



Memo

Date: July 22, 2020
To: Seattle City Council
From: Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections (SDCI)
Seattle Department of Neighborhoods (DON)
Subject: Update on Virtual Design Review, Historic Preservation and Major Institution Board and Committee Meetings (Ordinance 126072)

This memo serves as an update on the work being done by SDCI to hold virtual Design Review Board meetings while still under the COVID-19 public health emergency, as outlined in Ordinance 126072. An update on DON's work to launch virtual meetings of the City's historic preservation boards and major institution advisory committees is also provided.

Virtual Design Review Board meetings (SDCI)

SDCI recognizes and values the importance of public and community engagement in the Design Review process and wants to ensure that we are setting up the best available virtual platform for that to occur. This will include plain language instructions for the general public on joining and participating via written and audio comments (if possible) in our online meetings, which will be added to the public notices and the Design Review website. SDCI is also re-launching our updated Shaping Seattle mobile-first map application in July which is a robust tool designed for community use to understand the permitting process, with an emphasis on Design Review projects.

The challenges of holding virtual Design Review Board meetings are threefold: 1) the volume of Board meetings is significant, 2) the ability to replicate the nuances and interactions of a typical Board meeting to ensure an efficient and constructive meeting which involve multiple external parties with designated speaking/presentation roles and 3) identifying the expertise and designated staffing necessary to run the technology during these meetings. The eight Design Review Boards (including 42 board members) meet [twice monthly](#) Mondays through Thursdays for a total of approximately 192 meetings per year.

We are steadily working towards the goal of virtual Design Review Board meetings and have spent time investigating the three available platforms: Skype, MS Teams, and (more recently) Webex. After gathering the various requirements needed to identify the best technology platform (see Attachment 1), it was determined that Skype was insufficient for meeting our requirements and MS Teams involved several logistical issues that affected the ability for us to establish a replicable model that can meet the frequency of our meetings. Fortunately, Seattle IT accelerated the procurement of Cisco Webex platform which was deployed citywide on June 18th. We believe that this platform will best satisfy the requirements needed for our meetings (see Attachment 2: Table Comparing Virtual Meeting Platform Options and Attachment 3: Seattle IT Design Review Online Meeting Decision Paper). Additionally, and critical to the success of this pilot, SDCI is in the process of hiring technical staffing resources to run the technology during all board meetings, allowing staff and the Board to focus on the meeting substance. This part time, temporary position will set up the online meetings and pilot the technology during each of these meetings. This will allow the single SDCI Land Use Planner that currently attends and co-facilitates the meetings with the Board chair to continue to focus on the meeting agenda and content.

Our intent is to launch Design Review virtual meetings as a pilot effort with selected projects in early August allowing us to assess, learn and adjust our practices accordingly as we grow towards the full Design Review Board calendar capacity.

Virtual meetings of historic preservation boards and major institution advisory committees (DON)

Pursuant to Ordinance 126072, DON is preparing to launch virtual meetings of the City's historic preservation boards and major institution advisory committees, and successfully held the first Landmarks Preservation Board meeting on July 1. Like SDCI, DON staff reviewed multiple online meeting platforms and determined Cisco Webex best satisfies the procedural requirements of its boards and committees; however, alternative solutions to address closed-captioning and language translation needs are still being explored. DON also anticipates using Microsoft Forms to collect public comment at meetings.

DON is also working to identify staffing resources for every historic preservation board and major institution advisory committee meeting. Most of DON's boards and committees are supported by just one staff person who is responsible for facilitating proceedings, maintaining records of decisions, and serving as a technical advisor to board members and project applicants. Fulfilling all of these roles while simultaneously managing new IT infrastructure is more than one person can feasibly handle. Additionally, the number of meetings scheduled each month (often more than a dozen across Historic Preservation and Major Institutions and Schools programs), the length of the meetings, and existing pressures on staff capacity impede DON's ability to assign multiple staff to each meeting.

