit these items electronically to [SDC\\_Administration@seattle.gov](mailto:SDC_Administration@seattle.gov) prior to or at the time of your initial meeting with Commission staff.

## All Projects

- Project address and location
- DPD project number
- Project description including anticipated uses
- Vicinity map
- Site photos
- Site plan with two-foot contours and dimensions
- 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 in pipeline
  - Overlap with planning efforts (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
- Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) strategy overview
- Concept drawings, if available

## Street and Alley Vacations

- Copy of a valid vacation petition from SDOT; if submitted
- Square footage and dimensions of proposed vacation
- Analysis of development potential gained as a result of the vacation
- Utility plans
- Copy of any Early Design Guidance materials, if available

## Skybridges

- Recommendation from the Skybridge Review Committee
- Interior building plans showing skybridge access points
- 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. Applicants should discuss scheduling of the first review at the initial meeting with Commission staff.

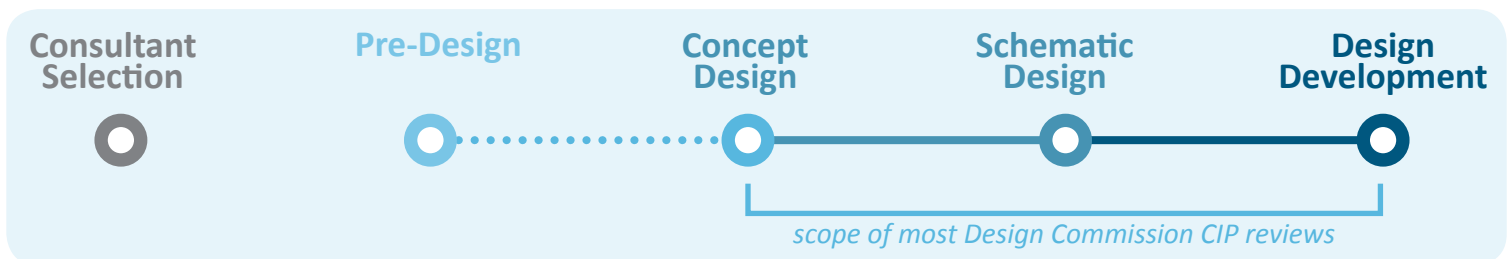
The phases described below explain what the Commission evaluates at each phase of review for each project type. Applicants should tailor their presentation materials to align with the information about each phase. Refer to the Presentation Guidelines section at the end of this handbook for additional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

### CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CIP) PROJECTS

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.*

To implement this authority, the Commission reviews projects through the following distinct phases:



After the consultant selection phase, the Design Commission reviews most CIP projects three times: during the concept design, schematic design, and design development phases. If the project is complex in size or its mission, the commission may also review it at pre-design. 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. Project managers should count on at least three reviews.

For questions about how engineering, infrastructure, or transportation projects align with this phase schedule, contact Commission staff.

In addition to the items specified below for each phase, every presentation should include the following materials 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

## 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 the applicant:

- Include preliminary design goals and objectives in the project scope
- Include sufficient design budgets and realistic schedules
- Invite submissions from a broad range of firms, including newly-established and minority- and women-owned firms
- Solicit firms with a record of, or potential for, design excellence
- Assess the firm's design expertise and values, its managerial competence, and its enthusiasm for the project

## Pre-Design

A pre-design review occurs when the applicant is exploring multiple alternatives for programming and siting. The Design Commission reviews the project goals, a roadmap for achieving them, and any opportunities and challenges the team has identified. The presentation should include a thorough analysis of the project site and any relevant codes, plans, or design guidelines. The team should outline its plan for community engagement and discuss how the project supports the goals of the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI).

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

- Overall project scope, budget, schedule
- Goals and objectives
- Design alternatives under consideration
- Exploration, analysis, and synthesis of and initial response to site conditions, constraints, and opportunities
- Exploration, analysis, and synthesis of and initial response to community and interdepartmental involvement and coordination
- Exploration of sustainability goals, challenges, and opportunities including options designed to meet the City's Sustainable Buildings and Site Policy ([Resolution 31326](#))
- Analysis of and initial response to urban context (urban form, character, uses, transportation and open space networks, etc.)

