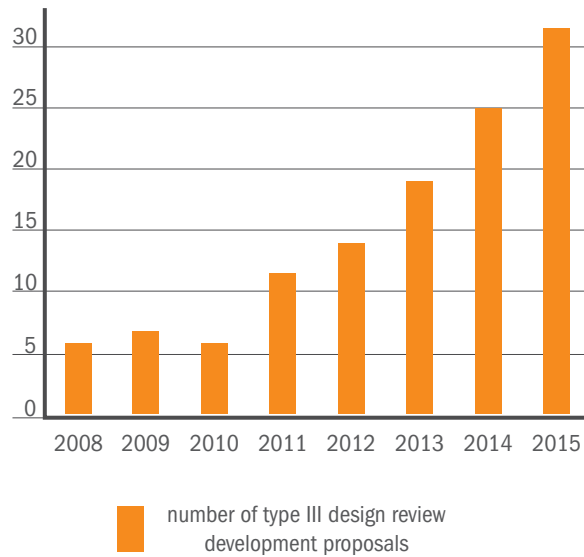

Interim Report: **Design Overlay Zone Assessment**

November 10th, 2016

PURPOSE/3 TENETS OF DESIGN REVIEW IN PORTLAND
FINDINGS
PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS



“As one can imagine, the economy has had a clear and direct impact on the volume and type of projects we review. While we were still in a deep recession and building slump at the start of this decade, over the last two years, the number of applications for design review has increased at a steady pace, reportedly eclipsing the volume seen in the mid-2000’s. [...] We have returned to the era of 6+ hour bi-monthly hearings, and have been adding additional hearings to our calendar to help move projects through the review pipeline.”

– 2014 State of the City Design Report, Design Commission

PURPOSE

In recent years, the City of Portland has entered the national and international spotlight as a city on the forefront of planning, urban design, and creating a resilient, high-quality built environment. Portland's long tradition of design review has had no small part in this—the quality of the public realm and pedestrian environment in the central city is, by and large, a product of many years of applying thoughtful design guidelines, standards, and review processes. There is no question that design review has had a central role in guiding the context-sensitive, high-quality development that Portland is renowned for today.

Cities across the nation are experiencing unprecedented growth, both in terms of population and new construction, and the City of Portland is not exempt from this trend; Portlanders saw an estimated 8.3% increase in their city's population between 2010 and 2015¹, with an estimated addition of nearly 13,000 people in the last year alone². With this population growth has come the largest development boom in this medium-sized city's history. As the city continues to experience growing pains, the question becomes: how can design review evolve to better respond to the changing development environment? Further, if design review is to expand to more areas to meet the uptick in development, what improvements could be made to the processes and tools of the design review system to allow for the highest benefit and least burden for all stakeholders?

This time of dramatic change presents an opportunity to reflect on the successes of design review and contemplate how it can better serve Portlanders into the future. The Design Overlay Zone Assessment (DOZA) was initiated to examine these questions.

1. Annual Estimates of the Resident Population: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2015. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division
2. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

3 TENETS OF DESIGN IN PORTLAND



Mixed use development built in 2011

At the outset of this project, three key design tenets were identified as fundamental to good design in Portland:

- Response to Context
- Public Realm and Ground Floor Design
- Quality and Sense of Permanence

These tenets are not meant to supersede adopted policies, guidelines and standards, but rather to provide a lens through which to understand them. They represent essential elements of excellent design that are embodied in numerous design standards and guidelines, and generally a high priority focus of the design review process. The tenets are useful for assessing development outcomes and the review criteria because they generally represent broader principles, concepts or outcomes that the guidelines and standards intend to achieve.

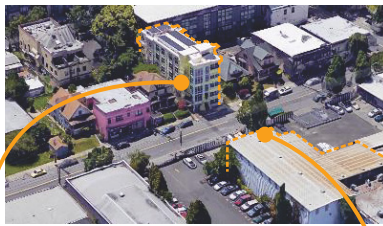
Prior to completing the assessment, these design tenets were better defined by relating the concepts to adopted policies of the 2035 Comprehensive Plan and existing design guidelines and standards. This analysis summarizes the varied ways in which the tenets are interpreted and addressed, discusses their relationship to Comprehensive Plan policy goals, and proposes a few essential dimensions of each objective that may be a useful framework for assessing the design guidelines and standards in more detail.

RESPONSE TO CONTEXT



An industrial aesthetic was common throughout the examples, but at times the design looks out of place if not inspired by industrial buildings in the neighborhood.

When assessing response to context, we focus on three recurring themes across Comprehensive Plan policies and design guidelines: *scale, patterns, and identity.*



This building's style and proportions contrast with the adjacent homes, but the roof form, height, and materials are more consistent with its wider context.

Images: Google Street View

The recently adopted Comprehensive Plan Goals and Policies Chapters Three (Urban Form) and Four (Design and Development) address the design objective of “response to context” extensively. Under the Urban Form chapter, two policies related to citywide design call for new development that preserves the prevailing physical characteristics of neighborhoods (3.2 – Growth and stability, 3.9 – Growth and development). Goal 4.A directs new development to “respond to and enhance the distinctive physical, historic and cultural qualities or its location”. Policies 4.1-4.9 of the Design and Development Chapter define a wide range of issues related to context, including community identity, site design, natural infrastructure, street orientation, use of alleys and transitional urbanism.

The Central City Fundamental Design Guidelines dedicate an entire section to issues related to context (Section A – Portland Personality). These guidelines define the character of the central city as a whole and identify the multiple districts within the central city. The guidelines also recommend more general approaches for responding to context, such as using “unifying elements” and “embellishing and identifying areas”. A more granular definition of context is presented in guidelines C4: Complement the Context of Existing Buildings. This guideline proposes the concept of a “design vocabulary”: a set of design themes and details that is commonly expressed by surrounding architecture. The guideline makes clear that new development need not imitate this design vocabulary to be complementary; buildings that use styles and materials that differ from existing buildings can use similar massing and proportions, for example.

The Community Design Guidelines adopt a similar approach for addressing “response to context”, but focus more directly on compatibility issues related to residential neighborhoods. The guidelines identify a set of plan areas across Portland, and encourage new development to respond to the local character and architectural heritage documented in these plans. Outside of these plan areas, the primary guideline related to context is D7: Blending into the Neighborhood. The strategies identified for meeting this guideline are diverse: articulate the façade, use vegetation to soften new development, reflect scale of adjacent buildings, respond to topography, and incorporate architectural details from the neighborhood.



The design of this commercial building is not responsive to the opportunity of presented by a prominent corner location. The façade facing the corner looks like the back side of the building.

Image: Google Street View

Addressing context with clear and objective standards can be a challenge. The Community Design Standards provide varying standards for different building types and some unique standards for specific neighborhoods. The standards also require consideration of adjacent residential uses, for example, by reducing building heights or providing a residential buffer. The specific context of Transit Streets and Pedestrian Districts are addressed in the Community Design Standards as well as specific locations such as street corners.

