

**FROM PROCESS TO PRODUCT:
AN ANALYSIS OF SEATTLE'S DESIGN REVIEW PROGRAM**

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ABSTRACT

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As Seattle continues to boom, the city is experiencing significant pressures to densify and grow to accommodate new residents and businesses. Seattle's Design Review Program reviews many of these new developments through an extensive public process with guidance from City staff, appointed board members, and other sources. This thesis explores the effectiveness of the Design Review Program in meeting its goals of encouraging quality projects, allowing for flexibility, and engaging the community. In order to do this, a comprehensive case study approach was taken to examine the way in which various influencing factors affect how building designs change as applicants move through the process. A thorough analysis of public comments, Design Review Board deliberations, submitted project design materials, local media articles, and planner interviews revealed an unpredictable process that is often confusing to navigate, particularly for community members, and is burdensome on applicants. While the existing system has its merits, it is clear that inefficiencies exist and that there are some possible solutions, though they may be difficult to implement.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The City of Seattle has a development review process—the Design Review Program—that requires certain new construction projects to “undergo a discretionary review¹ of siting and design characteristics.”² It is administered by the Department of Construction and Inspections (DCI), formerly part of the Department of Planning and Development, which was split into DCI and the Office of Planning and Community Development in early 2016. The Design Review Program began in 1994 and has reviewed over 1,500 projects to date. Design Review Program planners and appointed Design Review Board members review developments by analyzing building appearance, adjacent sites, site conditions, pedestrian and vehicular access, materials, open space, and landscaping, ultimately deciding whether projects adhere to municipal and neighborhood design guidelines.³ Design review is a component of the Master Use Permit (MUP) application in that it is required for many new developments before they can receive construction permits. Projects that go through the Full Design Review process (see Figure 2 in Methods) have a required public outreach process, which includes at least two formal opportunities for public comment and involvement. At these meetings, projects are presented by their developers and architects—the applicants—to one of the seven geographically-assigned Design Review Boards and members of the public. Figure 1 below shows how an applicant would move through the design review process from pre-application to issuance of the MUP.

¹ Discretionary review in this case means project approval is up to the discretion of the City of Seattle and the Design Review Boards, not that choosing to participate in the review is up to the discretion of the applicant. Unless otherwise noted, this is the definition used throughout this document.

² “Tip 238. Design Review: General Information, Application Instructions, and Submittal Requirements.” City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, 2016.

³ “Design Review.” City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, 2016.

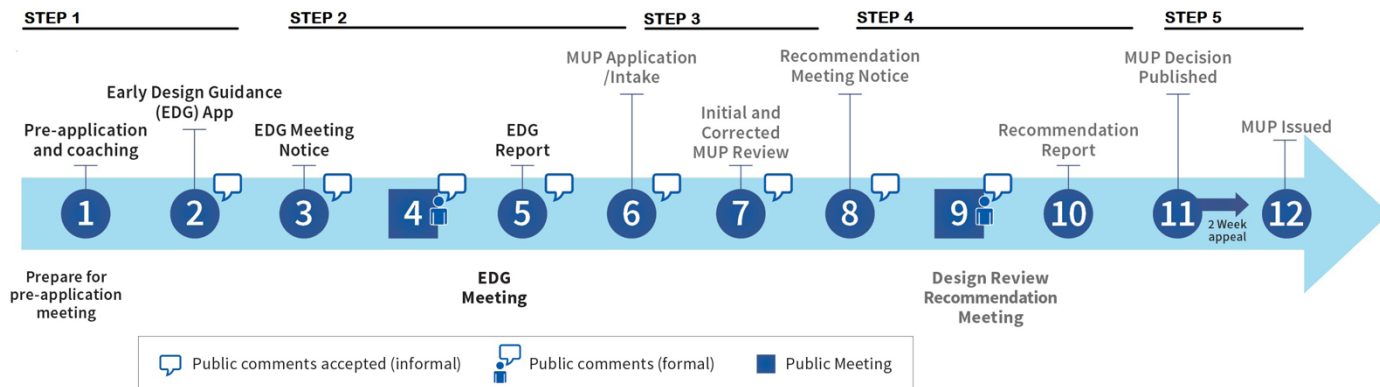


Figure 1: The Design Review Process Chart, showing the steps of Full Design Review in Seattle. Note the two formal meetings where public comments are permitted; Source: City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, 2016.

According to the City of Seattle, design review is meant to “provide a forum through which neighborhoods, developers, architects, and City staff can work together to ensure that new developments contribute positively to Seattle’s neighborhoods.”⁴

They go on to list three principal objectives of design review:

1. To encourage excellence in site planning and design of projects such that they enhance the character of the City,
2. To provide flexibility in the application of development standards, and
3. To improve communication and participation among developers, neighbors, and the City early in the design and siting of new development.⁵

Design guidelines, established by the City of Seattle, are meant to provide “greater predictability to designers, developers, and community members” and create consistency in decision making.⁶ Many neighborhoods have adopted extensions of these guidelines to cater the more generic guidelines to specific neighborhood styles and contexts, including the establishment of overlay or preservation districts.

⁴ “Tip 238”, City of Seattle.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Design review has become a contentious issue in Seattle as the city continues to grow and experience a construction boom; in 2014, Seattle’s population grew by almost 15,000 people—a 2.3% growth rate—and companies like Amazon, Facebook, and Expedia continue to expand their presence in the area, increasing the demand for housing and office space.⁷ Design review is meant to manage some negative externalities of development and built form- in this case, buildings that aren’t in keeping with design guidelines or that are rejected by the community. However, growth still has negative connotations among many members of the community, particularly when increased density is concerned, and densification is inevitable if growth continues to occur within city boundaries. Much of the negativity associated with the relentless pace of growth has been absorbed by the design review process, as Design Review Board meetings are the most frequent type of public meetings the City of Seattle holds.⁸ At one point, the “majority” of public comments at board meetings were supposedly not design-related, and instead focused on issues like zoning, parking, and affordability.⁹ Planners have begun guiding comments as much as possible during meetings, with the intent that comments will be more constructive and related to design. More anecdotally, many have accused the style of new construction in Seattle of being unattractive, out of context, or out of scale, perhaps indicating a disconnect between what the Design Review Program *intends* to achieve and what it *actually* achieves.¹⁰

Whether the Design Review Program works well or works poorly has a major effect on how people experience Seattle and the relationship they have with their

⁷ Gene Balk. "Seattle No Longer America's Fastest-growing Big City." *The Seattle Times*. 21 May 2015. <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/seattle-no-longer-americas-fastest-growing-big-city/>.

⁸ Lisa Rutzick and Magda Hogness. Personal Interview. 26 Feb. 2016.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ethan Phelps-Goodman. Personal interview. 26 Feb. 2016.

surroundings, the municipal government, their neighbors, and developers. Design review is important because it has a direct relationship to how Seattle grows and develops both aesthetically and contextually. *This thesis is intended to explore the effects of the Design Review Program by looking at how the process ultimately affects building design; by examining the process, one might find clues as to how effective it is in meeting the goals of design review and how it contributes positively to the built form of Seattle.* Specifically, this thesis will examine how each step and influencing factors in the review process affect the evolution of project design over time. It is not intended to be a critique of architectural results, however, as that is outside the realm of urban planning and can become highly subjective. Rather, it will look at how designs change from the Early Design Guidance stage to final construction, and how factors like public and board comments influence those changes. *Finally, this document will draw conclusions and make broader recommendations for how the design review process can be improved or modified to better meet its goals, based on analysis of the factors that influence how design review progresses.* It has the potential to inform how we approach design review in Seattle—including educating city staff, developers and the public—due to the specific ways in which it measures performance of the current system, using other approaches as comparisons.

Current Context

On March 9, 2016, the City of Seattle released a draft of its proposed Design Review Improvements. Related to the Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA), an advisory group recommended the proposed changes to “improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the design review process.”¹¹ A primary goal of these

¹¹ “Design Review: Department Recommended Program Improvements for Public Review, Draft.” City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, March 2016.

changes was to avoid design review further increasing the cost of housing due to significant burdens placed on developers, particularly for smaller projects. The proposed changes increase the threshold of projects that must go through Full Design Review and were based on feedback from a design review advisory group—consisting of 16 architects, developers, and community members—and public comments from meetings and surveys.¹² Efficiency in this case means that fewer projects would have to go through Full Design Review, reducing the overall burden on applicants and speeding up the review process of many small- to mid-sized projects. It would also reduce the number of Design Review Boards from seven to five, which some argue could possibly split neighborhoods in the name of efficiency.¹³

As of April 6, the City Council put the review of the proposed improvements on hold—possibly until early 2018—due to internal Council disagreements, but more significantly because of larger looming issues that could ultimately affect design review, like HALA related rezones and the City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan.¹⁴ As of the writing of this document, though, the Council may still review the changes as early as September 2016, revealing internal uncertainties.¹⁵ Though the politics of this decision—and the proposed improvements themselves—are not central to this paper, they are worth mentioning to show the controversies associated with design review and that they help show the full picture of an ever-evolving issue.

¹² “Draft Program Improvements”, City of Seattle.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Erica C. Barnett. “Council Could Delay Design Review Changes a Year or More.” *The C is for Crank*. 8 April 2016. <https://thecisforcrank.com/2016/04/08/design-review-changes-could-be-put-off-for-year-or-more/>.

¹⁵ “Draft Program Improvements”, City of Seattle.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review was intended to provide some general background on how other cities and academics approach and understand design review, though more specific “city cases” are discussed in later in this report. This section primarily drew from recent peer-reviewed research to explore the role of reviewers in the process and various strategies they employed. It was meant to engage on design review as a concept, noting its efficacy and limitations, and explore best practices for design review.

Kim + Forester: Design Reviewer Interviews Study

Joongsub Kim and John Forester published a broad-reaching study on design review in 13 major cities in 2012, including Seattle, Cincinnati, San Francisco, Miami, and Los Angeles. They conducted interviews with design reviewers, typically city staff that were tasked with supporting the various design review processes. Kim and Forester found four overlapping roles of design reviewers: as educators, as facilitators, as therapists, and as “ritual conveners.”¹⁶ By looking at these four roles and the processes themselves, they began to see the effectiveness behind certain strategies and ways in which the design process evolved.

As educators, design reviewers often mentioned attempting to resolve potential issues ahead of time, like Cincinnati's pre-hearing meeting and Seattle's pre-submittal meeting.¹⁷ By taking these preventive measures, reviewers were often able to prevent major appeals, court processes, and prevent expensive overhauls to near-complete

¹⁶ Joongsub Kim and John Forester. "How Design Review Staff do Far More than Regulate." *Urban Design International* 17.3 (2012): 239-52.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 241.

designs. By getting designers engaged early, it was easier to change the direction of the project if needed, which built trust and “helped psychologically.”¹⁸ As facilitators, reviewers stressed the importance of objectivity and sticking to the process, but promoting alternative ideas where possible.¹⁹ As therapists, reviewers often pushed applicants to reach out to neighborhood residents as preventative “psychotherapy”, as a planner in Los Angeles described.²⁰ Kim and Forester found that actively reaching out to the community generally allowed for the easing of tensions and more trust. Lastly, as ritual conveners, reviewers saw themselves as building relationships and spreading ideas to the greater community, resolving problems collaboratively. By playing these four roles—though not necessarily simultaneously—planners found they were able to build trust and ease tensions among stakeholders, allowing the review process to be more successful. The researchers, however, did not speculate how each role began to affect the designs of projects or how the various roles played into the review process timeline.

Punter: Best Practice Principles for Design Review

In 2007, John Punter, an urban design researcher from Wales, developed a set of 12 best practice principles for design review based on multiple critiques of design review. In the study, he described each of the best practices, though because the study was lengthy, I attempted to narrow down the most relevant points to this thesis here.

Punter noted that zoning was strongly connected to design, but historically zoning excluded design altogether, and still suffers from being complex and varying in effectiveness.²¹ He believed that zoning could “be adapted to be a much more flexible

¹⁸ Kim and Forester, “Design Review Staff”, 243.

¹⁹ Ibid., 245.