## Concept Design

At the concept design phase, the Commission evaluates the organization and function of the building and/or site. The review occurs when the applicant has selected a preferred alternative and there is still time to change the project concept. At the concept design review, the applicant documents the intended character and experiential qualities of the design. As the project progresses through the schematic design and design development phases, the initial concept presented at this review provides a reference point. If the Commission did not review the project at pre-design, the team should address the items listed above in the pre-design section.

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

- The preferred overarching design idea ("concept")
- Scope and program
- Design response to site conditions, constraints, and opportunities
- Synthesis of and design response to community input
- Overall approach to sustainability
- Integration with the urban fabric
- Sizing and configuration of site program elements, building uses, circulation, scale, massing, and orientation
- Character of buildings and spaces

- Initial ideas for employing materials, plants, lighting, and artwork
- Development of approach towards sustainability, including options in site and building design that meet or exceed the City's Sustainable Building and Site Policy

## Schematic Design

At the schematic design phase, it should be clear how the design has evolved from the initial concept. The review occurs when the project team anticipates only minor changes to the program and the choice of elements. At this point, the elements and details will be under design, and the project team will present the proposed choices for materials, plant palettes, site furnishings, and lighting. The team will have developed the art concept, and the designers and artist will know how they will be integrating their work.

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 Design Commission recommendations
- Shifts and refinements to the overarching design concept
- Changes to scope and program
- Resolution of issues with and refined design response to site conditions, constraints, and opportunities
- Any refinements of preferred approaches to sustainability, including initial analysis on meeting or exceeding project goals
- Refined integration with the urban fabric
- Refinements to sizing and configuration of site program elements and circulation
- Refinements to sizing and configuration of building uses, scale, massing, and orientation
- Character and experiential qualities of buildings and spaces
- Art integration based on art concept design
- Lighting concept

## Design Development

The Design Commission review of Design Development occurs when the project team has refined the schematic design, resolved most issues, and selected design details, materials, and finishes.

In this phase, the Design Commission reviews the integration of all aspects of the project. The Commission expects to see final materials and finishes, plant selections, furnishings, and lighting. The team has decided on all sustainability features, and engineers may present key systems and technologies of the overall sustainability strategy, including stormwater management, on-site energy generation, geothermal, or rainwater harvesting.

The artist's work will be well underway at this phase, and the Design Commission will review its integration within the project. Commissioners will consider if the architecture has contributed to the integration of the art in the overall design.

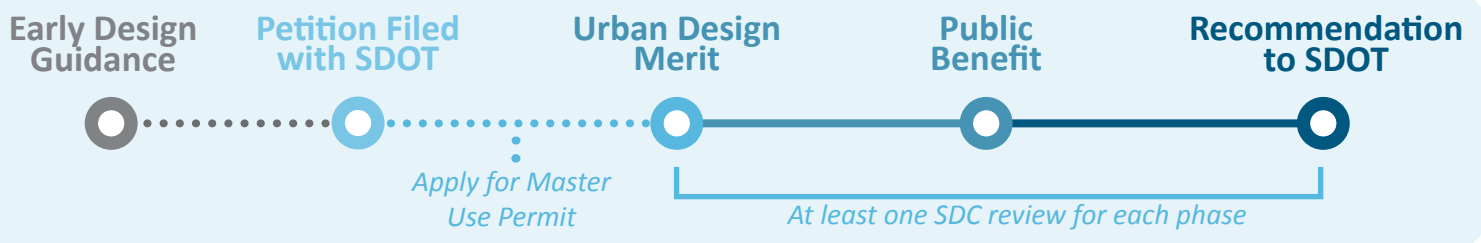
At the design development phase, the Commission evaluates and makes final recommendations on:

- A summary of how the design achieves the vision and concept for the project
- Response to previous Design Commission recommendations
- Shifts and refinements to the schematic design
- Design of elements and spaces
- Choice of site furnishings and lighting
- Materials, colors, and finishes
- Art integration
- Final approach and implementation of sustainability measures in building and site design

## STREET AND ALLEY VACATIONS

The Design Commission provides recommendations to the City Council on a petition to vacate a street or an alley. The Commission develops their recommendation in two distinct phases steps: Urban Design Merit and Public Benefit.

