



# City of Seattle

Edward B. Murray, Mayor

## Seattle Department of Planning and Development

Diane M. Sugimura, Director

**Date:** March 12, 2015

**To:** Councilmember Mike O'Brien, Chair  
Planning Land Use and Sustainability (PLUS) Committee

**From:** Aly Pennucci, DPD, Senior Planner  
Lisa Rutzick, DPD, Design Review Program Manager  
Mike Podowski, Land Use Policy Manager

**Subject:** Design Review Program Improvements

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### **Background:**

The City of Seattle began the Design Review program in 1994. In the two decades since, the program has improved the design of thousands of development projects. The program has evolved to some degree over time through changes to internal procedures and practices, and minor changes to the program's regulations. However, the basic structure and organization has not significantly changed since it was established in 1994.

Currently, DPD is observing calls for evaluating Design Review from varied user groups. Some in the development community are requesting cost reductions and more predictability. Simultaneously, some community groups are requesting that the program address concerns about growth more holistically. Given markedly changed conditions and strong interest from numerous stakeholders, it is appropriate to explore improvements and updates to the program. Building off of the recent work led by the Seattle Chamber and previous reviews of the Design Review Program, DPD will identify, evaluate and implement organizational, structural and procedural changes to revamp and refresh the Design Review Program.

### **Project Scope**

DPD will work with the community to identify ways to make the design review program more efficient and accessible without compromising the program's core mission to encourage better design and site planning to help ensure that new development enhances the character of the city, sensitively fits into neighborhoods, provides regulatory flexibility and improves communication between developers, neighborhoods, and the City early and throughout the development review process.

This work will include the following:

- Improving opportunities for community input
- Increasing participation from communities not typically involved with Design Review
- Employing recent and emerging technologies for better community engagement



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- Creating efficiencies in the overall DR process
- Addressing Design Review scope—review size and location of projects
- Improving Design Review meetings – public input, meeting location, meeting frequency
- Evaluating the role of the design review board vs. administrative review

**Outreach and engagement:**

DPD will work with a consultant (Enviroissues) to conduct outreach and engagement throughout the project. To gather feedback and get the word out about this project, the outreach and engagement work will include:

- Interviews with community stakeholders
- Online surveys
- Two community wide meetings coupled with an online open house for people who cannot attend
- Focus group with communities not typically at the table
- Advisory group of 10-15 members representing a range of interests and experience
- Project website
- Social media
- Provide information at design review board meetings

**Project Schedule:**

*First Quarter 2015*

- Peer review of design review programs in other cities
- Evaluate options identified in previous reviews of the program
- Interviews with community stakeholders
- Launch project website
- Launch stakeholder advisory group
- Launch online survey

*Second Quarter 2015*

- Focus group(s)
- Bulk of advisory group work
- Community wide meeting

*Third Quarter 2015*

- Develop findings and preliminary recommendations based on work completed to date
- 2<sup>nd</sup> community wide meeting

*Fourth Quarter 2015*

- Develop final set of advisory group recommendations
- Complete final report, recommendations and implementation plan