Comprehensive Plan policies and adopted design guidelines demonstrate that there are many dimensions to the concept of context, and many ways in which a building can respond to its context. Broadly, this assessment will focus primarily on the following outcomes of “responding to context” that are recurring themes across Comprehensive Plan policies and design guidelines:

- **Scale.** The building’s overall size, proportions, and massing in relation to surrounding buildings, and the related issues of privacy and solar access.
- **Patterns.** The building’s adoption of local physical design patterns, including overall proportions and massing, but also including a wide range of patterns, such as site orientation, roof forms, window design, ornamentation, materials and general architectural style.
- **Identity.** The building’s adoption of specific forms and features to celebrate the distinctiveness of its neighborhood or district, to reinforce a sense of place, and connect with the cultural and social qualities of the community.

PUBLIC REALM & GROUND FLOOR DESIGN



This ground floor design addresses many of the guidelines effectively: visual distinction between ground floor and upper floors, variation in texture and architectural detail, generous glazing, prominent height of ground floor, stopping places, weather protection, reinforce the corner, and public art.

Image: Google Street View

When assessing ground floor design, we focus on the intent to create a transition between the private realm of buildings and the public realm of the street. In design outcomes, this can mean articulation of ground floor spaces, visual interest, and comfort for pedestrians.

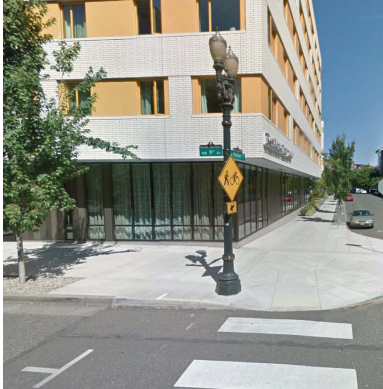
A building's relation to the public realm and design of the ground floor is seen as a critical design element across all of the City's adopted policies and guidelines. Broadly, the Comprehensive Plan links ground floor design and a building's contribution to the public realm to four primary purposes:

- Promoting human and environmental health by providing a connected, safe and convenient pedestrian network that encourages active transportation;
- Building a sense of community by fostering social interaction and providing spaces to gather;
- Creating a more livable city by shaping a public realm that is a comfortable, interesting, pleasant and attractive space to spend time;
- Supporting economic vitality by providing high visibility, convenient access and well-designed spaces for ground floor businesses.

It is clear that the Comprehensive Plan tasks ground floor design—in tandem with public investment in streets and the public realm—with many important roles and purposes. Design guidelines and standards are responsible for translating these broad goals into a specific and achievable mix and of strategies and techniques.

The Central City Fundamental Design Guidelines address ground floor design and the public realm extensively. Guidelines related to the public realm span all four sections of the framework and an entire section (Section C: Pedestrian Emphasis) is dedicated to issues related to the public realm. The Community Design Guidelines emphasize a very similar set of design features, with an entire section devoted to design for pedestrians and the public realm. The Community Design Standards also emphasize the relationship of the building to the street and include regulations for building placement, improvements between the building and pedestrian-oriented street, orientation to street corners, and building entrances.

For the purpose of this analysis, it is useful to employ a broader framework to assess the effectiveness of built outcomes and begin to diagnose any shortcomings of the guidelines and standards. In the broadest sense, the intention is to create a public realm that acts as a transition space between the private realm in the interior of buildings and the public realm of the street. This transition gives a range of choices for the degree of privacy that is desired for each social interaction or individual experience.



Recessed ground floors with overhangs tend to detract from the experience of the public realm by making it feel less prominent and important, limiting natural light, and drawing eyes upward to the more visually prominent upper floors.

Image: Google Street View



This cafe space is an example of successful transition between private and public at the ground floor of a building, with many elements for pedestrian interest and interaction.

Image: Henk Hattingh

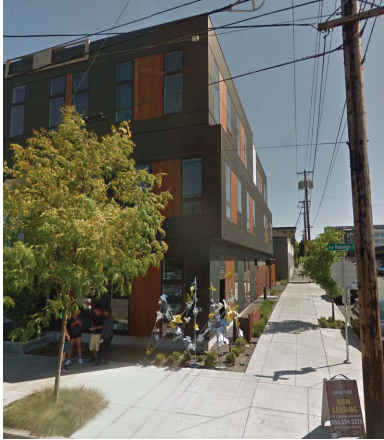
The ground floor exterior of buildings is a critical transition space between the public and private realms. The area between the building frontage and the curb must provide a space for people to walk safely and comfortably with many “eyes on the street”, for impromptu interactions between strangers or acquaintances, for sociable or intimate conversations among friends, and for reflective individual experience. Though it may be impractical or impossible for the public realm to provide space for all these experiences in all contexts, it is useful to conceive of the public realm as a space that aspires to support this wide range of uses. If the public realm is designed to do so, it will advance many of the broad goals for it set out by the Comprehensive Plan.

Given the concept of the public realm as a transition space, there are three overall design outcomes that support this purpose:

- Definition of the public realm through creating a sense of enclosure, distinction of the ground floor from upper floors of the building, and delineation of separate zones of the public realm for different purposes.
- Visual interest through windows with views into activity, landscaping, architectural detail or ornamentation, articulation of the façade, public art and other features.
- Comfort for pedestrians through providing places to sit or gather, protection from weather, buffers from vehicle traffic, and other features.

These three outcomes do not cover the wide array of design details necessary for a functional ground floor design, but provide a useful framework for assessing development outcomes and identifying where guidelines and standards need to be strengthened in order to advance good design and the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan’s goals and policies do not use the terms quality and permanence explicitly, but refer to related concepts of how building design can promote sustainability, energy and resource efficiency, and resilience to climate change and natural hazards. Goal 3.B establishes that “sustainable building development practices... reduce carbon emissions, reduce natural hazard risks and impacts, and improve resilience to the effects of climate change”. Goal 4.D states that “buildings...are designed to ensure long-term resilience”. The Comprehensive Plan links quality and permanence in building design to a functional purpose of protecting environmental and human health, particularly in the face of climate change.

QUALITY & SENSE OF PERMANENCE



Windows that are not recessed or without trim give the façade a thin, planar look that may be perceived as less durable or lower-quality.

Image: Google Street View

A review of City policies and guidelines underscores the complex, multi-faceted meaning of “quality and permanence”.

The conception includes: functional and technological characteristics of materials and techniques; aesthetic values related to visual interest, craftsmanship, texture, and detail; and appropriateness and authenticity of materials.

The Central City Fundamental Design Guidelines emphasize both the aesthetic and functional values of promoting quality and permanence in development. The ideals of quality and permanence are embodied by the longevity of the Central City’s many historic buildings that have “lasted through inclement weather and multiple renovations”, and also the way in which these buildings create an “urban atmosphere of quality and permanence”. Structural systems that use masonry, heavy timber, cast-iron or steel and exterior finishes of brick, metal, stone or glazed terra cotta tile are valued both for their durability and for promoting a sense of craftsmanship and “textural detail that can be appreciated from a variety of distances”.