The Commission forwards its recommendations to the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) as part of the Vacation Petition process. The goal of the Commission's review is to provide clear recommendations to SDOT and the City Council about 1) whether the request to vacate a street or alley should be approved and 2) what kind of public benefit the petitioner should provide to enhance the remaining streets or alleys.



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

- The Council's street and alley vacation policies adopted by Resolution 30702, including any amendments
- The documents in the petitioner's vacation petition
- The documents in the petitioner's application for Commission review and any presentation materials
- Permitting documents submitted to DPD, including street- or alley-related impact analyses or reports

### Urban Design Merit

The City's streets and alleys are held in public trust for the public. The public trust functions of the ROW include vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian circulation; access; utilities; light; air; open space; and views. During the Urban Design Merit phase, the Commission determines:

- If and how the vacation affects the remaining streets or alleys near the project
- If any impacts to the public trust functions have been adequately addressed

The location and distribution of streets and alleys affects urban form. The street and alley network supports land uses and associated vehicular and pedestrian circulation through safe and consistent access to properties. A consistent and predictable street and alley network also contributes to lots that are generally uniform in size, orientation, and development potential. A street or alley vacation can create unintended or unanticipated land use impacts, in particular when the resulting lot or lots are of a different size, shape, or orientation than property in the immediate area.

The Commission will consider how the vacation affects adjacent land uses, including whether the loss of the street or alley:

- Results in a lot that is inconsistent with the lot patterns of the immediate area
- Results in development on a lot that is out of scale in context with existing or potential development in the immediate area
- Alters development patterns that predominate in the immediate area
- Conflicts with or supports adopted public-trust-function-related policies

Your urban design merit presentation should include all items outlined in the Application section as well as:

- An analysis of increased development potential as a result of the vacation
- Neighborhood circulation (pedestrians, bicycles, transit, and vehicles) with and without vacation

- Building and site circulation with and without vacation
- Programming elements with and without vacation
- Open space with and without vacation
- Utility plans with and without vacation

The Commission will vote on its recommendation and may add clarifying comments or conditions of approval. When addressing the vacation's impacts on urban form during the Urban Design Merit phase, the Commission could reach one of two results:

- Recommend that the vacation be approved
- Recommend that the vacation not be approved and identify how the vacation negatively affects the urban form

### Public Benefit

When an applicant requests a vacation, they must develop a proposal that provides public amenities that offset the loss of the street or alley. These amenities or public benefits must exceed any project elements required by City codes or required to mitigate project impacts. The development and its economic impacts are not public benefits. The Commission determines if the proposed public benefits are proportional to the benefits gained by the applicant as a result of the vacation, including added property value or development potential.

The public benefits may occur on the right-of-way surrounding the project or nearby and may include:

- Publicly accessible plazas or open spaces that are created or enhanced
- Sidewalks wider than required by regulations
- Pedestrian connections
- Enhanced landscaping
- Street furniture including seating, lighting, or art
- View easements or corridors
- Wayfinding improvements

Public benefits should provide a clear benefit to the community that on balance is commensurate with the benefits gained by the applicant as a result of the vacation, including added property value or development potential.

