



Ms. Lisa Rutzick
Design Review Program Manager
Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection
City of Seattle
700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2000
P.O. Box 34019
Seattle, WA 98124-4019

Re: Draft Design Review Improvement Recommendations

April 8, 2016

Dear Ms. Rutzick,

AIA Seattle

Center for
Architecture & Design
1010 Western Avenue
Seattle, WA 98104

τ (206) 448 4938

aiaseattle.org

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the recommendations for improvements to the Design Review Program. AIA Seattle continues to represent Seattle architects, advocating for better design, greater consistency and encouraging effective public involvement in the Design Review Process. We are supportive of changes that address these concerns.

The following are our comments regarding each of the five recommendations for improvements in the Design Review process.

Early Ongoing Engagement

We are supportive of more effective public outreach. However we are concerned that the standards for structuring public engagement in the draft recommendations are still not clearly defined. The onus falls solely on the applicant to maintain and demonstrate ongoing engagement with the public. The suggestion of meeting 5 outreach tools (one from each category: electronic, in person and written) appears onerous. The addition of this requirement adds more process to a process that is already protracted.

We are also concerned about making this a formal requirement. Who determines if outreach is insufficient? What are the city's tools for enforcement? If implemented as a requirement, this may provide opportunities for the public to initiate legal protests claiming the requirement was not met, resulting in further delays.

Therefore, AIA Seattle does not support Early Ongoing Engagement as it is currently described in the Recommendation report. We feel that it is the City's responsibility, not that of the applicant, to achieve the appropriate level of public engagement. We recommend amending this recommendation to require applicant participation in a more clearly defined, city-led early public outreach effort.

Set Design Review Thresholds Based on Project Characteristics and Increase Administrative Design Reviews

We support implementing the new thresholds for the three categories of Design Review: Full Design Review; Hybrid; and Administrative. Measures that reduce the number of projects that fall under Design Review will focus the City's efforts on those projects of the highest priority.



We are concerned that the Hybrid Design Review as currently structured may result in less consistency by having two separate entities reviewing the project. Measures to clearly define both the City's and Board's roles at each meeting will be essential. AIA Seattle is generally in favor of the Board reviewing the project at the Recommendation phase.

The Hybrid Design Review process risks giving rise to additional meetings. Therefore, AIA Seattle would be supportive of limiting the number of meetings for projects that fall under this review category.

AIA Seattle supports the revised thresholds for projects which meet the City's Policy Priorities including affordable housing, cultural/arts and deep green buildings.

New Tools and Techniques

We support establishing an online platform for board meetings including a public commenting forum.

We also support applicants showing their design evolution in lieu of developing three independent schemes. Design evolutions should demonstrate multiple massing alternatives.

We support additional Board and staff training, particularly on technical zoning code requirements on complex projects that include alley vacations and full city block development, in addition to meeting facilitation training.

We believe a yearly awards program to honor design excellence is an outstanding way to honor and promote well designed projects. AIA Seattle would consider collaborating with the City on this initiative.

We wholeheartedly support providing additional SDCI staff to take notes or digitally record meetings with a printed transcript as a means to ensure consistency in the process.

Change Board Composition and Structure

We support the proposed 7 board members and the revised representative configuration. The hope would be that a larger board would include a greater diversity of opinions. We are also in favor of combining the boards into 5 districts. Additional review of the boundaries of Capitol Hill neighborhood should be undertaken to ensure this neighborhood falls within a single district.

We encourage mandatory increased meeting time for larger complex projects. For example, projects with alley vacations or full city block projects should be double length meetings at a minimum. Revisions to the meeting structure that encourages more dialogue between applicant and board is also supported along with increased time for applicant to present their projects.

Updates to Design Review Thresholds

AIA Seattle supports changes to reduce Design Review thresholds for projects less than 10,000 sf in size in identified zones. This would remove a large number of townhouse projects that currently go through the Streamlined Design Review process. The concern is how to improve low scale housing design if projects are exempt from any type of review. AIA Seattle would be open to assisting the city to elevate the

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design dialogue potentially through the use of an awards program category as suggested in the Tools and Techniques recommendations.

We appreciate the thoughtful work that has gone into the recommended changes to the Design Review process and hope that you will consider our comments in an effort to further improve the process. We look forward to working with the City to craft a Design Review process that focuses our efforts on the highest priorities while elevating the level of design, ensuring consistency and promoting public engagement in the process.

Regards,

Mary Johnston FAIA
President
AIA Seattle

AIA Seattle

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