²⁰ Ibid., 246.

²¹ John Punter. “Developing Urban Design as Public Policy: Best Practice Principles for Design Review and Development Management.” *Journal of Urban Design* 12.2 (2007): 177.

and design-sensitive instrument”,²² such as more prescriptive, urban transect-based zoning that could begin to connect the two.²³ This type of zoning, which includes requirements like build-to lines and has specific standards for building form, has been adopted by many cities or neighborhoods as “Smart Codes” or form-based codes. To add, he claimed that prescriptive zoning could be “potentially much more socially and functionally inclusive than standard zoning”, but that it could go awry if private systems attempted to take too much control (as was happening in the New Urbanist movement at the time).²⁴ He also warned that cities needed to distinguish between what was mandatory and what was simply guidance to avoid confusion amongst the public and developers.²⁵

Much of the rest of Punter’s study focused on the effectiveness of design review, which included some recommendations. He generally felt positive about design review programs, saying that they “weren’t always effective” but that they encouraged flexibility and played a crucial role in getting design to be an accepted part of development.²⁶ However, he warned that when design review is a separate part of the permitting process, the dangers of “expensive redesigns and time delays” were “particularly pronounced.”²⁷ In addition to encouraging pre-application negotiations, he recommended monitoring design outcomes through user assessment of the utility and validity of the process so that the systems are held accountable.²⁸ Lastly, he pointed out that many leaders of design review programs have been resistant to reform—even if they admit they need it—because programs are short-staffed or lacking the skill to

²² Punter, “Best Practices for Design Review”, 177.

²³ *Ibid.*, 180.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 190.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 191.

implement a higher-quality program.²⁹ Punter's research on design review is widely cited and has been very comprehensive, spanning several longitudinal studies, which lends validity to his claims above.

Lessons Learned

It is clear that certain strategies are more successful in gaining the trust of the community and achieving higher-quality built outcome. Particular strategies, such as pre-application conferences, seem to be especially effective in creating more efficient design review programs and getting developers on board with the process. Despite the general knowledge of best practices, the likelihood of cities adopting all or some of them is dependent on limited staff time and ability, preventing many cities from having better design review processes. It is also clear that there is often a disconnect between design review and other policies or practices, such as zoning and community input.

²⁹ Punter, "Best Practices for Design Review", 191.

III. METHODS

Using the literature review as background information, I decided to use a two-pronged case study approach to analyze Seattle’s Design Review Program, with personal interviews to support those cases.

City Cases

As an expansion of my more general literature review, I researched the design/development review processes of three cities in greater detail, using peer-reviewed literature, news media articles, and information from their planning departments (including zoning codes, program structures, and mission statements). I believed looking at how other cities approach design review and which factors in those places shape building design helped provide perspective when discussing the process in Seattle. The review was not intended to compare the successes and failures of each program, but rather to set up the more specific analysis of Seattle’s system and provide a basis for comparison when I began to draw conclusions and make recommendations. It was important not to look at Seattle’s program in complete isolation since there were likely positives and negatives from each program to learn from, and the three cases could reveal general trends in how design review is approached. The different cases—Portland, Vancouver, and Miami—also were relatively unique cases with a significant amount of information available about them, and could reveal insights on a more individual level.

Project Case Studies

In order to take a thorough look at the design review process from start to finish, I analyzed four projects in detail using a case study approach, described below. These

projects helped to inform conclusions presented in this paper, but are by no means fully representative of the design review process or development results as a whole. They are intended to point out some of the nuances of design review at the project level while also showing trends at a broader scale, revealing information both individually and collectively. Ultimately, the four projects were used to show how the various stages of review affect building design over time, which would be difficult to illustrate in a more general sense. I believed using case studies would allow me to do detailed research about particular projects using multiple sources of evidence—rather than examining all of the possible projects at a high level—which could reveal trends or issues more intimately and qualitatively.

Many projects go through design review every year in Seattle, ranging from small townhome sites to massive skyscrapers and most everything in between. In order to narrow down the projects analyzed in this report to four—and make them easier to compare against each other—I created a sampling criteria list:

1. *Fully completed in the past year (2015 or 2016)*. This ensured that they were likely the projects that most recently went through design review from start to finish. Due to the approvals and construction timeline, many projects completed in the past year began design review in late 2012 or early 2013. If a project is fully constructed, it allows for direct comparison between final renderings and what exists on the ground, and conclusions may begin to be drawn about the effectiveness or quality of the project.
2. *Mid-rise, typically 4-7 stories*. These projects can occur in a variety of zones, such as Neighborhood Commercial or Lowrise Residential 3, and are required to go through Full Design Review as per the Design Review Thresholds, shown in

Figure 2 below. This was done to compare projects similar in scale, lot size, and thresholds, removing unnecessary complexities.

Chart A: Design Review Thresholds for new multifamily, commercial or industrial development that exceeds the following thresholds	
ZONE	THRESHOLD
Lowrise 2 (LR2) & Lowrise 3 (LR3)	More than 8 dwelling units or 4,000 sq. ft. of non-residential space
Midrise (MR) & Highrise (HR)	More than 20 dwelling units or 4,000 sq. ft. of non-residential space
Neighborhood Commercial 1, 2 & 3 (NC1, NC2 & NC3)	More than 4 dwelling units or 4,000 sq. ft. of non-residential space

Figure 2: A portion of the Design Review Thresholds that would require a project to go through Full Design Review, selected to show thresholds that would apply to the sampling criteria; Source: City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, 2016.

3. *Different applicants*, in order to see how different firms and designers approached the process in terms of working with the board, conducting public outreach, and creating design iterations.
4. *Within the East Board boundaries*, which includes Capitol Hill, the Pike/Pine corridor, the Central District, First Hill, and Montlake. This ensured that projects had some geographic variation without being too dissimilar, providing some basis for comparison. The East Board governs a wide-ranging zone in terms of existing architectural character, neighborhood demographics, zoning, and overlays, acting in some ways as a microcosm of Seattle as a whole. Further, the projects selected within the East Board boundaries had some geographic variation within the zone to inform the effects of inter-district politics and differences. The selection of the East Board was done to further narrow down the number of possible projects while still ensuring a somewhat representative sample. Due to previous exposure to East Board projects from Manish Chalana’s Pike/Pine Studio in Autumn 2015, this selection was a natural, more familiar fit.

The City of Seattle is divided into seven Design Review Boards based on geography, including a downtown board that mostly reviews high rises. The East Board is the second-smallest board in terms of area, but due to the density of some of the neighborhoods it serves, it has a significant amount of pending projects at any given time, and as of June 2016 had the most active projects by a small margin.³⁰ However, each board has dense neighborhood centers, so they all see similar projects in terms of scale, zoning, and design, making it possible to apply findings from the East Board studies to the entire Design Review Program.

5. *Varied project aspects/types of construction* in order to illustrate how additional complexities could alter the projects. These go beyond new construction alone to include façade preservation (as seen in the Pike/Pine Conservation Overlay District), new construction plus the renovation of an existing structure, or affordable vs. market rate housing. This category is meant to show differences between how certain types of projects were perceived by the community and what standards they were held to by the Design Review Board.
6. *Varied levels of scrutiny*, meaning that some went through the standard design review process and some went through additional meetings due to public or board pushback. This helped illustrate if certain safeguards built into the design review process were effective and could help show why certain projects were subject to additional scrutiny or controversy.

To analyze and begin drawing conclusions from the case studies, I set up a descriptive framework which consisted of the influencing factors in design review. This framework ensured that each case study would discuss the same topics, creating consistency across comparisons. I created this framework based on impressions about

³⁰ Ethan Phelps-Goodman, "Seattle in Progress."

the process I received from initial interviews, reading official City of Seattle documents on the Design Review Program (such as the timeline in Figure 1), and guidance from my thesis committee. The factors in the framework were:

1. *Planner input*, which generally comes behind the scenes with one-one-one meetings with the applicant, such as the pre-submittal conference. Planners play an “integral role” in advancing the design through the process, working with the applicant to “evolve the designs to meet design guidelines, public comments, and board feedback.”³¹ Besides leading the applicant through the process, planners facilitate board meetings, explain land use code and design guidelines to the applicant and the public, and act as support for the board, all while bringing in their experiences from past projects.³² Unfortunately, it was often difficult to note when planners supplied additional input outside of general advisory or process information unless it was specifically mentioned in meeting minutes or other documents.
2. *Board comments and recommendations*, which ultimately dictate whether a project can move forward in the process. Board members work within design guidelines and incorporate public comments in order to reach conclusions in their review; they also base their comments on the applicant’s presentation and materials provided.³³ ³⁴ Despite their influence, the boards spend much less time with projects than the assigned planner does, and must rely on submitted materials, the applicant’s presentation, and the neighborhood design guidelines to make their decisions.³⁵ ³⁶

³¹ Lisa Rutzick. Personal Interview. 30 April 2016.

³² “Design Review”, City of Seattle.

³³ Rutzick, Personal interview.

³⁴ “Tip 238”, City of Seattle.

³⁵ Rutzick and Hogness, Personal interview.

³⁶ Katherine Idziorek. Personal Interview. 23 Feb. 2016

3. *Public comments*, whether at public meetings (formal) or letters submitted online or in person throughout the process (informal). The design review process chart shown in the introduction (Figure 1) displays when and how public comments are accepted.
4. *The role of the applicant*, which includes presenting at public meetings and conferences with planners, compiling materials, and additional public outreach.
5. *The role of outside forces* like the media and neighborhood activist or preservation groups. These groups can submit formal and informal comments (discussed in #3) but can also dictate the direction of policies at a neighborhood or citywide scale. The media can play a role in getting the word out about Design Review Board meetings and can also galvanize public support or opposition for projects.
6. *Project timeline*. The timeline stretches from pre-application to initial design submittal to project completion, allowing for before/after comparisons or showing transitions over time. Each case study was written in chronological order to show changes as the process unfolded. Renderings and photography were used to illustrate these changes, including montages of each project over time.

Information satisfying each piece of the framework was taken from project materials, meeting minutes, and permitting records kept by the City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (at the time Department of Design and Planning), which includes Design Review Program materials like applicant-supplied design packets. Packets and meeting summaries were analyzed over the timeline of the project, with changes to the design and design materials noted. Public comments were also scrutinized to see if the board took those comments into account when approving or denying projects. Additional information was gleaned from interviews (see below)

and local blogs, such as Capitol Hill Seattle Blog, which discusses East Board development in great detail.

Using the framework, I then began to generalize from the case studies in order to draw conclusions about the role of each in design review. The conclusions drawn begin to answer the question of how design review causes projects to evolve over time and can begin to inform recommendations to improving the process, if necessary.

For the purposes of simplicity, economic trends were not included in this framework. Though economics is important in that it influences project timelines and feasibility, the focus of this paper is not on real estate viability or economic cycles, but on design outcomes as a result of the review process.

Interviews

Interviewing people involved at different stages of the design review process helped provide a fuller picture of what happens on the ground. Planners, developers, architects, board members, and the public all have influence during the process. They all carry their individual experiences and biases with them, allowing for a qualitative research approach in an otherwise analytical exercise. These interviews were devised to supplement information gleaned from project documents and the City of Seattle, and helped make sense of some of the more bureaucratic intricacies of the process. They also helped to inform the pieces of the case study framework.

I chose to interview Lisa Rutzick and Magda Hogness from the City of Seattle's Department of Construction and Inspections, both of whom work directly with the Design Review Program, because they would be able to speak directly about the role of

planners and design review staff. Lisa is the Program Manager and Magda is a planner who is assigned to specific projects from start to end. They were able to explain how planners play a role in the greater design review process and pointed me in the direction of City of Seattle resources, like public comment logs and permitting information. Interviewing them helped make some sense of the prolonged process that is design review; they explained the City's reasoning behind some of the steps to project approval.

I also interviewed Ethan Phelps-Goodman, who started the website *Seattle in Progress*, a tool that maps all pending projects in Seattle that are facing design review or have been approved. Users can click on a pinpoint which takes them to a description of the project, with links to materials submitted by developers (such as an Early Design Guidance packet). The City of Seattle borrowed heavily from Ethan's idea to create their own version on the DCI website. I also spoke with Ethan because of his perspective as a quasi-outsider in the development process, but also because I knew he would speak candidly about development and urbanism. As a member of the public with some connections to developers, Ethan was able to explain some of the nuances of design review from the perspective of a potential applicant.