Within the Central City, the Design Commission has responded to issues of quality and permanence in terms of materials and details. The Commission has noted that quality and permanence are achieved through both the selection of durable materials and the use of detailing methods to ensure buildings preserve a high-quality appearance over time. Accordingly, the Commission has evaluated not only the type of material (such as brick or metal) but the thickness, rigidity, fastener systems, and exposure to environmental damage given the location of the material on the building. Additionally, the Design Commission views material selection and application as a key element of “designing for coherency” through consistent application of a design concept and a cohesive composition.

The Community Design Guidelines similarly embed quality and permanence in the context of the overall composition and visual interest of a building’s design. The guidelines state that “building materials should not only be long-lasting, but should have interesting textures and patterns”. Guideline D8.A recommends using cast stone, brick, terracotta or other long-lasting materials to achieve this end, while guideline D8.B promotes the use of a “variety of textures and colors in exterior finish materials”. Other guidelines relate the concept of quality to architectural detail, window design, trim and ornamentation.



This building promotes permanence by using high-quality materials and attention to detail. Inset window glazing and the use of window sills create a sense of authenticity.

Image: Google Street View

A related preference that is possibly embedded in these guidelines—though less explicitly stated—may be for materials with a connection to natural resources found in the northwest or that represent part of the architectural tradition of Portland, such as brick, stone, steel or timber. Further, at the root the values of quality and permanence may also be the social and communal values that can be expressed through a building’s design. Buildings designed to be durable, long-lasting and with attention to detail impart a sense that the developer and architect perceive the building as a contribution to a community to be appreciated by all those who see it, not only the building’s tenants or users.

The Community Design Standards don’t address materials in detail. Some specific materials are limited as either foundation materials or exterior finish materials, but the standards do not address the quality of those materials that are permitted.

This review of City policies and guidelines underscores the complex, multi-faceted meaning of “quality and permanence”. The conception includes the:

- Functional and technological characteristics of materials and techniques;
- Aesthetic values related to visual interest, craftsmanship, texture, detail; and
- Appropriateness and authenticity of materials.

CONCLUSION

The three tenets discussed—response to context, public realm and ground floor design, and quality and permanence—are critical to the building of good communities, as well as of individual buildings that comprise them. They are time-tested ways of ensuring that urban places are lively, enduring, and endearing. Consciously or subconsciously, people appreciate built environments that are thoughtfully designed, offer many choices, and are cared for over time. Portland is a city that has demonstrated a longstanding commitment to building gracious and diverse places. Standards, guidelines, processes associated with the review of buildings can continue to strengthen that deep commitment by carrying out these tenets.

FINDINGS

The consultant team has taken a multi-pronged approach to investigating issues associated with design overlay zoning in the city of Portland. No one method of assessment can provide a complete picture. But by exploring a multitude of sources of information, we can discern certain patterns and commonalities that could underpin eventual recommendations.

These findings should be read not with the thought that each will lead directly to a specific recommendation. Rather, they are suggestive of possible directions, some of which will be broad and sweeping and others more narrowly drawn.

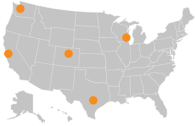
A cautionary note: Any regulatory approach to reviewing design aspects of development can only address particular issues of concern in a community; actions in this arena are part of a larger set of policies and programs. Indeed, the City is currently considering other actions through projects focused on mixed use zoning, residential infill, and street improvement standards, as well as significant revisions to the comprehensive plan. It is commendable that the City of Portland looks at changes in the urban environment through multiple lenses. Changes directed only at singular issues rarely have a meaningfully positive impact.

These findings are intended to identify issues that could be addressed through both administrative and legislative actions. They are offered in light of improving a system that is not entirely dysfunctional but rather could greatly benefit from deliberate and thoughtful modifications.

Finally, this work only examined the processes, standards and guidelines associated with d-overlay. It did not examine plan districts, base zones, mapping of d-overlay nor review of historic resources.

METHODOLOGY

In order to fully assess the range of issues in this subject, we have employed a multitude of techniques.



Review of Peer Cities. As described in the previous chapter of this report, we researched cities with comparable approaches to directing the design quality of development. By comparing and contrasting Portland’s approach with other peer cities, a number of lessons were extracted.



Interviews with Stakeholders. The Consultant team spent several weeks interviewing stakeholders. These included people in development and real estate, design professionals, neighborhood groups, City staff, and Design Commissioners – both current and past. A number of common themes were repeated by wide ranges of people. This report includes a summary that highlights the most frequently repeated comments and issues. An appendix to this report catalogues all comments, even those said by only a single individual. As a whole, the comments provide an excellent basis for going forward with approaches to making the review process and criteria operate more effectively.



Public Questionnaire. In addition to face-to-face interviews, a questionnaire was placed on the City’s website. Approximately 300 people responded. While this was not a controlled, random-sample survey, it provides further indications of aspects of the current system that are not working well. Many of the same themes were repeated by people answering the questions on line, which serves to reinforce the results of the more conversational interviews.



Assessments of Example Projects. The consultant team also looked at dozens of multiple-family, commercial, and mixed use projects that have been recently built throughout the city. In addition to new construction, the team also looked at projects that recently underwent an alteration or addition. Example projects fall into a number of categories:

- Projects that are ONLY required to meet basic zoning standards (i.e. not within the d-overlay).
- Projects subject to the Community Design Standards (non-discretionary track)
- Projects subject to Community Design Guidelines (discretionary track, Type II and Type III)
- Projects subject to the Gateway Design Guidelines (discretionary track, Type II and Type III)
- Projects subject to Central City Design Guidelines (discretionary track, Type II and Type III)

Seventy projects were given a cursory analysis represented by a “short form” documentation that focused on built results. Fourteen others were given a deeper assessment represented by a “long form” documentation that focused on the process. This step helped to reveal what the application of standards, guidelines and decision-making processes are producing on the ground.

KEY FINDINGS



Downtown Portland and the Hawthorne Bridge
Image: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/71380981@N06/>

Achieving place-specific results in the built environment is perhaps being discouraged by the current procedures and standards of review.



2015 development project not subject to d-overlay
Image: Works Progress Architecture

1. Portland is recognized as national model for good urban design, but is in need of a major “refresh.”

Portland is recognized internationally for actively creating a city that is highly walkable, culturally distinguished, very civil, and eminently livable. Few North American cities can match Portland with its long-standing commitment to the public realm and investments in collectively shared public places, including urban parks and squares, transit choices, bicycle infrastructure, and civic buildings. The City’s insistence on design quality is evidenced in many parts of the community, in both public and private development. There is a strong respect for history and, at the same time, a willingness to explore innovative design ideas and to nurture a wide variety of unique and neighborhoods, buildings, and streets.