IT Requirements Gathering for Virtual Design Review Board Meetings

REQUIREMENTS	
SDCI Instructions Webpage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short URL • Links to conference/meeting application • Displays instructions on the process for attending on-line meetings
Conferencing Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable and reliable platform – meetings cannot exceed 90 minutes, nor can they be rescheduled due to technical issues • Allows attendees to connect via PCs, laptops, cell phones, and iPads • Allows attendees the option to join on-line or via telephone call • Allows for more than one attendee with facilitator/moderator permissions – as host can bestow host permission on someone else, person scheduling the meeting will be host by default • Attendees can be granted presentation permission – i.e. “share screen” or “share file” • Allows for non-City email addresses to present • E-Sign-in sheet is provided for attendees • E-Sign-in indicates whether attendee intends to comment • Data from E-Sign-in sheet can be exported to a CSV or similar format • Supports at least 100 attendees without performance degradation • Automatically mutes audience upon entry to meeting • For public commenters, method for queuing and alerting attendees about their turn to speak • Attendees are not on video, audio only • Provides visual indication of which attendee is speaking • Facilitator(s)/Moderator(s) can mute/unmute specific audience members • Meetings can be recorded as audio only or as audio and video. • Audio recordings are in a standard (no proprietary) format • Attendee permissions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Board and SDCI – full control ○ Applicants – need to be able to present and then muted during Board deliberations, able to ask clarifying questions only during deliberations ○ Public – no controls, muted until queued up to speak, , able to ask clarifying questions only during deliberations
WORK THAT NEEDS TO BE COMPLETED/DECISIONS TO BE MADE PRIOR TO THE 1 ST MEETING	
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create SDCI web page with instructions on how to join meetings • Create bitly link or shortened website link • Updates to existing Design Review webpage to include instructions for meeting • Communications to Public about new meeting process • Determine tech staff member(s) who will be • Develop and confirm IT process for “Help Desk” in case technical issues arise • Set up Board members and SDCI staff with log-ins to meeting application

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop procedure for Public comments during the meeting or how to submit written comments prior to the beginning of the meeting • Link to existing Design Review webpage: http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/aboutus/news/events/DesignReview/upcomingreviews/ • Link to existing annual meeting calendar http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/SDCI/About/DesignReviewMeetingCalendar.pdf 		
Public Notice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include meeting instructions website link on the Public Notice • Include additional instruction sheet for online meetings 		
300' Notice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include additional instruction sheet for online meetings 		
Yellow Placard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include website link to meeting notice instructions 		
MEETINGS			
Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronic version of agenda • 2 versions: Downtown Board and all other Boards 		
Audience	<table border="1"> <tr> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board Members – up to 6 people, non-City • SDCI Staff- 1-2 people • Applicants –1-3 people (names may not be known prior to the meeting) • Public Attendees – up to 100 people </td> <td> Board and SDCI – full control Applicants – need to be able to present Public – no controls, muted until queued up to speak </td> </tr> </table>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board Members – up to 6 people, non-City • SDCI Staff- 1-2 people • Applicants –1-3 people (names may not be known prior to the meeting) • Public Attendees – up to 100 people 	Board and SDCI – full control Applicants – need to be able to present Public – no controls, muted until queued up to speak
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Meeting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Electronic sign-in sheet for Public Attendees 2. Technician starts meeting, starts audio recording, acts as timekeeper, Applicants and Public attendees muted 3. SDCI Staff – opening remarks, 10 mins 4. Board Chair – introductions and opening remarks, 10 mins 5. Applicant – presentation, 20-25 mins 6. Board – 10 minutes of clarifying questions 7. Public comments – 20-25 mins, need to limit 1 person speaking at a time, written comments that are submitted are read aloud by Board Chair? SDCI Staff? Technician? 8. Board deliberates – all other attendees are muted 9. Board Chair summarizes decision 10. Board Chair closes questions 11. SDCI Staff (?) makes closing comments 12. Technician closes on-line meeting 13. Technician copies audio recording to SDCI directory- upload to Accela record 14. Technician provides sign-in sheet to SDCI (will be added to Parties of Record list) 15. Meeting Report is uploaded to Accela 		