Lastly, I discussed the design review process with Katherine Idziorek, who serves on the West Design Review Board, is an Urban Designer at VIA Architecture, and is an Affiliate Instructor at the University of Washington who taught my Graphic Communications class. Katie acted as an advisor for me early in the process and helped me find various contacts and resources, including Lisa and Magda. I chose to speak with her because of her extensive experience both as a board member and as a designer in the private sector.

IV. CITY CASES

The following city cases were meant to provide some general, brief background on how other cities approach design review and illustrate the various factors that affect building outcomes, including how city staff, the public, and developers work to shape the design evolution.

City of Vancouver

The City of Vancouver, British Columbia has an Urban Design Panel which was created by the City Council in 1973.³⁷ The citywide Urban Design Panel consists of at least 13 members who are appointed by the council, made up of architects, landscape architects, planners, engineers, developers, and artists.³⁸ The panel advises the City Council on major development decisions, rezoning applications, and “other projects of public interest”, and works with the Council and Planning Commission to create urban design policy.³⁹ They do not officially approve or refuse projects or make official policy decisions; they simply advise the Council. Urban Design Panel input also can affect decisions made by the Development Permit Board, which does have the authority to approve or deny developments.⁴⁰ The DPB reviews projects that “may have a significant impact on their surroundings” due to scale or controversy.⁴¹ While DPB meetings allow public comment, UDP meetings—though open to the public—do not afford that

³⁷ John Punter. "From Design Advice to Peer Review: The Role of the Urban Design Panel in Vancouver." *Journal of Urban Design* 8.2 (2003): 114.

³⁸ "Urban Design Panel." City of Vancouver. 2016. <http://vancouver.ca/your-government/urban-design-panel.aspx>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Bruce Haden. "Urban Design Panels in British Columbia: An Insiders View." *Canadian Architect: The National Review of Design and Practice*. 1 Feb. 2005. <https://www.canadianarchitect.com/features/urban-design-panels-in-british-columbia-an-insiders-view/>.

⁴¹ "Development Permit Board." City of Vancouver. 2016. <http://vancouver.ca/home-property-development/development-permit-board.aspx>.

opportunity. In order to influence building design, members of the public must follow their project and submit comments according to the type of project process, since UDP focuses more on zoning and the Comprehensive Plan.⁴² At UDP meetings, applicants may clarify elements of their plan and must submit project materials, but unlike Seattle, they are not required to hold formal presentations to the public or board members.⁴³ The process is highly controlled, yet any outreach to the public in this stage is optional.

According to 2003 research by John Punter, Vancouver has been fairly successful in creating an effective model that encourages quality design. He gave five reasons, summarized here, for the success of the Urban Design Panel:

1. The panel sees designs “at a formative stage in their development”,
2. It avoids the biases associated with city staff or planners simply approving projects,
3. The interdisciplinary composition of the panel provides a well-rounded perspective,
4. It allows buy-in from the professional design community since the guidelines are open-ended enough to not be too “prescriptive”, and...
5. It is accountable and transparent since meetings are open, minutes are published, and it consists of multiple stakeholders.⁴⁴

Punter acknowledged the skeptic’s view that the panel’s opinions might differ from those of the general public or if the panel actually makes designs better. He did note that as the process progressed, projects that were initially not well-received gained increased buy-in from the panel and the public. Bruce Haden, at the time the present Chair of the UDP, said that the way the system was (and is) set up allowed for

⁴² “Urban Design Panel”, City of Vancouver.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Punter, “Urban Design in Vancouver.”

conflict of interest and that the panel was often a “hurdle” in the development process.⁴⁵ Despite those concerns, Haden was generally positive about the role of the panel, citing the general improvement of projects from idea conception to construction as they traveled through the “wringer” of the panel meetings.⁴⁶

City of Portland

Portland, Oregon has a complex design review process which requires review for all development within designated Design Districts and in overlay zones. Smaller proposals generally undergo less intense “Type II” review from planning staff, while larger or more complex projects undergo a more intense “Type III” review from the Portland Design Commission, which includes a pre-application conference with a city planner.⁴⁷ The Design Commission consists of seven appointed members from various design professions; one of the seven must represent the “public-at-large.”⁴⁸ The Commission gets the final say in Type III projects, but does not rule on historic preservation or conservation district projects. Appealed decisions are brought directly to the City Council. Some projects have to undergo an additional “Neighborhood Contact” process, which requires developers in certain residential and overlay zones to write letters to neighborhood associations and attend a neighborhood meeting.⁴⁹ This additional step is intended to get the developer to pursue a “collaborative approach”, though feedback from the neighborhood is not legally binding.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Haden, “An Insiders View.”

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ “Design Review Application Process.” City of Portland Bureau of Development Services. 23 Feb. 2016. <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bds/index.cfm?a=71941>.

⁴⁸ “Design Commission.” City of Portland Bureau of Development Services. 2016. <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bds/article/168799>.

⁴⁹ “Required Neighborhood Contact.” City of Portland Bureau of Development Services. 5 Sept. 2014. <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bds/index.cfm?a=71923>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Portland is experiencing a building boom—though not on the scale of Seattle’s—that affects how many in the city perceive development and contemporary design. Because of this boom, and increased pushback from neighborhood activists who believe growth might be slowed by increasing regulations, the Design Commission recently proposed expanding design review to the entire city.⁵¹ This would involve significant hiring of new reviewers as well as an overhaul of Community Design Standards, which would act in place of design review in some instances.⁵² While the author of this report, Nathan Day (an architect in Portland), was skeptical of the feasibility of the proposed changes, he did note the relative success Portland has achieved in “positively affecting [their] built environment.”⁵³

City of Miami

Miami, Florida is rare among cities in the United States because it completely scrapped its traditional zoning code in 2010 for a form-based code, called Miami 21. The City of Miami defines form-based code as “a method of regulating development to achieve a specific urban form... [creating] a predictable public realm by controlling physical form of private development.”⁵⁴ Form-based codes are intended to be more predictable for developers and easier for the public to interpret because they more specifically mandate the desired—and allowed—types and forms of development than traditional zoning. Even though Miami 21 is much more prescriptive than traditional zoning and design guidelines, some projects still go through a design review process, led by the Urban Development Review Board. However, these are generally required for projects that are over 200,000 sq. ft.; other projects may be referred to the board if they

⁵¹ Nathan Day. “Reviewing Design Review.” Portland Architecture. 13 April 2015.

<http://chatterbox.typepad.com/portlandarchitecture/2015/04/reviewing-design-review.html>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ “Types of Zoning Codes.” City of Miami. 2016. <http://www.miami21.org/TypesofZoningCodes.asp>.

request major waivers, interesting architectural features like murals, or if the Director of Planning deems it necessary.⁵⁵ Applicants are responsible for preparing and submitting project documents and must attend the meeting. The board then can approve or deny a project and submits the results to the Planning Director for final review.⁵⁶

Though not free from controversy in its initial stages—or recent attempts at watering down the code—Miami’s program is unique among American cities because of its early adoption of form-based codes and that major development review is limited to only the largest projects. If a project adheres to the regulations set forth in Miami 21, the project is approved without having to go through “layers of time-consuming and unpredictable discretionary reviews.”⁵⁷ However, replacing an entire zoning code from scratch is incredibly time-consuming on the back end and requires a huge amount of resources and public outreach; the City of Miami estimates that over 500 meetings were held about Miami 21, which included several rounds of public meetings in every neighborhood in the city.⁵⁸ Miami has been quite successful in implementation, garnering the attention of planners nationwide for its award-winning approach to connecting zoning and built form.

Lessons Learned

Design review is a contentious process in many cities, not just Seattle. Despite the various approaches, not one is entirely free from controversy or complications. The above cases do not go into specifics about how stages of the process affect building

⁵⁵ “Urban Development Review Board Application.” City of Miami Planning and Zoning Department. 4 April 2016. www.miamigov.com/planning/docs/boards/2016/UDRB%20APPLICATION%20060315pg.pdf.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ “Miami 21.” Form Based Codes Institute. 2015. <http://formbasedcodes.org/codes/miami-21/>.

⁵⁸ “Miami 21 Public Meetings.” City of Miami. 2016. http://www.miami21.org/Public_Meetings_ZoningCode.asp.

design, but they do demonstrate some of the positive and negative qualities of various approaches to design review. If anything, the examples show that there may be no completely “correct” way to approach design review. Table 1 below shows information about the three cities and how Seattle’s Design Review Program compares in terms of how review is performed, who makes review decisions, and how zoning is taken into account. If anything, these cases show that other cities have equally complex systems with vastly varied processes for public input, project approval, and how zoning and design review are intertwined. Certain examples seem to be particularly effective, including Portland’s Neighborhood Contact process—getting everyone on board early—and Miami’s expedited review process due to its more prescriptive zoning code.

Table 1: Comparisons of each design review process. Source: Scott Cutler.

	Who reviews projects?	Who approves projects?	Public process	Zoning
Vancouver	Urban Design Panel unless project is controversial/large, then also Development Permit Board	City Council and DPB (in some cases)	Online/in-person comment submittal (no in-meeting comments unless they require DPB approval as well)	traditional
Portland	Portland Design Commission	Design Commission, unless appealed to City Council	Neighborhood Contact, public meetings, online submittal	traditional, with overlays that require design review in certain areas
Miami	Urban Development Review Board (only for the largest or most complex projects), otherwise permitting staff	Board plus Planning Director (most projects approved by default)	Limited, except for influence over neighborhood zoning	form-based
Seattle	Design Review Board, Department of Construction and Inspections staff	Design Review Board plus DCI (for MUP approval)	Two required public meetings, online comment submittal	traditional

V. PROJECT CASE STUDIES

Using the criteria explicated in the Methods section, I selected the following four projects to analyze using the aforementioned framework:

1. 1600 E John Street (Anhalt Apartments)

Applicant: Public 47 Architects on behalf of Anhalt Apartment, LLC

Project Type: New construction and renovation of an existing historic structure (a nominated landmark)

Zoning: Lowrise Residential 3 with a Major Institutional Overlay, defined as multifamily residential with a 50 foot height limit,⁵⁹ adjacent to the Group Health Campus

2. 605 15th Ave E (Stream Fifteen)

Applicant: Nicholson Kovalchick Architects on behalf of Mark Angelillo

Project Type: New construction

Zoning: Neighborhood Commercial 2P-40, defined as mid-rise mixed use with pedestrian-focused design and a 40 foot height limit⁶⁰

3. 103 12th Ave (Anthem)

Applicant: Spectrum Development Solutions (Architect: Mithun)

Project Type: New construction, first private development at the Yesler Terrace redevelopment site, mix of market-rate and affordable housing

Zoning: Neighborhood Commercial 3P-65, defined as large-scale mid-rise mixed use with a pedestrian-focused design and a 65 foot height limit⁶¹

⁵⁹ "Seattle's Lowrise Multifamily Zones." City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections. January 2016.

http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/cs/groups/pan/@pan/documents/web_informational/dpds021571.pdf.

⁶⁰ "Seattle's Commercial Zones." City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections. January 2016. http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/cs/groups/pan/@pan/documents/web_informational/dpds021568.pdf.

⁶¹ Ibid.

