Re: Design Review Talking Points for Seattle Budget Hearing on 10-12-2021

Date: 10-8-21

* Seattle’s Design Review process is broken; it’s time to fix it.
* We urge City Council to fund SDCI to evaluate Seattle’s Design Review program and its impacts in close coordination with diverse organizational and community stakeholders.
  + This evaluation should make the process more inclusive, efficient, consistent, and predictable.
  + Talk without action is meaningless; this evaluation should lead to real legislation and administrative changes in 2022.
* **Inclusion.** Design Review has become a tool that favors current landowners over the broader community.
  + - We should ensure that the process is welcoming and inclusive to those from diverse racial, gender, socioeconomic, and housing backgrounds (i.e. renters & homeowners) at all levels; planners, board members, and public participants.
* **Affordable Housing.** There is a direct link between housing affordability and Seattle’s permit review process. Design Review can be made more efficient and predictable to lessen this impact.
  + In some cases, Design Review is being misused as a tool to stop or slow development rather than encourage good design.
    - By discouraging abuse, this process can be more collaborative and better aligned with the city’s housing and affordability goals.
  + Delays have been growing, which add costs to housing during an ongoing affordability crisis.
  + The process is unpredictable and uneven across neighborhoods, which can divert development pressure from affluent communities to ones more vulnerable to displacement. The process should work the same everywhere.
* **Sustainability.** Allowing new projects to move forward in areas of our city well-served by public transit is good for the environment. Thoughtful density, as an alternative to urban sprawl, is a critical tool to address climate change.
* *Aesthetics and neighborhood character must not be a barrier to housing inclusion, affordability, and sustainability. We call on City Council to study and legislate solutions that can fix Design Review for everyone.*