	16. Report is emailed to all people that were signed in as Parties of Record
TBD	
Still Need to Research/ Make Decisions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Setting expectations: the presentation by the Applicant(s) will not be easily viewable on smartphones. How does this get communicated to the Public? On the website with meeting instructions? As part of the information that will go out with the Public Notices? Should applicants be required to format their presentations to fit mobile devices? 2. What does the electronic sign-in sheet look like? Public Attendees must sign-in with email or only with email if they want to be on Parties of Record list? 3. Process for getting electronic version of the package to the Board members for review. Does a hardcopy also need to be distributed ahead of the meeting? Is there a file size limitation that can be distributed via email? Should the package be distributed via some other method? 4. How do we determine who would like to speak during the Public Comment period? 5. How are written comments submitted? 6. During Board deliberations, what is the process if someone needs to make a clarifying statement? (when Board is misunderstanding something in the presentation) 7. Focus on equity issues – needs to be addressed 8. Paper copies of packet very expensive to produce – how make sure that person is in category of not having other options 9. When do libraries open in Seattle? 10. How to deal with physical models and materials boards. 11. Meeting CANNOT go over 2 hours. Redmond meeting issues: materials board, 1hr mtg took 3 hrs 12. What are our Plan Bs for connectivity issues, tech issues, etc.? Big deal to have to reschedule

Virtual Meeting Matrix

X = No O = Yes

Requirement	Skype	MS Teams Meeting	MS Teams Events	WebEx	WebEx Events	Comments
Conferencing Application						
Stable and reliable platform – meetings cannot exceed 90 minutes, nor can they be rescheduled due to technical issues	X	X	X	O	O	
Allows attendees to connect via PCs, laptops, cell phones, and iPads	O	O	O	O	O	
Allows attendees the option to join on-line or via telephone call	O	X	X	O	O	Teams meetings require special license for dial-in; potentially capable but limited
Allows for more than one attendee with facilitator/moderator permissions – as host can bestow host permission on someone else, person scheduling the meeting will be host by default	O	O	O	O	O	
Attendees can be granted presentation permission – i.e. “share screen” or “share file”	O	O	X	O	O	
Allows for non-City email addresses to present	O	O	X	O	O	
E-Sign-in sheet is provided for attendees	X	X	X	X	X	Can require email registration to sign in and then export the link
E-Sign-in indicates whether attendee intends to comment	X	X	X	X	X	Webex: can set up questions as part of registration process
Data from E-Sign-in sheet can be exported to a CSV or similar format	X	O	O	O	O	
Supports at least 100 attendees without performance degradation	X	X	O	O	O	
Automatically mutes audience upon entry to meeting	O	O	O	O	O	
For public commenters, method for queuing and alerting attendees about their turn to speak	X	O	X	O	O	Solution would require process not included within application
Attendees are not on video, audio only	O	O	O	O	O	
Provides visual indication of which attendee is speaking	O	O	O	O	O	
Facilitator(s)/Moderator(s) can mute/unmute specific audience members	O	O	X	O	O	Speakers may have to unmute themselves--can be prompted to do so
Meetings can be recorded as audio only or as audio and video.	X	X	X	?	O	Can possibly record audio from separate app
Audio recordings are in a standard (no proprietary) format	X	X	X	O	O	MP4
Attendee permissions: Board and SDCI – full control	O	X	X	O	O	MS Teams: full control with seattle.gov email address only
Attendees: Applicants – need to be able to present	O	O	X	O	O	MS Teams: Presenter permissions with seattle.gov email address only
Attendees: Public – no controls, muted until queued up to speak	O	O	X	O	O	MS Teams Events: No mic capabilities for attendees

