

8/4/2025

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Land Use Committee  
**From:** HB Harper, Central Staff  
**Subject:** Interim Design Review Legislation

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On September 3, 2025, the Land Use Committee (Committee) will hold a public hearing on and discuss [Council Bill \(CB\) 121048](#), an ordinance adopting temporary regulations to make design review voluntary for a period of six months.

### Changes in State Law

During the 2023 session, the State legislature passed [House Bill \(HB\) 1293](#), which requires Seattle and other cities and counties that have a design review program to:

- Use objective rather than subjective guidelines;
- Have only one public meeting as part of the review process; and
- Integrate design review into the development permit process.

The proposed interim legislation will temporarily suspend required design review for six months, making design review voluntary for proposed development. These regulations will be in place while Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) works to [update the design review program](#) and guidelines as required by HB 1293.

### Design Review in Seattle Municipal Code

Seattle's Design Review program, Seattle Municipal Code Chapter 23.41, was created in 1993. It is inconsistent with the requirements of HB 1293 in two key ways: 1) it uses subjective design guidelines, designed to grant flexibility to designers but not providing predictability to developers, and 2) for major projects, it includes more than one public meeting.

There are three types of [design review in Seattle](#): Streamlined Design Review (SDR), Administrative Design Review (ADR), and Full Design Review (FDR). SDR is reviewed by SDCI staff and not appealable to the Hearing Examiner; it includes public comment but no design review public meeting. ADR is reviewed by City staff; it is appealable to the Hearing Examiner. ADR includes public comment but no design review public meeting. FDR is appealable to the Hearing Examiner and is also reviewed by Design Review Boards at two or more public meetings.

CB 121048 applies to all types of design review and provides that applicants may elect to continue review under the design review process or withdraw the proposed development from the design review process. Requests for departures, which would previously have been part of

the design review process, are proposed to be evaluated by the Director as a Type I decision, not appealable to the Hearing Examiner.

This legislation also extends temporary regulations established by [Ordinance 126854](#) for an additional six months. The temporary regulations exempt proposed developments that meet Mandatory Housing Affordability requirements using on site performance units and low-income housing from Design Review, but allow the Director to approve departures for qualifying proposed developments as a Type I decision.

### **Public Outreach and Stakeholder Feedback**

SDCI and the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) have been working with a stakeholder group to analyze the outcomes of Seattle's design review program and recommend best practices and options for program modifications, including addressing barriers to equitable participation. The additional time provided by this interim ordinance is needed for City staff to respond to the stakeholder and public engagement [recommendations](#) and to work through code amendments, Director's Rules, Tips, and guidance documents to clarify code requirements and procedures.

### **Next Steps**

A briefing and possible vote is anticipated on September 17, 2025.

Permanent legislation and new Design Guidelines are anticipated for council review following the 2025 budget process.

cc: Ben Noble, Director  
Lish Whitson, Lead Analyst