However, many recent building designs have been less thoughtful about considerations of context and lively streets and have tended toward the creation of repetitive, and seemingly interchangeable, building forms. Parts of the city are beginning to lose an idiosyncratic character that Portland is known for.

Achieving place-specific results in the built environment is perhaps being discouraged by the current procedures and standards of review.

2. The current d-overlay does not necessarily guarantee good design; good design can occur regardless of its presence.

For various possible reasons, projects outside of the d-overlay zone can—and do—result in successful built outcomes. Even when a project is subject only to base zone standards, the ethos and efforts of a conscientious development team can produce high quality, context-sensitive, and innovative design that goes above and beyond base zone requirements. Some project teams hold their work to criteria that are not directly addressed by guidelines or standards (for example, sustainability targets, response to neighbor concerns, or knowledge of local character and context). Others may be driven to produce high-quality design based on market considerations or other factors. Conversely, other projects outside of d-overlay zones can display thoughtlessness or lack of design quality, with numerous possible reasons ranging from budgetary constraints to lack of design expertise or attention to context.

Application of the d-overlay should not be assumed to be universally appropriate and beneficial.

Similarly, projects within a d-overlay zone can produce commendable results as well as less than desirable results. The current process and tools have proven capable of producing successful project, but they have also resulted in projects that seem to have missed the mark. This is to be expected, as no process or tools can be perfectly effective in every possible instance. Regardless, it is notable that desirable outcomes can be achieved outside of the d-overlay that are not required or overtly encouraged by the standards or guidelines.

Finally, while the d-overlay adds value to the quality of design, the housing emergency has raised concern about its impacts on affordable housing projects. The question is at what point does the acute need for affordable housing outweigh the benefits of extended design review. The impact comes from costs associated with the length of the review process, potential delays, uncertainty, extra rounds of plan changes and unanticipated higher costs for materials and details that may be required. For any project, delay and cost increases can jeopardize financing and placement on the market. This is more of problem for affordable housing projects due to their tight margins and complicated financing. The standards and guidelines, the procedures involved with review, the timelines involved, and the nature and pace of deliberations during review can and should reflect a sensitivity to these issues. In the recommendations phase of this project, we will be looking at methods that can make reviews more expeditious, reduce uncertainty, and focus the attention on subjects that are less impactful on costs.

Application of the d-overlay should not be assumed to be the universally appropriate and beneficial.

3. Although community support for thoughtful design is strong, the perception of whether new buildings exhibit good design is widely mixed.

People in Portland, whether residents, merchants, property owners, or developers generally seem to recognize the high value that the City places on design and laud its efforts to achieve that. Virtually no one we spoke with dismissed the value of having procedures and standards to guide the quality and character of buildings. But neither did anyone indicate that the system being used is functioning well. Indeed, many people were entirely forthcoming about issues and flaws. As a result of this assessment, we see no need to characterize the system as wholly “broken.” From the interviews, we learned that a number of elements are missing, out of date, unclear, or inadequate to meet overall expectations. Furthermore, we heard that the standards and guidelines used for reviewing proposed projects are not effectively reflecting the varied character and interests of different neighborhoods and corridors.

The process of shaping implementation tools, such as the d-overlay, has not been linked closely enough to community-driven urban design planning.

In the survey, when asked how well the design review process achieves important design characteristics of a desirable built environment, responses from the community were generally lukewarm at best. “Design Quality” and “Architectural Consistency with Surrounding Buildings” were rated the lowest. It was also evident that community values about what is good design are quite different than that is valued by designers and developers. There appears to be a growing disparity between community expectations and results on the ground – again with distinct parts of the city seeming to be losing their unique, “home-grown” character.

A robust process of involving the public throughout the city could result in more area-specific tools that can realign expectations with outcomes. Finally, when design teams have actually engaged with neighborhood groups for a proposed project, it is not clear what kind of responses emerged to address the commentary.

The process of shaping implementation tools, such as the d-overlay, has not been linked closely enough to community-driven urban design planning.

4. The current system doesn't recognize the varied impacts of different scales of development.

Much of Portland's unique character and reputation derives from the abundance of small-scale, home-grown businesses that reflect the individual personalities of the people who own and operate them. Indeed, many of Portland neighborhoods are filled with a fine-grained, exuberant mixture of shops, restaurants, food carts, galleries, pubs, and personal services. In the last decade, however, this diverse and distinctive character has been gradually replaced by new buildings with considerably less “hand-crafted” character at the street level.

Development regulations, along with high expectations for design have likely contributed somewhat to this eroding character by making it difficult for small, local developers to be part of the mix. By the same token, thresholds that require alterations and additions to go through discretionary review would benefit from recalibration so that design review can concentrate on projects with greater impact on their surroundings.



Smaller-scale, eclectic businesses are now often seen cheek-by-jowl with mixed-use development of a much different scale and character.

Image: Google Street View



Example of a successful courtyard space in a central city development that underwent significant refinement through design review.

Parts of Portland outside the Central City would greatly benefit from revising, consolidating, and simplifying review criteria, as well as recognizing contextual differences.

The development system seems more set up for larger scale development, encouraging property consolidation and maximizing zoning envelopes. Moreover, thresholds appear to not match city wide goals and direct larger, more high-impact projects through Type II, rather than Type III where they could receive more public exposure and scrutiny.

Standards and procedures could be structured to make the small end of the spectrum easier to flourish, even if the design results are not ideal.

Thresholds for larger projects, such as those that occupy half-blocks and entire blocks, could be restructured to ensure that such projects receive greater scrutiny both through design review and by involving the public in the review process.

5. The d-overlay has benefitted the Central City but other areas less so.

Within the Central City, the combination of the review process and the applicable guidelines has produced an elevated quality of design. But also a contributing factor is that developers and designers know the bar has been set high in this geographical area, which can create better proposals from the outset. Occasionally, something might get approved that is not as refined as some people would prefer. But almost no system can avoid that, regardless of codified language; it still comes down to human interactions, motivations, and talent. The Type III process has benefitted from a public discourse and the multiple, informed perspectives by citizen volunteers serving on the Design Commission.

The benefits of the d-overlay on other portions of the city are not so clear; the results have been very mixed. The staff does its best with the standards that are currently available, and the review process had sometimes created positive outcomes.

Guidelines applicable to the Central City could use some updating but the more serious issues are associated with other areas.

“..allow the multi-cultural business and property owners in East Portland to develop creatively and differentiate it from the sterility seen in other parts of Portland.”

-- comment from survey respondent

6. Standards and guidelines applied to areas outside the Central City may be impeding good urban design.

Some of the Community Design Standards and Guidelines that the City has been applying were developed and adopted more than twenty years ago. In reviewing those standards, four characteristics were evident:

First, they reflect a much earlier period of thought about urbanism, community character and diversity of design expression. In that era, “neo-traditional” views regarding building design were prevalent.

