Plan Review Priorities Guideline
September 2023

Intent:

The City of Seattle's Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) recognizes that we must give some permit applications priority in our review process to promote health, safety, and welfare and to serve special needs. This guideline describes the projects that should receive priority and provides goals for staff to complete their review. SDCI staff should use this guideline to ensure their review is completed based on these priorities.

PLAN REVIEW PRIORITIES:

- **Emergency: SDCI staff shall begin review of emergency projects within 24 hours of being submitted for review. The Emergency designation will be made by the Principal Engineer/Planner, the Permit Process Leader, the Inspection Services Director or Chief Building/Electrical Inspector, the Engineering Services Director or Manager, or the Land Use Director or Manager, the Director, or by a supervisor acting on their behalf.**
  - Emergency projects are life safety emergencies including:
    - Landslides damage repair
    - Repair of imminent structural hazards
    - Earthquake damage repair
    - Fire damage repairs

- **Priority One: SDCI staff shall begin review of Priority One projects within 48 hours of being submitted for review. The Priority One designation will be made by the Principal Engineer/Planner, the Permit Process Leader, the Inspection Services Director or Chief Building/Electrical Inspector, the Engineering Services Director/Manager, or the Land Use Director or Manager, the Director, or by a supervisor acting on their behalf.** Examples include:
  - Field-ordered corrections, which would interrupt the ability to proceed with construction. (Note: This is intended to address unanticipated issues and does not include applicant-initiated revisions.)
  - Projects with *serious* anomalous issues (lost plans, missed review locations, misrouted, etc.) as identified by Resource Supervisors.
  - Property hazard emergencies other than life safety emergencies including:
    - Landslide damage repair
    - Repair of imminent structural hazards
    - Earthquake damage repair
    - Fire damage repair

- o **Priority Two: SDCI staff give Priority Two projects priority through the assignment process for reviewers/planners who will be reviewing the project. When possible, the reviewers/planners shall be identified prior to intake. Reduced targets for initial and corrected plan review may be identified by Permit Process Leaders, Resource Supervisors, Managers, or Directors depending on project specific needs. Reviewers/planners should begin reviewing these projects early enough that the review can be completed prior to the target date.** Examples include:
  - Affordable housing (City, public, non-profit fund sources, or other projects that meet the SDCI definition of affordable housing) as defined by code, fee subtitle, or identified by the Director. These projects include 100 percent affordable housing units and are identified by other City departments as having received City/public funding.
  - Emergency housing shelters (shelters intended to provide temporary housing for persons displaced by natural disasters, fire, etc.).
  - Field-identified correction of problems not identified during plan review. (Note: This does not include substantial applicant-initiated revisions.)
  - Damage repair (structural, fire, landslide) which does not qualify as an Emergency or Priority One, within 18 months of the event.
  - Projects with anomalous issues (lost plans, missed review locations, misrouted, etc.) as identified by Resource Supervisors.
  - Imminent threats to wetlands, shorelines, or fish bearing streams.
  - Essential service providers (e.g. hospitals, fire and police stations, food banks, etc.).
  - Public and private schools and daycares (including classroom buildings at colleges and universities).
  - Industrial, commercial expansion, community, and recreational facilities located within the mapped Southeast Seattle Reinvestment Area (SESRA) overlay district (see the Land Use Code).
  - Projects per 23.40.040, Reasonable Accommodations. The Director may require a letter from a medical professional. Some examples are: allowing parking in non-conforming locations, allow an elevator in a required yard or to exceed lot coverage
  - Mayoral priorities as identified by the SDCI Director.
  - Bond issue projects as identified by the SDCI Director.
  - Other projects as identified by the SDCI Director.
  - Significant public facility and transportation projects (i.e. Sound Transit, WSDOT, etc.) and affected properties.
  - Time sensitive shop drawings (typically design/built components submitted as post permit submittals.
  - Subsequent phases (after Phase One) for phased construction projects as identified by the Application Facilitator

- o **Priority Three: SDCI staff differentiate Priority Three projects through the target date system for initial and corrected plan review. The standard target dates for the initial and corrected plan review of Priority Three projects are shorter than the standard target dates of other projects.** Examples include:
    - Previously approved single-family residences.
    - Repetitive-use townhomes.
    - Standard plans.
    - Priority Green projects.
    - Projects predominantly for full time students when missing certain target dates in control of SDCI could jeopardize the completion of construction in time for the academic school year.
    - Other expedited projects based on project size, complexity, and quality of application documents.

- o **Standard Priority:** SDCI staff assign projects the standard target dates for initial and corrected plan reviews from the standard target date system. SDCI staff should realize that all projects have some level of priority, but Standard Priority projects have no identified characteristics that would place them in a higher priority group. All projects not identified as one of the previous priorities will be Standard Priority.

- o **How to use the guideline at intake:**
    - When intake staff are accepting projects that appear to qualify as Emergency or Priority One, Two, or Three Levels, they should use this guide to determine the priority level, and contact the permit process leader or their supervisor to confirm.

- o **How to use the guideline to assist in prioritizing workload:**
    - o When a reviewer/planner receives an **Emergency** project, they should assess the relationship to the target dates of any other priority projects they may already have assigned to them.
        - If the other priority projects are Emergency, continue to work on those until the review is finished. If it appears this will prevent the reviewer/planner from being able to start reviewing the new Emergency project within the required 48 hours, the reviewer/planner should contact the resource supervisor for re-assignment or assistance in managing the priorities.
        - If currently in the middle of other Priority One to Four reviews, assess the time remaining to complete the review. If the time remaining is greater than two working days, set aside the current review and begin reviewing the Emergency project. If setting aside the current review will result in missing the target for that review, consult with the resource supervisor to confirm the priorities and assignments.

    - o When a reviewer/planner receives a **Priority One** project, they should assess the relationship to the target dates of any other priority projects they may already have assigned to them.
        - If the other priority projects are Emergency, continue to work on those until the review is finished. If it appears this will prevent the reviewer/planner from being able to start

reviewing the new Priority One project within the required 72 hours, the reviewer/planner should contact the resource supervisor for re-assignment or assistance in managing the priorities.

- If the other priority projects are Priority One, continue to work on those until the review is finished. If it appears this will prevent the reviewer/planner from being able to start reviewing the new Priority One project within the required 72 hours, the reviewer/planner should contact the resource supervisor for re-assignment or assistance in managing the priorities.
- If currently in the middle of other Priority Two and Three reviews, assess the time remaining to complete the review. If the time remaining is greater than three working days, set aside the current review and begin reviewing the Priority One project. If setting aside the current review will result in missing the target for that review, consult with the resource supervisor to confirm the priorities.

o When a reviewer/planner receives a **Priority Two or Three** project, they should assess the relationship of the project to the target dates of the current workload, especially any other priority projects already assigned to them. The goal is that Priority Two and Three projects will have the review complete by the target date, even though this may cause other projects with lower priority to miss targets.
- Sometime within three working days of receiving the Priority Two or Three project, assess the time needed to complete the review of the priority project, to determine the required start date to meet the completion target.
- If necessary, set aside the current work and begin reviewing the priority project.
- If setting aside the current review and the subsequent delay of other reviews in the reviewer's/planner's current workload will result in missing targets, consult with the resource supervisor to confirm the priorities.

o When a reviewer/planner has two or more projects with the same target dates, the projects with the higher priority should be completed first. This is where the difference between Priority Three and Standard Priority projects will affect the reviewer's workload management, since they are not otherwise identified. For instance, a project that is the remodel of an existing single-family residence (Priority Three) with the same target date as a new commercial structure (Standard Priority) should be reviewed before the new commercial project.