	Closed captioning available	X	X	X	O	O	MS Teams Events: Closed captioning available in recordings. WebEx: Closed captioning still coming (Events does after meeting)
	Translation services available	X	X	O	X	X	MS Teams Events: Available during playback of recordings
Meeting	Board deliberates – all other attendees are muted	O	O	O	O	O	Only if audio recording is available Can send attendee list - is this different than a sign-in sheet?
	Technician copies audio recording to SDCI directory- upload to Accela record	O	O	O	O	O	
	Technician provides sign-in sheet to SDCI (will be added to Parties of Record list)	X	O	O	O	O	
Still Need to Research/ Make Decisions	Setting expectations: the presentation by the Applicant(s) will not be easily viewable on smartphones. How does this get communicated to the Public? On the website with meeting instructions? As part of the information that will go out with the Public Notices? Should applicants be required to format their presentations to fit mobile devices? What does the electronic sign-in sheet look like? Public Attendees must sign-in with email or only with email if they want to be on Parties of Record list?						All applications have dynamic formatting during screen-sharing, no additional formatting necessary. Settings can be created for meeting requiring that no one log in "anonymously"
	How do we determine who would like to speak during the Public Comment period?			X			Teams and WebEx have "raise hand" feature which moderator can call on, and announce next person on deck to prepare. MS Teams Events do not allow attendees to speak
	During Board deliberations, what is the process if someone needs to make a clarifying statement? (when Board is misunderstanding something in the presentation)	X			X		Can use raise hand feature for all except Skype and MS Teams Events Ability to review plan sets via video conference is not feasible. Access needed for those without computers, tablets, or smartphones
	Focus on equity issues – needs to be addressed Meeting CANNOT go over 2 hours. Redmond meeting issues: materials board, 1hr mtg took 3 hrs						Will require timekeeper
	What are our Plan Bs for connectivity issues, tech issues, etc.? Big deal to have to reschedule						Potentially setting up duplicate meeting in alternate app, which would lose some functionality

DECISION PAPER

Date

June 8, 2020

Prepared by

Patricia Palmer, Project Manager, PREP Phase III, with input from Danielle Priest

Decisions to be made

Select a new process to be followed for Design Review Board meetings that allows for them to be conducted online instead of in person as a response to COVID-19. Select a video conferencing platform which is essential for administering these meetings online.

Background

The City of Seattle's design review process requires that certain new construction projects undergo a discretionary review of the siting and design of new development. Design review is a key required element in the application process.

For projects requiring design review, the Design Review Board convenes public meetings at least twice for projects that are required to go through the Full Design Review process. Without these public meetings, progress cannot be made on project applications.

There are eight review boards, each one focusing on a specific geographical region in the city. Meetings are held at locations throughout the city. Each board is scheduled to meet twice a month and to hold quarterly training sessions.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, significant changes had to be made in the way that SDCI and the public do business together. The City Council recently passed legislation mandating development of a solution that will allow the design review process to continue, while adhering to the city and county guidelines for safely conducting business.

Assumptions

- Public engagement is a critical component to the design review process and it is important that we not only provide opportunities for this engagement but also ensure that the public feel that their time is spent in a meaningful manner.

SDCI has a vested interest in continuing the design review process.

- COVID-19 shutdowns will continue to impact business with the City of Seattle.
- This decision will not impact any existing online conferencing systems used by SDCI.
- The action items listed at the end of this document will be completed prior to implementation of selected solution.

Options

1. **Use video conferencing applications currently offered by Seattle IT.** Skype and Microsoft Teams are the two video conferencing options currently in production and available for use for online meetings.
 - a. **Pros.**
 - i. Applications are in place and ready for use.
 - ii. SDCI staff have been trained in the use of the applications.
 - iii. Common platforms that are likely familiar to public users.