Second, they came out of a desire to guide development in one particular area of the city with a specific, long-established character. They apply less readily to other areas of the City that have new patterns of development or are transforming. For these changing areas, different tools -- such as those that focus on site design -- would be more useful.

Third, we have repeatedly heard that they do not reflect the many different established neighborhoods, with their own distinct qualities, histories, demographics, and cultures. That will require extensive outreach process that involves various parts of the city.

Finally, the plethora of standards and guidelines can be both daunting and confusing; even where to find applicable ones can be a challenge. The re-crafting of standards and guidelines should focus on the handful of elements that are relevant to an area; other more generalized aspects should be contained in the base zoning.

The guidelines that direct development in the Central City are more recent, clearer and more informative and could serve as a model for other areas.

Parts of Portland outside the Central City would greatly benefit from revising, consolidating and simplifying review criteria, as well as recognizing contextual differences.

7. The recent high volume of projects has thwarted good intentions.

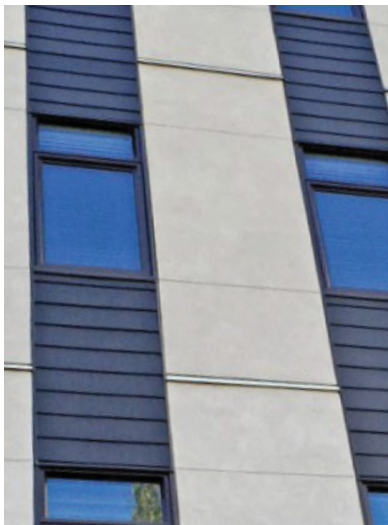
The Design Commission, along with City staff, has played a key role in elevating and maintaining the quality of design throughout the community over several decades. Nonetheless, the system of ensuring quality in the built environment is in need of some thoughtful re-examination. The recent, massive increase in the

There is a need to adopt ways of reducing the workload, managing the workload better, and incorporating public comments more effectively.

quantity of development and redevelopment throughout the city has put a sharper point on the mechanics, procedures, and rationale for making decisions about design proposals. It has overwhelmed what could be a smoother and more thoughtful process of review. Both staff and Design Commission have had difficulties wrestling with workload. We heard from the design and development community that they have become frustrated with the process, which has become time consuming and costly. We have also heard that citizens do not feel their input is being fully recognized in the decision-making process.

Given the volume of reviews, methods of managing the Commission workload are needed. Keeping discussions on point and with reference to specific guidelines, rather than personal preferences would be enormously useful in making the process more transparent and organized.

There is a need to adopt ways of reducing the workload, managing the workload better, and incorporating public comments more effectively.



The amount of time spent discussing specific building components is not allowing sufficient discussion of issues of context and the public realm.

8. There has been shift away from the “Big Picture” and towards details and minutiae in Design Commission deliberations.

One of Portland’s significant contributions to governing cities is the posture of taking the long view as it builds great streets and districts. Rather than merely reacting to momentary situations as they occur, the City has a tradition of advancing policies, programs, and projects that seek to build a healthy, diverse community. The review of development with respect to design quality was originally established with this view; that the whole is greater than simply the sum of individual parts. And the long view is about creating great places over time, less so about the detailed aspects of individual structures.

In recent years, however, this social compact has become fractured, with a focus on details and minutiae that greatly exceed what other cities attempt to regulate. Recently, there has been an emphasis on discrete building components of projects; this was evident in repeated comments regarding subjects such as fasteners and specific cladding materials. Finally, the process of design review does not seem to be in sync with the typical sequence of designing buildings in which broad issues are dealt with first with iterations of increasing detail addressed later.

The amount of time spent discussing specific building components is not allowing sufficient discussion of issues of context and the public realm.

All participants in the process -- City staff, Design Commission, and design teams should exhibit a greater spirit of collaborative problem-solving and mutual respect.

9. An attitude of collaboration is important in having successful design outcomes.

Regulatory tools and techniques are necessary to maintain consistency, due process and fairness. But it should also be recognized that any system of democratic decision-making still comes down to the interaction between multiple people. Attitudes, demeanor, comportment, sense of collaboration, and willingness to clearly communicate by all individuals and organizations involved in the process are important. The resolution of issues is not always found in the legislative arena, but in the realm of basic human behavior. Attitudes that seem arrogant, non-collaborative, dictatorial, or obstructionist can taint the process and turn it from being inspirational into an impediment to a collective community spirit. Although Portland has a reputation of effective local governance, design review seems to be on the edge of this tipping point.

This points out a need for procedural rules that provide transparency, fairness, clear expectations, and specific references to adopted decision criteria. It also requires a willingness of design and development representatives to pay attention to the perspectives of the appointed review body.

Finally, all parties engaged in design review, whether staff, appointed citizens, applicants, designers, or the public must understand what is actually on the table in for deliberation. Design review is not the only regulation guiding development; it works in concert with many other regulations, some of which are quantitatively established by law – such as height and allowable floor area. Although design review is authorized by City code may look at many aspects of any building, such as “placement, dimensions, height and bulk, lot coverage and exterior alterations, including materials, color, parking areas, open space, landscaping and preservation of trees”, there seems to be some degree of confusion about what are non-negotiable allowances, and what may be modified. The City should make it absolutely clear what is permissible to adjust; perhaps through a legislatively adopted list of what can be modified through design review and what cannot (as other cities have done). This would provide great clarity to the process of review.

All participants in the process -- City staff, Design Commission, and design teams should exhibit a greater spirit of collaborative problem-solving and mutual respect.

DETAILED FINDINGS | PROCESSES



Example of a typical notice board for a design review hearing.

This set of more detailed findings was derived from the three part analysis, including interviews, the questionnaire, and the examination of specific example sites.

A. GENERAL

- Public notice seems inadequate, both with respect to on-site notice and mailed notices. Geographic coverage is limited and renters receive no notice. Consequently, people can feel left out of any way of influencing, or even being aware of, change around them.
- Dialog between neighborhoods and the design teams of development projects seems disorganized, uneven, and sometimes token. It is not always evident how the design teams have responded to design issues raised in community meetings.
- Concerns about the required time, cost, and effort may be inadvertently encouraging project teams to choose compliance with objective standards rather than discretionary review.
- The list of submittals is not always appropriate to the typical stages of the design process; considerable detail is requested upfront before it typically occurs in the design process.
- There is a tendency in building design towards “the middle” in quality and innovation in order to gain approval. More adventurous designs are rare.
- There is a lack of coordination with PBOT and other agencies in the review process.
- During construction, there is little in the way of follow-up inspections to ensure that elements of the design are actually built as proposed.
- It would be useful to examine of the role of d-overlay in relation to other City processes such as non-standard improvements in the rights-of-way, capital improvement projects, design of parks, and issues regarding specific uses such as storage units.
- Often there are conflicts with other agencies or internal groups; design teams get caught in the middle and don't receive clear direction. It is not clear who has the final authority when there are conflicts between agencies.
- Basic elements, such as the location of vaults and building services and garage door setbacks, are sometimes not determined early enough and can create problems later in design.