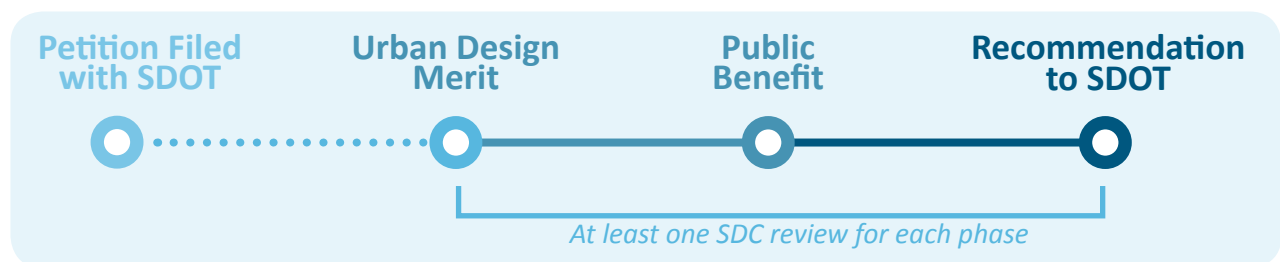
If the Commission determines that the petitioner adequately addresses the proposal's adverse impacts to the urban form as a result of the vacation, it would proceed with the public benefit aspect of its review. During this phase The Commission could reach one of two results:

- Recommend that the petitioner has proposed an adequate public benefit package
- Recommend that the petitioner has not proposed an adequate public benefit package by identifying the inadequacy

**SKYBRIDGES**

Similar to street and alley vacations, the Commission advises the City Council on a petition for a new skybridge or to reauthorize an existing skybridge. Following the process for street or alley vacations, the Commission develops their recommendation in two separate steps: the merit of the proposal and the public benefit. The Commission makes their recommendations following 1) submittal of an application to SDOT and 2) recommendations from the City's Skybridge Review Committee.

The goal of the Commission's review is to provide clear recommendations to SDOT and the City Council about 1) whether the request to approve or retain a skybridge is warranted, given its impacts on the adjacent or nearby rights-of-way (merit) and 2) what kind of public amenities 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 documents in the petitioner's application;
- The documents developed for review by the Skybridge Review Committee, including their final report; or
- Permitting documents submitted to SDOT or DPD 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. For new and existing skybridges, 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 Council ordinance
- Any known conflicts with existing or proposed utilities, street lighting, traffic control devices, or other upcoming transportation projects



The Commission will vote on its recommendation and may add clarifying comments or conditions of approval in its final report to SDOT and the Council. When addressing the impacts of the skybridge on the right-of-way, the Commission could reach one of two results:

- Recommend that the skybridge be approved
- Recommend that the skybridge not be approved and identify how the skybridge negatively affects the right-of-way

### 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 exceed 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 furniture including seating, lighting, or art
- View easements or corridors
- Wayfinding improvements

Public benefits should provide a clear benefit to the community to offset the impacts of the skybridge on the right of way. If the Commission determines that the petitioner adequately addresses the proposal's adverse impacts, it would proceed with the public benefit aspect of its recommendation by reaching one of two results:

- Recommend that the petitioner has proposed an adequate public benefit package
- Recommend that the petitioner has not proposed an adequate public benefit package by identifying the inadequacy

## 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

1. Number every slide.
2. Ensure all text is at least size 11 font. Keep in mind Commissioners primarily view your materials as a presentation, not as a packet.
3. 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.
4. Ensure all maps and plans contain a north arrow, legend, and scale bar.
5. Ensure all elevations and site plans have dimensions for all relevant project elements.

### Saving

1. Save the presentation as a single PDF. Do not submit a PowerPoint file or split into multiple PDF files.
2. Do not convert the PDF to black and white or grayscale.
3. 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.
4. If you are scanning documents to create your preview materials, set your scanner to a sampling rate/resolution of at least 300 dpi.

### Submitting

1. To reduce paper usage, submit your presentation materials electronically to Commission staff. We will inform you if any handouts or copies are required for the meeting.
2. If you have any technical or formatting questions, contact [SDC\\_Administration@seattle.gov](mailto:SDC_Administration@seattle.gov)
3. Refer to the timeline on page 1 for submittal due dates.