

**Greenwood Community Council**

July 17, 2015

Geoff Wentlandt, Senior Planner

Department of Planning and Development

700 5th Ave.Suite 2000  
P.O. Box 34019  
Seattle, WA

RE: Design Review Program Improvements

Dear Mr. Wentlandt:

I write on behalf of the Greenwood Community Council (GCC) to provide feedback and recommendations for improvements to the Design Review (DR) Program. These recommendations are the result of the deliberations of the GCC Land Use Committee and comments received from our general membership. The GCC strongly emphasizes DPD’s stated notion that the purpose of DR is to, among other things, *“Encourage better design and site planning to ensure new development enhances the city and sensitively fits into neighborhoods.”* As a neighborhood organization located within the Northwest DR Board District, the GCC supports improved community engagement and agrees with DPD’s stated goals to improve design review efficiency and accessibility, community dialogue, and technology for more effective community engagement. We add that having a predictable, accurate, transparent, and consistent process is meaningful as long as this process if focused on end result of producing excellent design for Seattle.

**Engagement and Outreach.**

* Criteria should be developed (such as a checklist) for defining effective community engagement.
* Redesign Land Use Notification boards to include layman’s terms, QR codes, or other technology that allows readers to link to online information about the project. We suggest DPD develop 3 alternative boards for public review and comment.
* Develop technology, social media or other means to provide for more broad notification. Continue to ensure hard copy notices are mailed out.
* Seek more equitable engagement of populations that have historically not been active in the design review process, are under-represented, or for whom distance of travel to meetings is a burden.
* Clarify public notice rules for each type of design review. Define required accuracy clearly and define the consequences for inaccuracy.
* Face-to-face meetings and forums should be encouraged and increased; interactive on-line commenting platforms should be discouraged as means for engagement.
* Provide dedicated and skilled facilitators at select meetings.
* Make all public information readily available to the public by improvements to web-based technology. Some citizens simply cannot attend meetings.

**DPD Staffing**

* Planners that work directly with the site developer should not perform administrative or streamlined review; there should be an unbiased review and independent review.
* The quality of planners differs.  Provide senior review and transparent auditing process to encourage fairness and objectivity of design review process.
* Provide a process to elevate problem cases where staff actions (or competency) are challenged.

**Process**

* The purview of the design review process needs to be clear and understandable by the public. If there will continue to be restrictions on what is allowable comment (and allowable findings), that needs to be communicated far more effectively in advance, and an alternative method to comment on out-of-purview issues provided to the public.
* Raising thresholds (e.g. reducing design review) is not acceptable. Project size alone is not an indicator of the need for DR, from a community perspective.
* The terms "Administrative Design Review" (ADR) and Streamlined Design Review (SDR) are unclear.  It is not intuitive to know which is the more rigorous.  Calling the various forms "Type A", "Type B", "Type C" may be more clear.
* Clarify the terminology for “design review” for better understanding of the public; for example sometimes the term "design review" has been used to describe the three types of review, while other times the term "design review" has referred only to the form of design review that isn't ADR or SDR.
* A 4th level of design review is needed, one that goes beyond the single parcel to consider cumulative neighborhood impacts.   This might be termed EDR - Enhanced Design Review, meaning Ordinary (traditional) Design Review with additional holistic considerations.

**Design Review Boards**

* Given the heavy workload and increased development, the boards need to be expanded.
* Initiate a process of familiarization between design board members and the community, such as having the "community" representative on the DRB advertise availability to visit community organizations periodically.

We are eager to help facilitate public dialog on this matter and collaborate with DPD to improve the DR Program and implement more effective community engagement. Please keep the GCC informed of DPD’s plans for public outreach and do not hesitate to contact myself if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Joel Darnell

Land Use Chair, Greenwood Community Council

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<http://greenwoodcommunitycouncil.org/>