B. NON-DISCRETIONARY PLAN CHECK

Application of Community Design Standards

This is a process that is required by State law for projects involving “needed housing”. The review process must apply an adopted set of “clear and objective standards”.

- Because they apply city-wide, the Community Design Standards don’t appear to always reflect what individual neighborhoods or districts have as priorities with respect to design. Greater variety and flexibility to allow recognition of the context is desired.
- Because it is not possible to seek adjustments to CDS without opening up the entire project to review, some development teams design precisely to Community Design Standards (CDS) in order to avoid discretionary review – even if it leads to less desirable results.



C. DISCRETIONARY DESIGN REVIEW

Type II (City Staff)

- Some design teams have a preference for working with staff because they can have multiple conversations over time to resolve issues.
- Generally, staff reports and findings in Type II processes exhibit an even-handed application of guidelines related to context, the public realm, and materials.
- Recently, however, it appears that staff may be taking cues from the Design Commission and sometimes asks for a considerably great amount of information about details and materials.
- Staff could benefit from a regular training program. Field visits both in Portland and elsewhere would be useful to become familiar with the state of the art in development.
- Administrative interpretations of guidelines are not made available to the development design community.

Type III (Design Commission, with support by City Staff)

- The Type III design review process adds significant time and costs to projects. The amount of time spent in making changes to plans often greatly exceeds what is normally figured into design fees for securing entitlements. Some developers find ways to avoid it.



- Information requested is not always appropriate to the typical stages of the design process.
- A considerable amount of discussion is associated details, materials, utilities, and building services. Some of this time could be better spent on larger issues--attention to materials details in hearings did not consistently result in a better, overall built outcome. This suggests a redirection to the public realm and considerations of context.
- Both the number and length of meetings have expanded to address details and revisions. Some of all of these could be referred to staff.
- Specific guidelines are not cited during deliberations. There is a lack of focus that can spin off into other subjects. Moreover, personal preferences seem to dominate some deliberations.
- The DAR -- originally intended to be helpful at an early stage to establish the broad strokes of a project -- according to some designers and developers, now occurs too late to be useful. Some teams chose not to engage in it.
- Management of Commission meetings by staff or the chair to keep everyone on point and on time seems to be lacking. People showing up to present or testify have no idea when items will come up.
- It would be useful to clarify the Council's "charter" for the Design Commission especially as it relates to authority and focus of reviews.
- Building massing needs to be discussed and determined at first formal review meeting and not revisited later, as that can create havoc in the design process.
- According to some applicants, in its deliberations and decisions, the Design Commission does not always cite applicable guidelines and sometimes has been adding some on an ad hoc basis.
- The list of "Unacceptable Materials" by the Commission in the "Best Practices Guide" could preclude creative possibilities from being considered at the outset by designers.
- Commissioners absent during an earlier review sometimes bring up new issues.
- The Commission is overloaded with cases, which is slowing down the process.



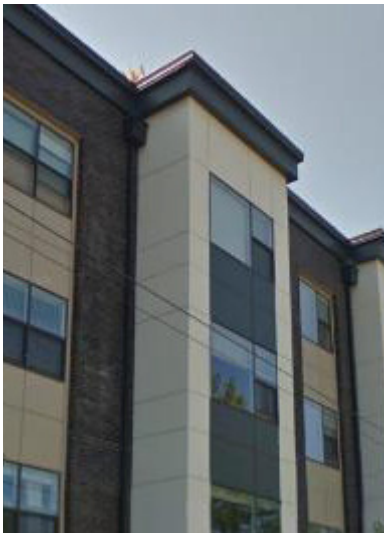
Example of a recessed ground floor

A. GENERAL

- The guidelines and standards are out of date with the many design-related standards that are now located in the commercial and mixed-use base zones.
- Some guidelines may not be achieving desired results on the ground floor and/or public realm of buildings. For example, the current trend of recessing the ground floor, along with cantilevered overhangs above, can have a negative impact on the public realm. This appears to be the result of a combination of standards and/or guidelines.
- There is a need for criteria that address the ground level of residential-only buildings. In particular, the standards for ground floor windows need some rethinking as these can create privacy issues for dwelling units on the ground floor.
- Many of the site examples evaluated did not exhibit a great level of concern for the public realm. Nor did the context seem to influence the design greatly. This suggests that something may be lacking in the guidelines to encourage a fine-grained design outcome.
- Current street frontage requirements may be limiting the ability of designers to provide a wider variety of spaces and pedestrian-oriented elements along the sidewalk.

B. COMMUNITY DESIGN STANDARDS (NON-DISCRETIONARY)

- Some corridors subject to Community Design Standards have had development that seems to overwhelm its surroundings. Standards seem to address parts of buildings but do not address very well the relationship to context, significantly breaking down large building masses, or activating the ground level.
- There are numerous standards with repetition and overlap. They reflect an earlier era of thinking about design in which the effort was focused on embodying traditional elements of architecture.
- The one-size-fits-all approach doesn't address location-specific patterns, context and public realm sufficiently.
- Having originated with retaining the character of one particular neighborhood, their application city-wide has presented difficulties and reproduced development patterns that do not recognize the many diverse parts of Portland.



Example of a large cornice



- The combination of some standards has produced unintentionally awkward results such as off-putting, recessed ground floors with little visual interest and traditional projecting cornices on contemporary building facades.
- While the CDS does prohibit certain materials, it does not address issues related to the appearance of “authenticity” of materials or details (e.g., the thickness of faux stone or brick veneers). For example, windows are required, which provides “eyes on street”. However, when glazing is set in the same plane with the siding instead of being recessed inside the window casing, it can give the impression that the walls are very thin – an impression that may be appropriate in a glass tower, but which may feel insubstantial when walls are intended to appear solid as with panel construction.
- Because many of ground floor design and massing fundamentals are now covered by the base zones and other standards, there is not much “left on the table” for the Community Design Standards (CDS). For example, building setbacks on a Transit Street or in a Pedestrian District and the orientation of a building to the street corner are addressed in the commercial zones. Buildings in CS (or other commercial zones) that were subject to the CDS were not substantially different in appearance from those that were not. Revised standards could focus on important elements not covered by the base zones, such as ground floors of residential buildings and street frontages for large sites.

C. CENTRAL CITY FUNDAMENTAL AND SUBDISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES (DISCRETIONARY)

These guidelines apply in the Central City.

- A few guidelines are vague, such as “integrate the river” and “integrate encroachments.” More complete explanations would help applicants to understand what these mean.
- Portland themes, under Portland Personality could be expanded beyond fountains, fish, and roses. Other candidates that could express local character are arts, music, fresh food, handmade crafts, advanced technology, and sustainability.
- These have been effective in shaping many buildings within and near the center. They are inspirational, illustrated, and invite a range of design approaches. The basic direction is made clear, but variations can be acceptable.