4. **600 E Pike Street (AVA Capitol Hill)**

Applicant: Ankrom Moisan (architects) on behalf of Avalon Bay Communities

Project Type: New construction with the façade preservation of an auto-row era Mercedes-Benz dealership building

Zoning: Neighborhood Commercial 3P-65 in the Pike Pine Conservation Overlay District, which includes incentives for preserving character structures

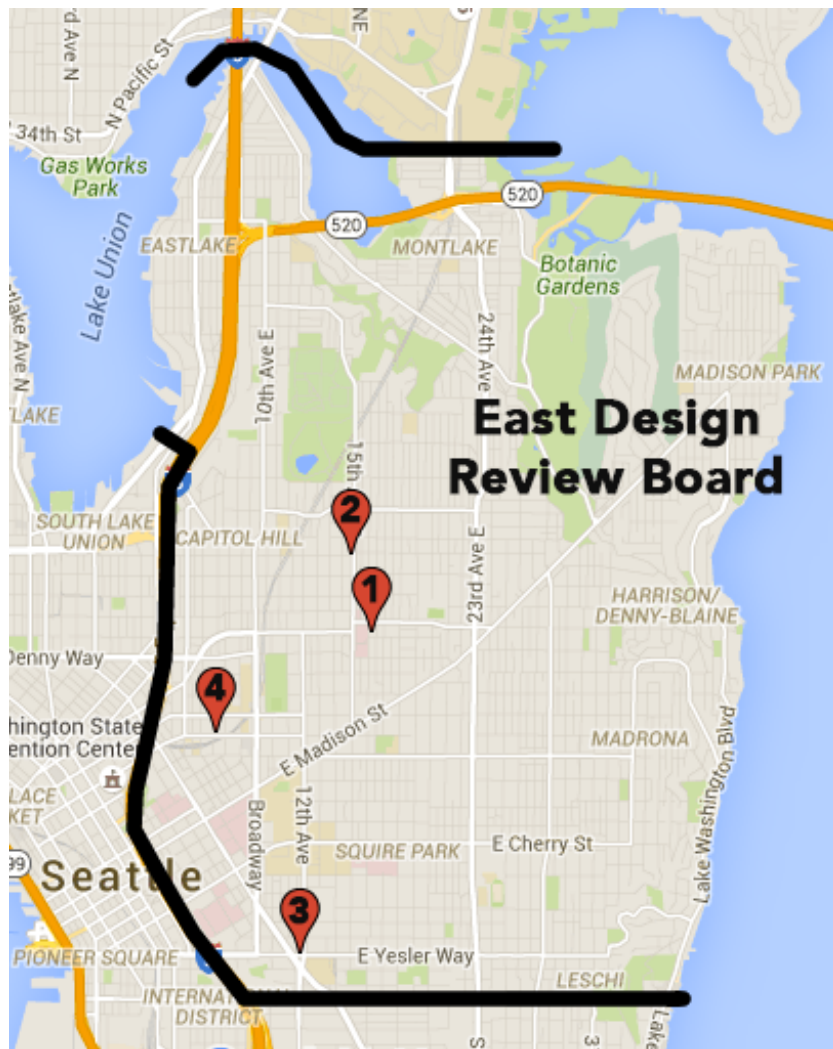


Figure 3: Map of selected case study projects within the East Board boundaries. Source: Scott Cutler.

Case #1: 1600 E John Street (Anhalt Apartments)



Figure 4: The new Anhalt building (on left) and the landmark Anhalt (on right). Source: Scott Cutler.

Located across 16th Ave E from the Group Health Capitol Hill campus, the Anhalt project combined a renovation of a then-nominated (now official) City of Seattle landmark apartment building from 1930 and the new construction of a 4-story apartment building in a more modern aesthetic immediately next door (see Figure 4). While only the new construction was under the purview of design review, project materials were submitted together and construction and renovation occurred simultaneously under the same permit. This project was relatively unique because of the complicating factor of the landmark process and that only part of the project scope was subject to design review. Notably, the new construction contrasts significantly with the

original Tudor Revival apartment building and neighboring brick apartments, which generated significant discussion and pushback from neighbors.

Initial project documents were submitted to the City on January 12, 2012, and the Early Design Guidance Meeting of the East Board was held on October 3, 2012. At the meeting, the applicant, Scot Carr of Public 47 Architects, noted that the proposed building would be designed to contrast with the Anhalt building, but also reference it through features like a larger-than-required courtyard (see Figure 5 below) and the same setbacks from the street.⁶²



Figure 5: Initial rendering of the Anhalt courtyard, with the original structure at left. Source: EDG packet from Public 47 Architects.

Public comments touched on the proposed architectural contrast, citing that the new building “may not fit with the neighborhood context” and that the 4-story height did not fit in with the surrounding 3-story apartment buildings.⁶³ Others were concerned about front setbacks and the bulk of the building better respecting adjacent structures. Materiality was also an issue with one commenter, who wanted to see “masonry and other design treatment

⁶² “Early Design Guidance of the East Design Review Board (Meeting Report for 1600 E John Street).” City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections. 3 October 2012. Accessed from City of Seattle Permit and Property Records: <http://web6.seattle.gov/dpd/edms/>.

⁶³ Ibid.

relate to the historic context.”⁶⁴ Because it was an EDG meeting, materials were not specifically mentioned yet. The rest of the public comments were not overwhelmingly negative and generally provided some direction to the applicant, like landscaping suggestions.

The board responded similarly to concerns of context but agreed with the applicant’s stated design goals of “compatible” design without “mimicking.”⁶⁵ The board was also concerned about the 4-story height, offering the idea to step back the fourth floor, but did not provide any specific instruction. The board’s support for the lack of front setback contrasted with the public’s comment about the need for a setback to allow for light in existing units.⁶⁶ Ultimately, the board recommended the project move forward to the Master Use Permit application stage, with the agreement that their concerns must be addressed in the next round of review. On October 17, 2012, just two weeks after the EDG meeting, the original Anhalt building was approved its Seattle Landmark designation, which protected original features of the building,⁶⁷ like spiral staircases and half-timbering, but allowed for infill on the remaining portion of the site.⁶⁸

In the recommendation meeting, held on April 24, 2013, a group of neighbors living in the buildings to the north of the Anhalt project again stated their concerns about the project based on the updated renderings, specifically focusing on issues of height, inconsistency with the design guidelines, and the proposed large balconies (see

⁶⁴ “EDG Meeting Report: 1600 E John Street”, City of Seattle.

⁶⁵ “Anhalt Renovation + Addition: Early Design Guidance.” Public 47 Architects. October 2012. Accessed from City of Seattle Permit and Property Records: <http://web6.seattle.gov/dpd/edms/>.

⁶⁶ “EDG Meeting Report: 1600 E John Street”, City of Seattle.

⁶⁷ “Landmarks Preservation Board Designation Report on the Anhalt Apartment Building, located at 1600 East John Street.” City of Seattle Office of the City Clerk. 10 July 2013.

⁶⁸ “Anhalt Apartment Building.” *Historic Seattle*. 17 June 2015. <http://historicseattle.org/anhalt-apartment-building/>.

Figure 6). The group claimed in their submitted letter that the updated proposal was “exactly the same” as the EDG proposal and cited frustration that the applicant did not incorporate more of the board’s recommendations, or recommendations from the public, specifically their group.⁶⁹ Additional public comments echoed those in the EDG meeting, though some had a positive outlook. Though not part of the official process, commenters on Capitol Hill Seattle Blog were mixed on the appeal of the updated project, some claiming the project lacked creativity and noted the clashing architecture, while others applauded the differences and increased density in the neighborhood.⁷⁰



Figure 6: An elevation rendering from the recommendation meeting, showing the height differences between the proposed building and its surroundings. Source: Recommendation packet from Public 47 Architects.

Ultimately, the board recommended the project to move forward, including all of the departures, one of which was the controversial lack of front setback. This move was an apparent contrast from some positions the board took in the EDG meeting, including shifting their support for balconies after hearing the applicant’s argument in more detail.⁷¹ Many of the board comments shifted from cautious to complementary,

⁶⁹ Public Comment Letter on 1600 E John Street. 19 April 2013. Accessed from City of Seattle Permit and Property Records: <http://web6.seattle.gov/dpd/edms/>.

⁷⁰ Justin Carder. “Capitol Hill development melds landmark Anhalt with modern apartments.” *Capitol Hill Seattle Blog*. 22 September 2013. <http://www.capitolhillseattle.com/2013/09/capitol-hill-development-melds-landmark-anhalt-with-modern-apartments/>.

⁷¹ “Final Recommendation of the East Design Review Board (Meeting Report for 1600 E John Street.” City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections. 24 April 2013. Accessed from City of Seattle Permit and Property Records: <http://web6.seattle.gov/dpd/edms/>.

allowing the project to move forward despite the frustration among some members of the community (see Figure 9 for final balconies).

On May 14, 2013, the original Anhalt building was awarded another preservation badge, being placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Since the Secretary of Interior was cited in the recommendations design packet, it was clear the applicant was attempting to earn this preservation badge at the same time as developing the infill building; the Secretary requires neighboring buildings to be “compatible but differentiated” from their neighbors, something the applicant continued to sell to the board despite objections from the public.⁷² On July 15, 2013, the applicant was granted a Land Use Permit, allowing construction on the infill building to begin.



Figure 7 (at left): The balconies in question. Note the distressed brickwork on the addition, which was an attempt to complement the historic building at right. Source: Scott Cutler.

Figure 8 (below): The landmark Anhalt building's signature Tudor Revival style. Source: Scott Cutler.



⁷² “Anhalt Renovation + Addition: Recommendation.” Public 47 Architects. April 2013. Accessed from City of Seattle Permit and Property Records: <http://web6.seattle.gov/dpd/edms/>.

Overall, the Anhalt addition did not change significantly from EDG to final construction (see Figure 9 below). The Preferred Alternative in the EDG phase almost completely matches the final product, though more details—such as the brickwork—were fleshed out in the recommendation phase, as required. The applicant responded to all of the board’s comments from the EDG meeting in the recommendation phase, but the responses did not mean they incorporated all of those design changes, as discussed above.



Figure 9: Timeline of design for the Anhalt. 1) EDG, 2) Recommendation, 3) Final construction. Note the subtle design changes—like the fenestration—but similar overall concept. Sources: EDG and recommendation packets from Public 47 Architects, Scott Cutler.

Case #2: 605 15th Ave E (Stream Fifteen)



Figure 10: Stream Fifteen from across the street. Source: Scott Cutler.

Stream Fifteen is located at the north end of the 15th Ave E neighborhood commercial corridor at the intersection with E Mercer Street. Stream Fifteen was entirely new construction, replacing a one-story commercial building built in 1941 that was being used as a restaurant. The site is nearly hemmed in by lower-density zones, with lowrise zones to the north and west, and single family zones to the northwest and northeast. A 4-story mixed-use structure with street level commercial space and apartments above, Stream Fifteen stands out among its neighbors along 15th Avenue for its contemporary styling and its height; many buildings in the corridor are 1-2 stories, and smaller-scale residential structures lie immediately to the north.

Initial site plans for Stream Fifteen were submitted on October 24, 2012, and the Early Design Guidance Meeting of the East Board was held on April 3, 2013. Each scheme presented by the applicant, Gary Oppenheimer of Nicholson Kovalchick Architects, showed retail lining the 15th Ave E side with residential above.

Though renderings are limited in EDG packets, there were numerous public comments objecting to the project as presented (see Figure 11). Commenters were concerned that the project was “not successfully transitioning to the lowrise zones” and that it didn’t relate to the “grand Capitol Hill residential architecture or neighborhood character.”⁷³ Someone was quick to draw comparisons to the quirky architecture of the Pike/Pine corridor and stated that that style would not work for the 15th Ave corridor, but a brick structure would. Additional concerns were raised about the blank north facade, view blockages, setbacks, and privacy.⁷⁴



Figure 11: EDG sketch of north façade in transition zone, looking south. Source: EDG packet from Nicholson Kovalchick Architects.

