

DESIGN REVIEW TESTIMONY:

Overview and Talking Points for 11/18 Budget Hearing

Testimony Details:

- *This is the LAST of three public hearings at the Select Budget Committee before the Select Budget Committee votes on the package to bring before full Council. This includes amendments.*
- *The hearing will be at the [Select Budget Committee THR, 11/18 at 9:30 AM](#).*
 - *If you are giving testimony, sign ups open at 7:30 AM, 2 hours before the session. Use [this link](#) to register.*
- *Here is a link to the Statement of Legislative Intent itself (see item "SDCI-004-A-001"):*
<http://seattle.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5218526&GUID=C12B3613-7B05-466E-892B-6FA6CCFA85BE>

Design Review ("DR") Statement of Legislative Intent ("SLI") Details:

- The SLI directs the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections ("SDCI") to convene a stakeholder group and provide a report to Council on the Design Review Program Outcomes.
 - It is our hope that this will provide the support and traction needed for legislation to reform Design Review to be more inclusive, efficient, predictable, and consistent.
- The proposed report would have two primary parts that would inform *recommendations for how Design Review could be modified to address the findings of the stakeholder group*:
 - A Racial Equity Toolkit analysis on DR participation (whether DR creates barriers to participation and whether it reinforces racial exclusion)
 - An analysis of: a.) program outcomes since 2017, b.) program departures and how often they are granted, c.) whether the program increases housing costs, and d.) national best practices for Design Review programs with a significant public component.
- The SLI is sponsored by Councilmember Strauss and co-sponsored by Councilmembers Morales and González. We also believe that there is strong support from several other Councilmembers. It is important we share our support so that they can confidently move this SLI forward!

Talking Points:

(S4E Recommendations page is [here](#) for more background info on Design Review)

- ***I support the Statement of Legislative Intent for SDCI to study program outcomes, process improvements, and equity within Seattle's Design Review process.***
- Seattle's Design Review process is broken; it's time to fix it.

- **SDCI's analysis should happen in close coordination with a group of diverse organizational and community stakeholders.** A truly broad group of stakeholders is best equipped to find the right set of solutions to keep the helpful parts of Design Review intact while boldly reforming the parts that are not working, are unnecessary, or exclusionary.
 - The city made changes in 2017 that didn't go far enough or weren't fully implemented.
- **Inclusion.** We should ensure that Design Review is welcoming and inclusive to those from diverse racial, gender, socioeconomic, professional, and housing backgrounds (i.e. renters & homeowners) at all levels, including applicants, board members, and public participants.
- **The racial equity toolkit analysis is critical** to understand how the program might reinforce racial exclusion or create barriers to participation.
 - In some cases, Design Review has become a tool that favors current landowners over the broader community.
 - Design Review can be misused as a tool to stop or slow development rather than encourage good design.
 - 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.*
 - Design review doesn't allow future residents to participate and ignores the very people that would benefit from new homes.
- **Affordable Housing.** We should fully understand the link between housing affordability and Seattle's Design Review. If it has become a barrier to urgently needed affordable housing, the program must be reformed to be more efficient and predictable.
- **Best Practices.** Other cities have more effective Design Review processes than Seattle. We should learn from our neighbors and implement solutions that are right for us.
- **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.
 - Currently, Design Review is not set up to prioritize highly sustainable projects.
- ***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.***