- iv. Can be implemented without additional IT support.
 - b. **Cons.**
 - i. Known connection issues (ex: busy signals, dropped calls, performance degradation depending upon network being used by presenters).
 - ii. Limitations with existing functionality (ex: issues with non-City email addresses as participants)
 - iii. Additional staffing needed to facilitate the online meetings.
2. **Use the new Webex Events video conferencing application.** Take advantage of Seattle IT's early adopter process to roll-out the recently added Webex Meetings offering.
- a. **Pros.**
 - i. Additional available support by IT during early adopter phase.
 - ii. Application that is well established for video conferencing functionality and stability.
 - iii. Robust feature set may more solidly support the requirements.
 - b. **Cons.**
 - i. Early adopter status means that system issues may not have been uncovered yet.
 - ii. Additional staff training needed.
 - iii. Possible longer timeline to implement.
 - iv. Managing the meetings will require technical administrators and communications outside of the scope of availability of current staff. Initial projections indicate the need for 2 term-limited temporary assignments to support this effort fully.
3. **Research third party design review process applications.** Create a project specifically to find and do an analysis of possible third-party applications specializing in the design review process. As part of the analysis, search for applications that also support video conferencing, and possibly integrate with Accela.
- a. **Pros.**
 - i. Possibility of finding an all-in-one solution.
 - ii. Supports the City's goal of "one City, one system" for permitting
 - b. **Cons.**
 - i. Research phase will significantly add to the timeline of solution implementation.
 - ii. Research may not result in any products suitable for implementation.
 - iii. If one or more products are identified, purchasing phase will increase the timeline
 - iv. Implementation phase will add to the timeline
 - v. Significant additional staff training needed.

Recommendation

The recommended approach is to implement Option 2 and execute a pilot launch. SDCI would be able to take advantage of the early adopter roll-out for Webex Events, an internationally established video conferencing platform .

Action Items Needing Decision Prior to Roll-out:

1. SDCI needs to examine the Racial Equity Toolkit and apply it to this project. There are concerns about equity in access to participate in this public process that need to be further examined and mitigated.
2. A key component of the board meetings is the project presentation by applicants. It is unlikely that the presentation materials will be viewable on smartphone screens. How will SDCI provide access to presentation materials?
 - a. Option 1: set the expectation that, for full access to the presentation, attendees will need to use a tablet or other larger screened device.
 - b. Option 2: provide hardcopies of the presentation to attendees that only have access to smartphones.

- c. Option 3: require applicants to format presentation materials so that they are viewable across an assortment of mobile devices.
- 3. A second key component of the board meetings is display of physical models and materials boards. How will board members, and possibly the public, be able to review these work products?
- 4. SDCI staff currently involved with the design review process will not be able to run the online meeting. What additional technical staff members will be assigned as application facilitators? Tasks would include starting and managing the meeting application, managing the participant/speaker queue, assisting with support for technical issues, and acting as meeting timekeeper.
- 5. Meetings are very difficult to reschedule. What is the backup plan for online meetings that cannot be completed online due to technical issues?

Action Items to be Completed Prior to Roll-out:

- 1. Prepare and execute an approved communication plan.
- 2. Deploy the WebEx Meetings application.
 - a. Pilot testing with SDCI design review staff.
 - b. Application testing with meetings of 100+ attendees.
 - c. Set up for all currently active board members.
 - d. Training for SDCI staff involved with the design review process.
 - e. Training for active board members.
- 3. Prepare instructions for attending meetings online.
- 4. Update all public facing communications with the link to the meeting instructions (ex: public notices, DJC, SDCI website, Tips).
- 5. Define the process for providing the meeting presentation package to board members prior to the meeting. File size may prevent distribution by email.
- 6. Create an electronic participant sign-in sheet that works with Webex Events.
- 7. Define the process for how participants will be able to share written and verbal public comments during the meeting. This needs to include how participants can provide input when clarification is needed during board deliberations.

High Level Roll-out Schedule

6/8 - 6/24	Decisions / Deploy Webex Events / Create temporary employee assignments (2)
6/15 - 7/20	Communication Plan / Application Testing / Hire temporary employees
6/22 - 7/24	Website and Public Facing Information Updates / Training
7/6 - 7/13	Deadline to Notice Board Meetings for Week of 7/27
8/3 - 8/7	First Available Week of Board Meetings
8/15 - 8/30	Follow-up / Updates to Process and Communications