⁷³ “Early Design Guidance of the East Design Review Board (Meeting Report for 605 15th Ave E).” City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections. 3 April 2013.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

The board echoed sentiment about better respecting surrounding buildings, both in regards to setbacks and architectural style. They also recommended having a “materials board” at the next meeting since building materials were brought up so frequently. Like a member of the public, they were concerned that the proposed building design was designed around maintaining a laurel hedge, which they felt could compromise the project.⁷⁵ The board recommended moving forward to the next meeting, but required that the applicant provide detailed sketches of the residential entry area, provide a materials board showing all options, and provide detailed elevations showing how the project would act as a transition zone on the corridor.⁷⁶

The recommendation meeting, held on September 18, 2013, had a slew of public comments, board reactions, and proposed design changes (including features like a “little library”), but not the larger, code-compliant setbacks requested by many neighbors (see Figure 12 on following page). Notably, a detailed presentation on landscaping and materials was provided by the applicant, as requested, but many comments focused on the quality of those materials and colors, including a particularly active Capitol Hill Seattle Blog comment thread which largely panned the design and material choice.⁷⁷ Most letters received also reflected these sentiments. The board, concerned that the applicant did not accurately or sufficiently explain setback changes or supply sufficient materials, called for a second recommendation meeting with a faster turnaround time to further discuss the proposed departures and materials.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ “EDG Report for 605 15th Ave E”, City of Seattle.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Justin Carder. “Gateway *and* Terminus, what the 15th/Mercer Chutney’s building will look like.” *Capitol Hill Seattle Blog*. 18 September 2013. <http://www.capitolhillseattle.com/2013/09/gateway-and-terminus-what-the-15thmercerc-hutneys-building-will-look-like/>.

⁷⁸ “Initial Recommendation Meeting of the East Design Review Board (Report for 605 15th Ave E).” City of Seattle Department of Constructions and Inspections. 18 September 2013.



Figure 12: Sketch from the first recommendation meeting showing the little library add-on and the non-compliant setback departure (looking south). Source: First recommendation packet from Nicholson Kovalchick Architects.

The second recommendation meeting was held on November 6, 2013. Design changes included larger windows, cedar siding that better matched neighborhood materials, and architectural changes to create a better “gateway experience.”⁷⁹ The applicant again requested a smaller setback on the west side, though the rationality behind this position was still unclear. The board stated that it was “not their purview” to design the structure, but said they were willing to work with the applicant on developing a setback that worked for everyone.⁸⁰ Much of the public was still opposed to the design of the building—some to the entire idea of a new building—though some letters and comments did support the proposed departures and the developer’s

⁷⁹ “Second Recommendation Meeting of the East Design Review Board (Report for 605 15th Ave E).” City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections. 6 November 2013.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

willingness to work with the community.⁸¹ At last, the board agreed with the material decisions, but requested a third recommendation meeting in order to further discuss the setback departures and how to create a quality transition zone at the north end.

The third—and final—recommendation meeting took place on December 18, 2013. Much of the controversy over setbacks and transitions at the north end was eliminated when the applicant decided to go with the code-compliant option, with tiered setbacks leading to the top required setback of 15 feet (see Figure 13 below).⁸² Many of the add-ons proposed in the first and second recommendation meetings, like the “little library”, were eliminated as well, creating a more cohesive and traditional design. At this point, the majority of the public comments were positive, commending the applicant for continuing to work with the public and the board.⁸³ The board granted all remaining departures and approved the project and after another four months of corrections, permits were issued on April 29, 2014.



Figure 13: The final setback at the northern transition zone. Note the tiered setbacks as a difference from Figure 11. Source: Scott Cutler.

⁸¹ “Second Recommendation Meeting Report”, City of Seattle.

⁸² “Final Recommendation Meeting of the East Design Review Board (Report for 605 15th Ave E).” City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections. 18 December 2013.

⁸³ Ibid.

After a long design review process and a construction period not free from controversy, Stream Fifteen was completed in December 2015. Though construction is entirely separate from design review, the additional difficulties are worth noting because of the nature of the dispute. Adjacent property owner Chris Rugh—who initially supported the project design in a public letter—was sued by the developer for preventing access to land needed for construction staging, temporarily stopping construction.⁸⁴ Blog commenters largely sided with Rugh, some using him as a symbol standing against the relentless pace of development in Capitol Hill, and resurfacing previous complaints about the building design.⁸⁵

Though the design concept stayed fundamentally the same throughout the process, details of the design changed significantly due to persistent board and public feedback (see Figure 14 on following page). When it was clear the board was not going to budge on certain design issues—like the setbacks on the north transition end—the applicant pivoted quickly to change the design.

⁸⁴ Bryan Cohen. “Capitol Hill developer sues homeowner for stalling 15th and Mercer Project.” Capitol Hill Seattle Blog. 30 July 2014. <http://www.capitolhillseattle.com/2014/07/capitol-hill-developer-sues-homeowner-for-stalling-a-15th-and-mercero-project/>.

⁸⁵ Ibid.



Figure 14: Timeline of design for Stream Fifteen. 1) EDG, 2) First recommendation, 3) Second recommendation, 4) Third recommendation, 5) Final construction. Sources: EDG and recommendations packets from Nicholson Kovalchick Architects, Scott Cutler.

Case #3: 103 12th Ave (Anthem)



Figure 15: Anthem from 12th Ave and E Yesler, Source: Scott Cutler.

Anthem is located in the Yesler Terrace area, at the busy intersection of 12th Ave and E Yesler Way. It was the first private development to be built at the Yesler Terrace site, which is still undergoing a massive redevelopment process using public and private funds to create a mixed-income community.⁸⁶ It lies adjacent to a Seattle Housing Authority project of a similar scale. The area is a mix of commercial, residential, and institutional structures and acts as a transition zone into various distinct neighborhoods including the International District, the Central District, and First Hill. Anthem is a 6-

⁸⁶ "Anthem on 12th." Seattle Housing Authority. 2013. <http://seattlehousing.net/redevelopment/yesler-terrace/housing/anthem-on-12th/>.

story, mixed-use, environmentally conscious building designed to be “workforce housing” and a gateway to the 12th Avenue Urban Center Village.⁸⁷

Initial project documents were submitted on November 1, 2012, and the Early Design Guidance meeting of the East Board was held on February 13, 2013. The applicant and presenter was Jake McKinstry of Spectrum Development Solutions, represented by Mithun. According to architects at Mithun, the project was designed to complement the neighboring SHA affordable housing site and anchor the corner of 12th and Yesler by enhancing the pedestrian experience and encouraging “gateway” architecture (see Figure 16).⁸⁸ All proposed designs were contemporary in nature, and the preferred scheme favored a courtyard facing the SHA project, integrating—at least visually—with its open space,⁸⁹ as SHA property management stated they would not allow a true connection between the projects.⁹⁰



Figure 16: Sketch of the proposed south façade, with the gateway corner on the right. Source: EDG packet from Mithun.

⁸⁷ “12th and Yesler: Early Design Guidance.” Mithun. 30 January 2013.

⁸⁸ “Early Design Guidance of the East Design Review Board (Meeting Report for 103 12th Ave).” City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections. 13 February 2013.

⁸⁹ “12th and Yesler EDG Packet”, Mithun.

⁹⁰ “EDG Report for 103 12th Ave”, City of Seattle.

Fourteen members of the public attended the meeting and six of them provided comments.⁹¹ None of the comments were negative in nature about the overall project, but rather provided small suggestions to improve the design. One particular suggestion was to reduce the size of the retail units in order to encourage small businesses and affordable retail spaces.⁹² The board was somewhat more skeptical, but still largely supportive of the project. In particular, the board suggested making the courtyard larger, making the west (back) side more “playful” instead of having a nondescript building face, having smaller retail spaces along the street frontage to increase granularity, and adding weather protection along E Yesler.⁹³ Ensuring pedestrian primacy was also a guiding principle of the board’s comments; one board comment told the applicant to treat vehicles as “intruders” and ensure architectural cues indicated that, particularly at the garage entrance.⁹⁴ The board recommended the project move forward to the Master Use Permit application stage, with the agreement they expected a detailed landscape and streetscape plan at the next meeting.

The recommendation meeting was held on July 10, 2013. Between the EDG and recommendation meeting, two “exceptional” trees were found by a City of Seattle arborist, putting both the board and the applicant in an “awkward at best” situation.⁹⁵ Both the board and applicant agreed that saving the trees would compromise the integrity of the project, particularly the streetscape, and Mithun’s landscape architect said that the two removed trees would be replaced by 21 new trees.⁹⁶ The board

⁹¹ “EDG Report for 103 12th Ave”, City of Seattle.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ “Final Recommendation of the East Design Review Board (Meeting Report for 103 12th Ave).” City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections. 10 July 2013. Accessed from City of Seattle Permit and Property Records: <http://web6.seattle.gov/dpd/edms/>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

indicated support for the tree removal, but noted on the record their frustration with the late-in-the-game notification about the exceptional trees.

With this, the design presentation began, highlighting minor design changes, including random protruding, angular, and colorful window bays to break up the façade (see Figure 18 on page 50). A smaller rear setback was again requested in exchange for a larger courtyard.⁹⁷ Detailed landscape and streetscape plans were provided as requested, including a detailed materials palette.

Public comment at the meeting was limited. A senior development manager at SHA, Tom Eanes, emphasized SHA's support of the project and the proposed smaller setback and courtyard configuration, explaining that the design teams had conferred in order to enhance privacy (see Figure 17 on following page for courtyard rendering).⁹⁸ The board appreciated the increased vibrancy in design, citing the protruding window bays and increased use of color.⁹⁹ Lastly, the board noted that some of the initial "gateway" treatment was lost, and indicated their support for the planner and design team to work together to "restore verticality" and enhance the corner element.¹⁰⁰ The board indicated their support for the project and proposed setback departure, but requested the minor changes mentioned above be incorporated in the final design.

⁹⁷ "12th and Yesler Design Review Recommendation." Mithun. 10 July 2013. Accessed from City of Seattle Permit and Property Records: <http://web6.seattle.gov/dpd/edms/>.

⁹⁸ "Recommendation Report for 103 12th Ave", City of Seattle.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.



Figure 17: Rendering of the courtyard from the SHA site. Note the subtle separation between the two sites. Source: Recommendation packet from Mithun.

Construction permits were issued November 19, 2013, and final construction was completed by December 20, 2015. The final project is not noticeably different from the approved recommendation meeting design and is still very similar to the preferred option presented in the EDG meeting (see Figure 18). Other than design details being more fleshed out as the process went on, such as the addition of the random window extrusions, Anthem did not experience many changes or significant scrutiny from the public or the board.

It should be noted that meeting summaries for this project were far more detailed than those provided for the other case studies, providing detailed analysis of comments provided by the public (limited as they were) and the board. This made analyzing the review process easier, though much of the content was subjective and written in a more informal manner than other reports. Interestingly, however, no public letters were received for this project, perhaps indicating an overall lack of controversy or

disruption. There was also very little media coverage or outside commentary—including neighborhood comment—about this project.



Figure 18: Timeline of design for Anthem. 1) EDG, 2) Recommendation, 3) Final construction. Note the addition of the angled, protruding window bays in the recommendation phase. Sources: EDG and recommendation packets from Mithun, Scott Cutler.

Case #4: 600 E Pike Street (AVA Capitol Hill)



Figure 19: The E Pike portion of AVA, with two character structures below. Source: Scott Cutler.

Located in the heart of the Pike/Pine Conservation Overlay District (PPCOD) in southern Capitol Hill, the AVA Capitol Hill project—also called the Mercedes-Benz redevelopment—combined the façade preservation of four commercial “character structures” from the 1910s on the site with a massive 5- to 7-story residential addition above. A character structure in the PPCOD is defined as having “been in existence for at least 75 years, thereby contributing to the established scale, development pattern, and architectural character of the area.”¹⁰¹ Within the PPCOD, developers get height

¹⁰¹ “Pike/Pine Conservation District.” City of Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development. 7 August 2009.

<http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/cityplanning/completeprojectslist/pikepines/background/default.htm>.

bonuses up to 10 feet for preserving these character structures, often done through the controversial practice of façade preservation, which maintains and refurbishes the shell of the character structure and incorporates it into the larger building design.¹⁰² At the time AVA was going through design review, only some of the character structures had to be preserved on a site in order for applicants to gain the 10 foot bonus; as of June 2014, all had to be preserved (though AVA did partially preserve all character structures on the site).¹⁰³ Though not the first example of façade preservation in the PPCOD, AVA came at a time of intense redevelopment in the Pike/Pine corridor, and is located across Boylston Ave from another massive façade preservation project, Pike Motorworks.