D. COMMUNITY DESIGN GUIDELINES (DISCRETIONARY)

These guidelines apply outside of the Central City.

- Overall, the structures built under the Community Design Guidelines appear to reflect a somewhat greater attention to detail than those built under the Community Design Standards. This could indicate the merit of professional judgment in discussions about design, rather than merely following prescriptive standards.
- Similar to the Community Design Standards, many of ground floor design fundamentals are covered by the base zones and other standards, there is not much “left on the table” for the Community Design Guidelines. Revisions to the guidelines could “raise the bar” and focus on subjects not addressed in the base zones.
- Judging from the site evaluations, the Guidelines result in a greater variety of building forms and appearances than the Community Design Standards. This is expected, as the process is intended to provide greater flexibility in achieving the desired outcomes.
- The Guidelines address “Plan Area Character” by requiring buildings that incorporate “building design features that respond to the area’s desired characteristics and traditions.” The examples provided are very broad, from protecting trees to replicating a pattern of roads/building massing, to incorporating art or interpretive signs.

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PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

These preliminary recommendations have been developed after considering all of the information and ideas that were gathered during the research phase, including looking at peer cities, interviews with scores of stakeholders, results of the questionnaire, and examining dozens of built projects of all different types and scales throughout the city. These recommendations are directed to improving aspects of review associated with the d-overlay.

We did not evaluate base zones, plan districts, or the mapped boundaries of d-overlay. Nor did we look at reviews associated with historic resources. These other aspects may also warrant examination at some point, but, for the purpose of this effort, we focused on the processes, standards, and guidelines associated with d-overly. It should be recognized that the d-overlay is only one part of a much larger set of regulatory tools that help guide growth and development in Portland.

RECOMMENDATIONS | PROCESS

1

Adjust thresholds to provide a high level of review for larger projects in d-overlay districts but lessen the level of review for smaller projects.

Note: the numbers indicated below regarding site area and floors are for the purpose of illustrating the recommendation. Other numbers could be considered. The thresholds could also differ for Central City vs non-Central City, as well as Gateway. Finally, FAR could be an alternative to number of floors.

a. Larger Projects – Sites larger than 10,000 sf

For new projects with more than two proposed floors, as well as alterations and additions of buildings with more than two floors, the Design Commission would conduct review through the Type III process.

For new projects with two floors or less, as well as alterations and additions of buildings with two floors or less, the staff would conduct review through the Type II process.

b. Mid-size Projects – Sites between 5,000 sf and 10,000sf

For new projects, as well as alterations and additions on sites between 5,000 sf and 10,000 sf, the staff would conduct review through the Type II process.

Outside the Central City, the clear and objective option would continue for sites in this range, for buildings less than four floors.

c. Small Projects - Sites less than 5,000 sf

New projects, as well as alterations and additions, would be exempt from design review. The base zone standards would apply.

d. Other Exemptions from Design Review

Certain institutional uses with campuses would be reviewed by other processes as their scale and impacts are considerably different than typical lot by lot development.

Existing exemptions in the current code would be continued.

2

Improve the review processes with a charter, public information, better management of meetings, and training for both Commission and staff.

a. Adopt a charter

A new charter should outline the charge of the Design Commission and design staff related to authority and focus of reviews. Staff and commissioners should review the charter at retreats.

b. Provide additional information to assist in the understanding of review processes

Interpretations of guidelines should be published on a regular basis. This would allow applicants, as well as the public, to learn about past interpretations. Annually compile and publish examples of projects that are exemplary in addressing guidelines. There could also be a Commission Commendation program.

c. Manage Design Commission meetings more effectively.

Establish management practices for the Design Commission, using the role of the chair to keep the discussions timely, on point, and focused on applying adopted design guidelines. Start times and end times should be indicated on agendas. A checklist of guidelines should be used to focus and prioritize discussion. For very large projects, or those involving multiple buildings, fewer projects should be scheduled for a given meeting to allow for more time. Staff's role should be to clarify standards/guidelines, point out precedents, and help with time keeping.

The Chair and Vice Chair should receive training on meeting management and be given clear authority to ensure that:

- Hearings that last no more than 90 minutes and follow clear outline: applicant presentation, Q&A, deliberation. (Staff should assist in monitoring the time.)
- No topic is discussed for more than 10 minutes
- Published times for beginning and ending each hearing are followed
- Discussions focus on guidelines and not subjects outside the Commission's authority
- Every commissioner is heard from
- Group consensus is the direction; not individual comments
- Direction is clear at end of meeting

d. Provide training for staff

- To ensure that guidelines and recent interpretations of guidelines are clear
- Field visits within Portland and elsewhere to become familiar with the state of the art in development
- Coordination between BPS and BDS staff to regarding long-range planning goals and current planning outcomes

3 Align the City review process with the design process.

a. Alignment

Organize the City’s review process to correspond to typical design process. This should move reviews away from discussing details prematurely and allow the “big picture” aspects of a project to be addressed first, with more detail as the project proceeds. The Commission would also be responsible for tying their comments to relevant guidelines. A summary of guidelines/check sheet could assist in the deliberations.

STAGE	SUBJECT	SUBITTALS
Pre-App (with staff)	Pre-design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site & Program • Issues Identification • Services/Utilities
DAR (optional; with Design Commission)	Early Schematic Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context Analysis • Initial Concepts • Configuration • Massing • Overall Site Plan
First Review (with Design Commission)	End of Schematic Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept • Elevations • Ground Level • Public Spaces • Preliminary Materials • Renderings
Decision Review (with Design Commission)	End of Design Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete Design • Refined Design • Materials • Details • Exterior Lighting
Building Permit (with staff)	Construction Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDs

Notes:

- *For projects over a certain size or geographic location, a DAR would be required.*
- *Issues resolved at each stage would not be revisited in subsequent meetings.*
- *Staff would check construction documents and progress during construction to ensure follow-through with commitments and conditions.*

b. Focus Deliberations

In addition to citing relevant guidelines during deliberations, deliberations of the Commission could be assisted by staff grouping the guidelines and sorting them by issues related to the three tenets: context, public realm, and durability of materials. Further, the focus should be on those guidelines that have not been met so that the discussion can bear down on what could be done in the project to have it better comport. To some extent, the staff does this already, but a more concentrated and consistent effort would be helpful. It would be helpful for the Commission to also be diligent about relating its discussion to guidelines and avoid bringing in other issues that may occur to individuals.

4 Consider a second Design Commission.

Other recommendations here involve changing thresholds for review and managing the meetings more effectively in order to reduce workload on the current Commission. The result should be a reduced load, which has been meeting many hours each month. If those methods do not reduce the workload significantly, it may be worth considering creating another commission.

A “natural” division of labor would be to have one commission for the Central City and another for other areas of the city. This reflects the differing nature of development in various parts of the city as well as the different guidelines that are applied. However, there are other ways of setting up multiple commissions.

Other cities with multiple commissions assign them to different geographic areas or assign them either public projects or private projects. But there might be merit to different approach.