Initial project documents were submitted on October 1, 2012 by Derek Bottles of Avalon Bay Communities, with Ankrom Moisan Architects acting as the architects for this project. The EDG meeting was held on January 16, 2013. At this meeting, a preferred scheme was presented that preserved the façades of three character structures and refurbished the fourth, with a building height of 75 feet and multiple upper façade modulations, inspired by folds in a paper map (see Figure 20).¹⁰⁴



Figure 20: Detailing of the “folds” concept proposed in the EDG materials. Source: EDG packet from Ankrom Moisan.

¹⁰² “Staff Report: Proposal to amend the Pike/Pine Conservation Overlay District.” City of Seattle. 20 June 2013. http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/cs/groups/pan/@pan/documents/web_informational/dpdp025810.pdf.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ “600 E Pike: Early Design Guidance Meeting.” Ankrom Moisan. 16 January 2013. Accessed from City of Seattle Permit and Property Records: <http://web6.seattle.gov/dpd/edms/>.

The Pike Pine Urban Neighborhood Council (PPUNC) submitted a letter about the EDG proposal before the meeting largely commending the initial design, and that letter of support was referenced during the meeting. The PPUNC in particular supported the total refurbishment of one of the character structures, which as proposed would not be built over. They called for the applicant to better flesh out the design concept so that it pervades the design of the building inside and out, not just as a façade treatment.¹⁰⁵ Some other comments focused on the “folds” design concept, saying that it needed to better respond to the nearby context.¹⁰⁶ Additional comments were generally supportive or focused on minor design details.

The board was also generally supportive of the preferred scheme, but was cautious about the folds concept, saying it might be “challenging to pull off.”¹⁰⁷ In particular, the board focused on the scale of the building, noting that it needed to better relate to the character structures below and appear to be two distinct masses above the two different character structures on E Pike Street. The board was skeptical of the proposed departure asking for a reduced upper floor setback from the character structure and asked the applicant to better demonstrate how the reduced setbacks would respond to adjacent buildings and meet the design guidelines. They also did not support the request for two access curb cuts instead of one.¹⁰⁸ With these requests and considerations in mind, the board recommended the project move forward to the MUP application stage.

¹⁰⁵ Public Comment Letter on 600 E Pike Street. Pike Pine Urban Neighborhood Council. 16 January 2013.

¹⁰⁶ “EDG Report for 600 E Pike Street”, City of Seattle.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

The recommendation meeting was held on July 31, 2013. Based on the feedback from the EDG meeting, the applicant revised the architectural concept to a “connectivity and tension” design, eliminating the folds concept. Showpiece “floating connectors” clad in stainless steel panels were meant to recall the Auto Row heritage and break up the façade, standing out from the rest of the upper massing.¹⁰⁹ Ankrom Moisan also added top floor setbacks on the north portion of the project in accordance with the board’s recommendation. The building mass above the two character structures on E Pike was redesigned to match the rhythm of the windows on the ground floor, and was asymmetrical to help visually reduce the scale (see Figure 21 for rendering).¹¹⁰ Very detailed departure requests were included in the recommendation design packet, which thoroughly explained the reasoning behind those requests graphically and in writing.



Figure 21: Rendering of the proposed character structure preservation with matching window rhythm on newly constructed upper floors. Source: Recommendation packet from Ankrom Moisan.

The recommendation design packet also contained detailed information about how the applicant performed community outreach, starting before the EDG meeting. Though not required by the City of Seattle, the applicant led several additional

¹⁰⁹ “600 E Pike: Recommendation Meeting.” Ankrom Moisan. 31 July 2013.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

presentations to PPUNC at their community meetings in order to seek input. The choice to include this information was billed as the design being strengthened by the collaborative process with the neighborhood.¹¹¹

After the presentation, one public commenter noted that the materials palette was contemporary in comparison to its surroundings. Another supported the new modulation, saying that it helped to reduce the scale of the building.¹¹² The most fleshed-out public comment came from the PPUNC again, which largely supported the design; they felt the materials used on this project should act as a minimum standard of quality for future projects.¹¹³ They called for E Pine Street retail spaces to have more glazing and to take another look at the red, vertical band at the building entry on Belmont Ave (see elevation in Figure 22 below). Many of the PPUNC comments were very specific suggestions billed as “further architectural refinements” that would enhance the streetscape, retail viability, and landscaping.¹¹⁴



Figure 22: A portion of the western elevation (along Belmont Ave at E Pine Street) which shows the red band in question. Source: Recommendation packet from Ankrom Moisan.

The board discussed the red band and appreciated that it drew interest to the entrance and provided modulation to reduce the scale of the building, but “left

¹¹¹ “600 E Pike Recommendation Packet”, Ankrom Moisan.

¹¹² “Final Recommendation of the East Design Review Board (Meeting Report for 600 E Pike Street).” City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections. 31 July 2013.

¹¹³ Public Comment Letter on 600 E Pike Street. Pike Pine Urban Neighborhood Council. 31 July 2013.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

resolution of this area to the discretion of the applicant.”¹¹⁵ They applauded the work done to reduce the appearance of mass of the building and the character structure preservation. The board agreed with the PPUNC that more should be done to engage the street in the portions of the building that would be newly constructed, and also recommended more window glazing along E Pine and the creation of more visual interest along the residential stoops, fearing that they might create a blank wall condition.¹¹⁶ Of the eight departures requested, the board approved seven; the only one denied was the proposal to waive the 50 foot width maximum for retail spaces.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the board recommended approval of the project, but with several conditions, all of which were mentioned above. Following the meeting, and with the final submitted materials, the applicant confirmed all of the changes were made, as noted in the “Analysis and Decision” document from November 7, 2013.¹¹⁷ Permits were issued on December 9, 2013, and construction was completed on March 3, 2016. As shown in the montages below (Figures 23 and 24), the final product is not significantly different from the design presented in the recommendation meeting, though the minor design changes were incorporated. The red band at the residential entrance remained.

¹¹⁵ “Recommendation Report for 600 E Pike Street”, City of Seattle.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Diane M. Sugimura. “Analysis and Decision of the Director: 600 E Pike Street.” City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections. 7 November 2013.



Figure 23: Design timeline for the western portion of AVA Capitol Hill along Belmont Ave, showing the elimination of the “folds” concept. 1) EDG, 2) Recommendation, 3) Final construction. Sources: EDG and recommendation packets from Ankrom Moisan, Scott Cutler.



Figure 24: Design timeline for the northern portion of AVA Capitol Hill along E Pike Street. 1) EDG, 2) Recommendation, 3) Final construction from two angles. Sources: EDG and recommendation packets from Ankrom Moisan, Scott Cutler.

V: FINDINGS + TRENDS

How the Factors Affect the Process

Each case study revealed useful information for examining the projects individually and collectively. This section will begin to generalize how each of the six factors in the descriptive framework affect building design and how the project moves forward, using trends gleaned from the case studies. Table 4 at the end of this section summarizes some of the trends, allowing for comparison between each of the project case studies.

Planner Input

As mentioned in the methods section, planners have a significant behind-the-scenes role in the process, coaching the applicant through each step and bringing in past experiences to help shape design outcomes. Though direct contributions to the design process beyond the bureaucratic role of the planner were unfortunately difficult to find, discussions with those involved in design review in Seattle ensure planner input does shape how designers approach the process, engage with the public, and present at meetings. The extent to which planners are involved varies from project to project.¹¹⁸ Planners do spend much more time with each project than the Design Review Boards and often encourage additional private meetings to guide designs, based mostly on the applicant's experience and completeness of the application.¹¹⁹ For example, it is likely that planners played a role in coaching Nicholson Kovalchick Architects through the process more closely when it was clear the board was looking for something specific that the applicant was not providing (but, due to the lack of notes, this is speculation).

¹¹⁸ Rutzick, Personal Interview.

¹¹⁹ Rutzick and Hogness, Personal Interview.

To note, the planners responsible for keeping meeting notes had differences of how much detail they included and varied writing styles that affected how much information could be taken from those notes (and who said what, and why), even though they all followed the same official format. For example, the Anthem meeting notes were very specific, noting the number of people attending and even board comments outside the standard context of the guidelines. On the other hand, board comments were hardly present at all (or attached to design guidelines) in the Anhalt notes. Though this does not affect the design of the buildings, it does show the varied amounts of effort planners gave the projects.

Board Comments and Recommendations

Board members do not spend a considerable amount of time with each project, but they have a significant amount of influence in shaping the design, and their involvement allows for more “professional eyes” on each project. Applicants are responsible for responding to board comments (see more about this in the applicant section) and the board can ultimately decide whether additional meetings are necessary or if the project can move forward to the MUP application. In theory, comments from the board must be relevant to the appropriate design guidelines, but in reality, comments are much more varied and subjective. While board members still focus on the design—not issues outside of the purview of design review like parking or use of retail space—comments in meetings occasionally got off topic, though on record, all comments are tied to various elements of the design guidelines. As an example (though not part of the case studies), board members at a Design Review Board Meeting about 707 Terry Avenue fixated on the possible pedestrianization of Terry Avenue—outside of design review relevancy—and were quite open about their personal opinions of the

design, failing to tie those to the guidelines.¹²⁰ As noted in Anthem’s recommendation meeting, the board went on a significant, opinionated tangent about the exceptional trees found on the site after the EDG meeting. Though these trees are generally discussed in design review meetings, the board made it a point to express their frustrations with the process, setting the tone for the rest of the meeting.

Possibly because of the preliminary nature of EDG meetings, board comments in these meetings were much more cautious and skeptical than in the recommendation phase. In addition, the “preferred” designs presented in the EDG meetings—applicants are required to present three design concepts in the first public meeting—were always the ones the board preferred, calling into question whether the alternatives are an appropriate use of time for the designers. At any rate, the constructive comments provided by the board in the EDG set up the direction the applicants took when approaching the more detailed design concepts in the recommendation meetings.

In the recommendation phase(s), the board focused primarily on how the applicant responded to their suggestions from the EDG meeting and/or previous recommendation meetings. They were often convinced by the applicant to take positions they were previously uncertain about due to additional explanations and time with the proposed designs. For example, the board reversed their skepticism about including large balconies in the Anhalt project after the applicant re-explained the reasoning behind the balconies in more detail and tweaked the design slightly. In the EDG meeting, the board suggested the pattern of the balconies and windows were not in the context of the surrounding buildings, but with the changes shown in Figure 9, the

¹²⁰ Scott Cutler. “Notes on East Design Review Board EDG Meeting for 707 Terry Ave.” 27 January 2016.

board believed they then “responded well to the adjacent landmark.”¹²¹ One thing the board never did was offer specific site planning suggestions beyond opinions; as noted in the Stream Fifteen case study, the board stated it was “not their purview” to design the setbacks to meet their recommendations and better follow the design guidelines.¹²²

Many board comments focused on materiality. Each project had significant input from the board about the materials used and saw different design iterations based on that feedback. Whether materials being brought up is due to a common fixation of the board or an issue with how projects are initially proposed is unclear, but high-quality materials clearly mattered to the board (perhaps beyond the somewhat vague design guidelines). Even projects with relatively little scrutiny, like Anthem, still had significant guidance from the board on color and materials (see materials board on following page, Figure 25). Stream Fifteen, which received significant scrutiny, had requests for three separate materials boards, one at each of its recommendation meetings.

¹²¹ “1600 E John Street Recommendation Packet”, Public 47 Architects.

¹²² “601 15th Ave E: Second Recommendation Meeting Report”, City of Seattle.



Figure 25: Materials board for Anthem. Source: Recommendation packet from Mithun.

Public Comments

Each meeting analyzed was attended by members of the public, some of whom spoke at the meeting. Other public comments were submitted electronically, usually taking the form of more formal letters such as those submitted by the PPUNC or the group of homeowners next to the Anhalt project. Of the comments submitted at meetings, 16 were positive in nature, 21 were neutral or provided suggestions, and 31 were negative. Of these comments, 7 were considered off-topic—outside the purview of design review—and 6 of those were negative. Table 2 below shows all of the comments arranged by general categories and Table 3 shows positive vs. negative comments compared by those categories (showing trends of what types of comments skewed positive or negative). Though “generally supportive” comments were the most

common at 9 total instances, negative comments related to architectural context and height/scale/bulk were also common, at 7 and 5 instances, respectively.

Table 2: Public comments from case study projects, ranked by total occurrence. Source: Scott Cutler.

Comment Category	Total	Type	Comment Category	Total	Type
Generally supportive	9	positive	Not supportive of setback	2	negative
Out of context	7	negative	Supportive of departures	2	positive
Materials-related	6	neutral	General project concerns	2	negative
Minor design recommendations	6	neutral	Streetscape recommendations	2	neutral
Out of scale (height or bulk)	5	negative	Supportive of setback	1	positive
General issues with departures	4	negative	Not being listened to	1	negative
Developer is listening/doing outreach	4	positive	Zoning (not related)	1	negative
Landscaping-related	3	neutral	Views blocked (not related)	1	negative
Privacy concerns (not related)	3	negative	Does not follow design guidelines	1	negative
Retail space size	3	neutral	Retail use suggestion (not related)	1	neutral
Transition concerns	3	negative	Safety concerns (not related)	1	negative

Table 3: Public comments by category, arranged to compare instances of positive and negative comments and the categories represented in each. Source: Scott Cutler.

Comment Category (Positive)	Total	Comment Category (Negative)	Total	
General	9	General	2	<i>Found in Both</i>
Outreach	4	Outreach	1	
Departures	2	Departures	4	
Setbacks	1	Setbacks	2	
		Context	7	<i>Found in Negative Only</i>
		Scale	5	
		Transition	3	
		Guidelines	1	
		Privacy	3	<i>Off-topic</i>
		Zoning	1	
		Views	1	
		Retail use	1	
		Safety	1	

In interviews, planners implied that a large portion of comments would be off-topic; however, only 10% of the comments in the meetings analyzed were beyond the scope of design review. It is possible that the disclaimers at the beginning of each meeting might be dissuading some off-topic commenters from speaking up, or somehow the cases analyzed in this paper were not typical. It is also possible that planners have false impressions about the nature of the public comments, possibly indicating an adversarial relationship or some memorable negative experience. Interestingly, negative comments were usually more specific—focusing on design issues like context, scale, departures, and transitions—than positive comments, where general support was the most common.

Overall, public comments are intended to inform the board’s review of the project, but in order to be relevant and seriously taken into consideration, they must be supported by the design guidelines. As demonstrated in certain case studies—particularly the disagreement over the balconies on the Anhalt project—the board may disagree with the public’s comments and allow their opinion to take precedence. However, the board did appear to take comments into serious consideration when it was clear that the Stream Fifteen project was not being well-received by the community. Organized comments from established groups, like the PPUNC, also seemed to hold more sway than individual or anonymous comments; the board and the applicant worked directly with the PPUNC to reach consensus on AVA Capitol Hill.

Role of the Applicant

Naturally, the applicant plays the most significant role in shaping the project design because they are the ones actually doing the designing, but they must sufficiently defend those positions to the board and public. Beyond the required presentations at the EDG and recommendation meetings, applicants confer with planners assigned to their project and often engage with the neighborhood through additional public meetings or stakeholder engagement. The range of extra outreach (read: extra effort) varies by project. In some cases, that outreach is before or during the early design phase, while in other cases it is a response to negative sentiments about projects already in progress. For example, Ankrom Moisan held several extra, non-required meetings with the PPUNC in the early stages of the AVA project, and used that as a selling point of the project in their recommendation presentation.¹²³ When the applicant receives direction from the board, they generally have to follow through with the guidance in order to gain approval. In the case of Stream Fifteen, the board called

¹²³ “600 E Pike Recommendation Packet”, Ankrom Moisan.

for a second (and third) recommendation meeting because changes they requested were “not clearly presented” or fully satisfied.¹²⁴ In this case, the applicant likely created additional future burden for themselves by not adequately responding to the board.

In the EDG meeting, the applicant has influence over the direction of the project simply by presenting their “preferred” option, which—in all the cases of the projects studied here—becomes the direction of the building massing moving forward. Though things like materials, fenestration, and even higher-level design concepts can change in later phases, the preferred layout and massing become the foundation for the project. It was also clear that the applicants put the most energy into the preferred option, supplying additional renderings or discussing those at greater length, causing public comments and board deliberation to focus on those designs.

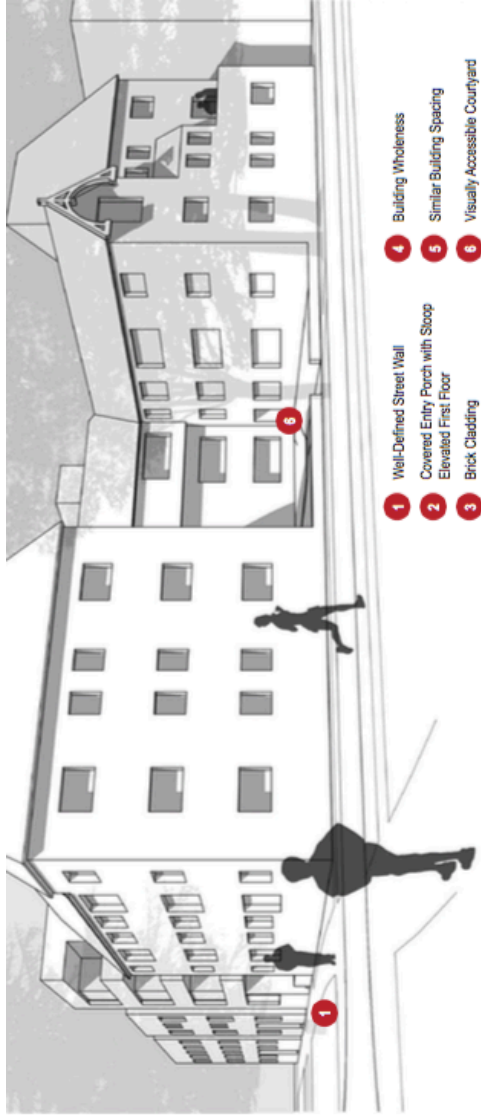
In the recommendation meetings, applicants are required to have more detailed renderings and layouts, including materials and landscaping. Beyond this work, they have to respond to board guidance from the EDG, whether changing the design completely to match those requests or defending their position by meeting in the middle. Each case study had elements of negotiation in the recommendation phase, with the applicant usually providing detailed reasoning as to why they designed things a particular way; this was often done on a line-by-line basis in a direct response to official board comments relating to the appropriate design guidelines. Graphics also corresponded to the responses from the applicant, as shown in Figure 26 on the following page, taken from the Anhalt recommendation packet.

¹²⁴ “Initial Recommendation Report for 605 15th Ave E”, City of Seattle.

DESIGN RESPONSE:

The proposed addition is decidedly modern but fits into the context by following specific design cues and massing patterns established by the neighboring buildings along 16th Avenue. Like its neighbors, the new building extends to the west property line maintaining the strong street wall. The first floor is elevated approximately 30" above the adjacent sidewalk, which affords privacy to living spaces, a strategy common among the more traditional apartment buildings in the neighborhood, including all of the buildings on the subject block. The primary proposed cladding material is brick, which is consistent with the neighboring buildings. The street facade of the proposed building presents a cohesive expression from top to bottom with a singular variation at the first floor entry portal. This sense of building "wholeness" is consistent with the neighboring structures. The covered entry porch and stoop directly reference the entries of the northern neighbors. The space between the new building and the building immediately to the north is roughly the same as the space between that building and its north neighbor. Right-of-way planting along the building-side of the sidewalk continues the landscape strip of the neighboring buildings.

The proposed addition is also responsive to the historic Anhalt Building, which occupies the southern two-thirds of the subject property and is a critical aspect of the project context. Pursuant to the standards of the Secretary of Interiors, the new building is complementary but differentiated from the existing structure. The new design is inspired by the attitude with which developer Fred Anhalt approached apartment building design, emphasizing the livability of the dwelling units and creating inviting communal spaces such as the new courtyard situated between the two buildings. The Landmarks Architectural Review Committee reviewed the massing for the proposed addition at a November 2 meeting, during which they expressed general comfort with the differentiation of the new structure as an autonomous, 4-story, modern infill building. The ARC felt that the proposed height and scale were appropriate, and identified the inclusion of a courtyard and entry stoops as positive aspects of the project.



- 1 Well-Defined Street Wall
- 2 Covered Entry Porch with Stoop
- 3 Elevated First Floor
- 4 Brick Cladding
- 5 Building Wholeness
- 6 Similar Building Spacing
- 7 Visually Accessible Courtyard



Figure 26: Design responses to the board's EDG comments (Anhalt project). Source: Recommendation packet from Public 47 Architects

Role of Outside Forces

This section will focus primarily on the role of local media (print and web) in the design review process. Discussion of the general community sentiments about growth and development are more speculative and are more suited for the Conclusions section. While numerous other outside forces affect the progression of design—including economics (real estate trends or cost engineering), materials availability, and zoning changes—this thesis focuses on influences more directly related to the Design Review Program and its public process. Because meetings are advertised on local websites and media plays such an influential role in making development news known (opinionated or not), it often has a substantial effect on how projects are received by the public.

Neighborhood groups also play a role in influencing design review, whether they submit public comments or not. Groups can play the role of “concerned professionals”, like PPUNC, acting as quasi-lobbyists, or they can take a more activist approach, galvanizing neighborhood support against projects. While none of the case study projects experienced major public outcry, there appears to be a sentiment among those involved in design review that anti-development groups are becoming increasingly influential. In some cases, these groups organize well before design review even begins, prompting developers to prepare for additional outreach and meetings, as is currently the case with the City People’s site in Madison Valley.¹²⁵

Capitol Hill Seattle Blog and the Seattle Times both played a major role in discussing the projects analyzed in the case studies. In particular, Justin Carder of

¹²⁵ Janet Tu. “PCC plans Madison Valley grocery in longtime City People’s spot.” The Seattle Times. 19 April 2016. <http://www.seattletimes.com/business/retail/pcc-plans-madison-valley-grocery-in-longtime-city-peoples-spot/>.

Capitol Hill Seattle wrote very detailed articles before EDG meetings about each project, and often followed up with project updates. Capitol Hill Seattle is a particularly active resource for the East Board area, and its scope has expanded to cover much of the Central District and Yesler Terrace; in the past 30 days, CHS had 84,800 unique views, or 2,827 per day.¹²⁶ Comment threads on project proposals are often particularly active, often mirroring comments discussed in the public meetings. Whether the people commenting and the people attending the meetings are the same or not, CHS comments—and the amount of them—often correlate to the scrutiny the project ends up receiving. While this is anecdotal, Anthem—which received little scrutiny or pushback—had a largely inactive comment thread, while Stream Fifteen had multiple very active ones where comments skewed negative, even after the project received its construction permits.¹²⁷ I get the impression that besides possibly the Proposed Land Use Action signs posted at the project sites, neighborhood blogs are the most influential in soliciting responses from the public, though again this is anecdotal, and unfortunately not researchable without a public survey of sorts.

Project Timeline

Each project had a similar timeline, beginning EDG in late 2012 or early 2013, and completing construction in late 2015 or early 2016. Even Stream Fifteen—which had two additional recommendation meetings—had a similar timeline because meeting dates for the final two meetings were only a couple of weeks apart. For Stream Fifteen, initial project documents were submitted in October 2012 and final permits were issued in April 2014 after approval by the board in December 2013, almost 18 months later. To compare, Anthem took 12 months between submittal and permitting, AVA took 14

¹²⁶ Justin Carder. "Advertise (30-day prediction)." Capitol Hill Seattle Blog via Quantcast. 14 May 2016. <http://www.capitolhillseattle.com/wp-content/plugins/oiopub-direct/purchase.php>.

¹²⁷ Cohen, "Capitol Hill developer sues homeowner."

months, and Anhalt took 18 months (largely due to an unexplained 9-month gap between application submittal and the EDG meeting). Though other factors contribute to uncertainty and project feasibility, this is not an insignificant amount of time to wait for approval, considering the applicant must also contend with the City of Seattle’s scheduling process for Design Review Board meetings and approval is contingent upon board and City support. The timeline may not affect the transition of design directly—that transition is part of the timeline, and designers do not appear to be scrambling for more time—but it is useful to include in discussion when discussing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Design Review Program.

Project Case Study Summary

Table 4 on the following page acts as a meta-spreadsheet of sorts, showing the results from each piece of the framework, where possible. Unsurprisingly, the projects that ended up having the most pushback from the board and/or public—Anhalt and Stream Fifteen—had the highest percentage of negative comments and took the longest to process. Overall, all but one of the departures were granted by the board, showing that the board was generally flexible in allowing site-sensitive design.

Table 4: Tabulation of project case study results across categories. Source: Scott Cutler.

	Duration of Review (filing to permitting, in months)	Number of Public Meetings (2 is standard)	Number of Participants	Final Number of Departures		Number/Type of Public Comments			Percentage of Negative Comments
				Requested	Approved	Positive	Neutral	Negative	
Anhalt	18	2	not provided	3	3	3	6	9	50.0%
Stream Fifteen	18	4	not provided	6	6	6	7	18	58.1%
Anthem	12	2	20	1	1	2	3	1	16.7%
AVA Capitol Hill	14	2	not provided	8	7	5	5	3	23.1%
					Total	16	21	31	

Conclusions

As it stands, the current review system excludes from discussion conversations about many issues people care about, such as parking, zoning (which determines setbacks, density, and building envelope, all of which can be contentious and were mentioned in various public comments), affordability, and what tenants fill commercial space. The fact that each meeting starts with the disclaimer that the meeting can only pertain to the design guidelines and that public comments are unused if they do not relate to design shows a design flaw in the system, though perhaps the planners' concerns about off-topic comments are overstated. There are ways for the public to get involved in directing policy on issues like zoning or housing—the HALA public meetings being one example—but design review is the most regular and personal opportunity for people to voice their opinions about growth and development. Because of the limited scope of design review meetings, the board and public comments can only change so much about a project, and complaints about non design-related topics aren't effective drivers of change. Based on the findings, however, *it is clear that the boards hold*

considerable power, and—besides the applicant themselves, who must respond to the design guidelines—have the most influence over how building design progresses throughout the process. The public comments that are negative and related to design review focus on issues of scale and architectural context, which boils down to people opposing growth that is out of character or different/larger than what it is replacing, despite the fact that local zoning allows it. While mentioned in the design guidelines (and thus related to design review), issues of scale and character are in turn affected by zoning, other municipal codes, and prevailing architectural trends, revealing greater issues with development and the public process in Seattle and design review's role in it.

Design review staff commented specifically that it is difficult to get representation of the renter demographic at public meetings, as homeowners have traditionally dominated the process.¹²⁸ Attendance and amount of comments are highly varied across meetings; in addition, not all meeting notes report the number of attendees or speakers. When comparing the attendance and number of comments at a relatively controversial project, Stream Fifteen (where many comments were logged), versus a relatively painless project, Anthem (where very few attended) major demographic and contextual differences between the two sites and their surrounding neighborhoods cannot be ignored. Those differences lend some clues about why the projects took such different routes through the process. In short, Anthem had far fewer neighbors to complain as it was part of a larger redevelopment process and was in a much less established urban context and less affluent area. Stream Fifteen, by contrast, was built in a highly established neighborhood corridor with affluent lower-density zones directly adjacent to it.

¹²⁸ Rutzick and Hogness, Personal Interview.

The inconsistency of results achieved from the design review process are notable in that it is often unpredictable which types of projects will trigger additional scrutiny or backlash from neighbors. Anhalt, located in a similarly affluent and historic area as Stream Fifteen, received some scrutiny and opposition, but was not subjected to two additional meetings or major design changes despite going through design review nearly at the same time as Stream Fifteen with the same board. Yet, it inexplicably had a 9-month gap between when project documents were submitted and the first EDG meeting, a much longer wait than the other applicants experienced. This unpredictability is difficult for the applicants and can be confusing for residents, who already have trouble understanding the approvals process. Unpredictability also means more possible designer time and waiting time for developers, who supposedly complain about time delays more than the design changes themselves.¹²⁹ While the literature review and case studies show that design review does help projects meet design guidelines (and become “better” in that sense), the way in which that happens varies greatly by project.

Recommendations

It is clear from the case study findings that Seattle’s Design Review Program suffers from inconsistently-applied scrutiny and an unpredictable bureaucratic timeline, which both need to be fixed to ensure fairness and accessibility to the process. A form-based code (as discussed in the Miami city case and Punter study) for Seattle would scale back the need for board meetings and other bureaucracy related to permitting because the bulk of the design work would already have been done on the back end. There are certainly other ways for Seattle to streamline its Design Review Program, all of which can’t be fully developed in this work; form-based codes are one way to go about

¹²⁹ Phelps-Goodman, Personal Interview.

changing the system. The process to develop the form-based code would ensure stakeholder priorities are incorporated into designs on a neighborhood-wide basis, rather than a project-by-project basis, allowing for solidified neighborhood visions beyond the somewhat vague design guidelines that exist today.

The viability of this recommendation is somewhat dubious, however, due to the massive investment in staff time to develop the code—which Punter pointed out is often lacking—and the contentious development politics in Seattle right now. Considering the recent controversies over the proposed Design Review Program Improvements and the present HALA debate, it would not be easy to make major changes to design review (beyond what was already proposed) or scrap it altogether. Form-based codes may be ideal for those who lament the slow and deliberate “Seattle Process”, but they still rely on compromise to get stakeholders on board. Though once established, as shown in Miami, the permitting process is much faster and easier for the public to understand because it is built directly into a single bureaucratic process. Form-based codes can also be more rigid in that they don’t always allow for as much creativity beyond the design standards, but they can still be flexible within the more prescriptive framework depending on how the code is written. Despite the drawbacks, neighborhood-oriented form-based codes would add considerable predictability for developers and residents alike and prevent many of the current inefficiencies that exist (like inconsistency of results and the lengthy public process and permitting timeline). Because of the current inefficiencies that exist on a systemic level, *I would recommend Seattle move towards adopting a form-based code like Miami 21 to more strongly tie zoning and design together and eliminate some of the bureaucratic confusion.*

Given the recommendation to adopt a form-based code in lieu of traditional zoning, it is helpful to discuss how the projects explored in this thesis would have fared differently if they were subject to a neighborhood-based form-based code. Efficiency benefits notwithstanding, it is likely that the projects I looked at would have taken on different forms, from overall massing to materiality (which was noted in the findings as being very important to the board). In order to do this, I selected two of the projects (Anhalt and AVA Capitol Hill) to explore further using simple elevation sketches to speculate as to how a form-based code would have affected the designs of the projects. For the Anhalt project (see Figure 27 on following page), it is likely that the code would have kept the building height consistent along the block and required more context-appropriate materials and fenestration, as called for by the group of neighbors in the public meetings. With the form-based code, the scale, context, and materials would become directly connected to the site's zoning and would be predetermined. For AVA (see Figure 28 on following page), it is likely that a form-based code would require more context-sensitive, separate masses instead of one large building mass. Much of the existing architecture of the Pike/Pine corridor is on smaller lots with smaller building footprints, so AVA would have to respond appropriately to these conditions, better taking into account the historic Auto Row precedent. It is difficult to speculate how a form-based code would handle façade preservation, but the rules behind it would look very different, with more attention paid to how the design responds to the character structures given the context of the neighborhood.

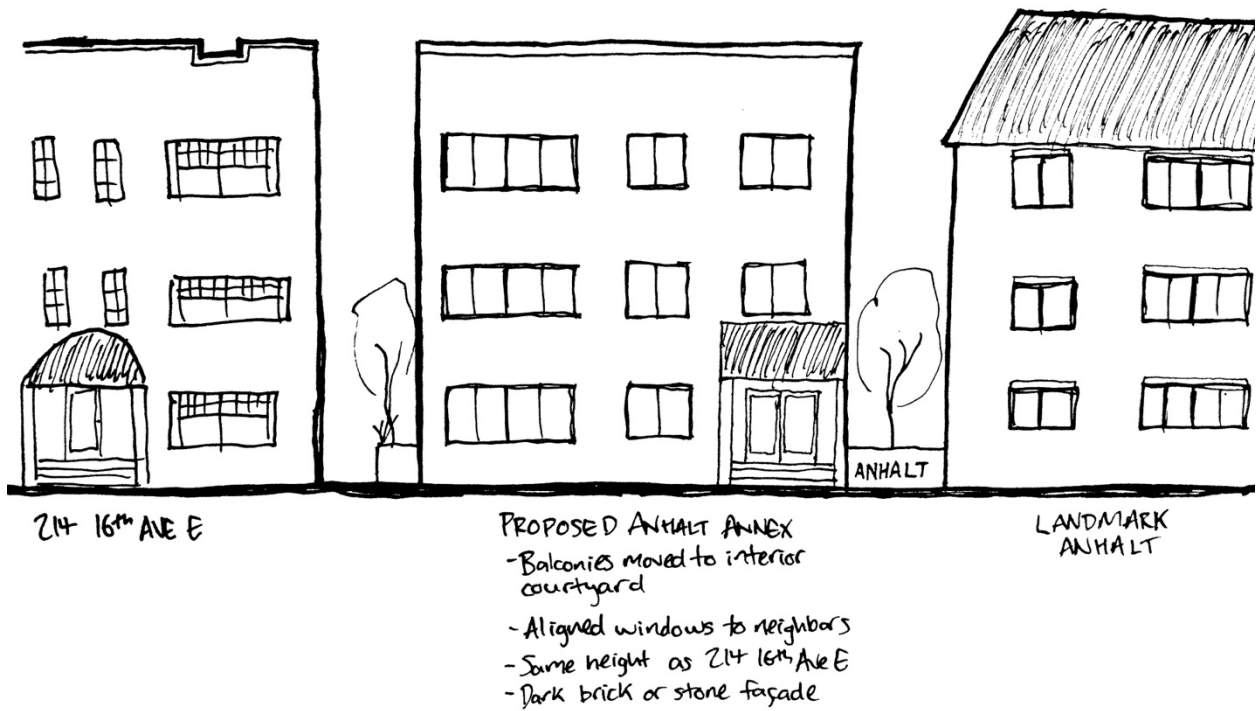


Figure 27 (above): Sketch of what the Anhalt project might have looked like with a form-based code applied. Source: Scott Cutler.



Figure 28 (above): Sketch of what the AVA project might have looked like with a form-based code applied, from the same perspective as Figure 23. Note the three separate masses with Auto Row architectural features as opposed to a mass that takes up the whole block, and the complete preservation of the most iconic character structure. Source: Scott Cutler.

The recommendation of a form-based code is not to say that elements of the existing Design Review Program haven't been successful. Very few cities have the level of accountability or system of checks and balances that Seattle does when it comes to project approval; Portland's Neighborhood Contact requirement and appeals system might have Seattle beat, but a system like Portland's is a rarity. The disconnect is when we consider whether that accountability lends itself to better design results or is fair to developers, something this thesis cannot fully speculate on, though based on the slew of negative comments and delays in project timelines, it's obvious the existing system isn't working well for almost all users. Even planners, who act more behind the scenes in an advisory role, were forced to tweak the existing system when they found members of the public were confused about what design review entailed.

The proposed improvements to the Design Review Program (described in the beginning of this document) are compelling because they seem to recognize some of the inefficiencies of the current process—particularly the amount of time applicants spend to defend small- to mid-sized projects and the amount of effort that goes into preparing for public meetings—but may not go far enough in making systemic changes. The increased design review thresholds (meaning fewer projects require Full Design Review) may benefit developers, but do little to make the rest of the process more accessible or efficient, beyond reducing staff burden. To conclude, the approach to how projects are reviewed and approved will ultimately shape the built form of the City of Seattle and the connection people have to their neighborhoods, to developers, and to their government, but reform is often an uphill (but achievable) battle. But when people who experience the system from all perspectives—planners, developers, and everyday citizens—seem to agree that the system is not serving them or its intended purpose, it may be time to make some changes.

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