One additional element that could be added to commissions, regardless of the number, is including a representative of the neighborhood or district where the project is located. This person could be drawn from a pool of volunteers to serve in this advisory capacity. Whether this is a voting position is another issue of discussion.

5 Improve public notification.

Development being reviewed under Type II or Type III would be required to erect a large sign on the property within one week of filing that would briefly describe the proposal and include a site plan. Contact information for City staff will be prominently shown. Typically in other cities, these boards are 4' tall by either 4' or 8' wide. They also include a site plan.

Mailed notification could be enhanced by increasing the mailing radius. 400 feet could be considered – roughly a two-block distance. Furthermore, other cities make sure that renters are included in the notification by having the postal service deliver notices to “Residents” or “Occupants” of a defined mailing area.

6 Document responses to neighborhood input.

When meetings with neighborhood associations for any Type II or Type III review have occurred, the responses to comments should be indicated in a report to the City staff or Design Commission.

For non-discretionary decisions, the City should establish a clear process for input from neighborhood associations and how discussions were incorporated into the design. Expectations for such input should be given a structure so that comments from associations can be useful.

For discretionary decisions, the applicant should describe how Neighborhood Association input and social context was incorporated into the design. The applicant should include a summary of neighborhood input and the response in their presentation to the Commission.

1 Sync the Standards and Guidelines.

Standards and guidelines should be combined into one document with a parallel structure. This should make it possible to easily see the relationship between the flexible guidelines and the more objective standards.

This might require separating historic review criteria, since the process and purpose are different. Flagging criteria only applicable to historic structures might be another option.

The application of standards and guidelines would benefit from frequent communication and coordination between staff applying Community design Standards and Community Design Guidelines to ensure consistent results.

2 Simplify, consolidate, and revise the Standards and Guidelines.

Develop standards and guidelines with an eye to consolidating and simplifying them, eliminating redundancies or combining those that are only marginally different.

Standards and guidelines should be highly graphical with language that clearly explains the intent and the terms of the guidelines. They should include a diagram to help explain and several real-world photographic examples that illustrate how it has been accomplished in other development. (The Central City Fundamentals are a good model.)

Criteria should be organized to address the three design tenets, which should get equal weight in review. Area-specific criteria could be added as available. For all design review tools:

Response to Context

Analysis of the context surrounding a proposed development should examine patterns, uses, characteristics, demographics, natural features and social activities. The design that evolves should be explained as to how it either fits into the context or why it is establishing something new. The guidelines should describe the size of area to be examined as context relating to the scale of the proposal.

The assessment should also look at guidance from adopted polices and plans, such as:

- The Comprehensive Plan, which offers direction through Pattern Areas.
- New direction from Mixed Use Zones project on context (inner and outer city areas)
- Central City 2035 Plan
- District Plans
- Adopted Urban Design plans or frameworks

Ground Floor/Pedestrian Emphasis

The review of project examples revealed some missing criteria:

Ground floor residential.

- Develop more specific and comprehensive options than those outlined in MUZ.

Ground floor.

- Height (floor to ceiling) – At least 12’ for residential and 15’ for mixed use
- The ground floor should be the focus of considerably more design attention, with respect to lighting, weather protection at entries, materials, doorways, windows, signs, and details that people on foot can see, touch, and otherwise appreciate at that scale.
- There should be more specificity to guide the design of the ground floor to discourage an “elevated basement” look.

In order to allow for sufficient review, in the list of required submittals, the ground level should be depicted in both elevations and sections at a large enough scale to discern details, with annotations indicating what is proposed. $\frac{1}{4}'' = 1'$ is suggested as an appropriate scale. For larger developments, this might require breaking elevation drawings into segments.

Quality and Permanence

This should be broadened to encompass other subjects such as sustainability, energy use, and ability to adapt over time. Currently, there is a lot of focus on specific details of cladding systems. Given long-range policy directions of the City, this subject matter could be given a different cast. Address “green” features that make developments more permanent because they provide lasting resilience. Determine appropriate level of detail for materials (e.g. what materials are acceptable, dimension of railing, brick coursework) while allowing some flexibility over time as building technologies and systems change.

RECOMMENDATIONS | COMMUNITY DESIGN STANDARDS

1 Replace the current standards with a considerably shorter set that focuses on the three tenets outlined below.

An important consideration is making sure these standards add value to those in the base zones. If not, having these standards might be redundant.

Response to Context

- Use Pattern Area language to determine appropriate responses for setbacks, roof pitches, entries, massing, etc.
- For East Portland specifically, emphasize site design, open space, circulations systems in requirements
- Allow more flexibility in options.
- More guidance on massing/form (MUZ will have wiggle room with new FARs)

Ground floor/Pedestrian Emphasis

- Entries should be given considerably more attention.
- Shallow landscape areas along the property line should be rethought, as they currently contribute to a “daylight basement” appearance.
- For the Eastern pattern area, and perhaps some other areas, standards should emphasize site design issues related to livability, including pedestrian access and circulation, open space, privacy, and CPTED.
- Residential-only buildings within commercial zones need to have standards that address how they reflect the residential occupancy rather than appearing to be another commercial structure. The ground floor design can convey this, but upper floors are also important.

Quality and Permanence

- Address quality results on all sides of the building, not just street-facing.
- When mixing masonry with thinner cladding, use masonry where it makes visual sense, such as within recessed portions of the building as opposed to overhanging portions.
- In residential development, window openings should be recessed or project outward rather than being within a flush, uninterrupted wall surface
- Considerations of energy use should be incorporated.

2

Provide for optional ways of meeting standards.

Some possibilities:

A given standard might include a number of optional features. The applicant would choose to include, for example, at least 4 of 7 possible elements.

The applicant could meet all standards but could be allowed one or two “departures” (i.e. variances) from certain specified standards without a LU review. This likely would require a modification of Type I review.

1 Rewrite, update, and focus the Guidelines.

These were originally put together in the late 90s. They were revised in 2008. However, they continue to reflect the original focus, which seems to be more historicist in nature and referring to older patterns of lower density residential architecture. In the last fifteen years, the city has seen much more development that is larger in scale, significantly denser, more mixed use, and consumes larger a sites, such as half-blocks and even entire blocks. Guidelines should be developed to address this form and scale of development, with examples drawn from the most recent buildings.

Guidelines should be organized to apply differently to places where a desired future character is the goal (such as 82nd Ave.) with another approach for older main street areas where the intention is to foster continuity and appropriate fit within an establish context.

2 Emphasize the public realm.

The guidelines should organized to indicate degrees of priority and importance. Given the evolution of Portland with its emphasis on transit, walking, biking, public spaces, active streets, we suggest that guidelines (and corresponding standards) place great emphasis on the components that relate to the public realm.

For residential projects, this would include the design of planting areas adjacent to sidewalks, stoops and steps, windows, lighting, entrances, parking and materials on the ground level.

For commercial and mixed use projects, these would include storefronts, entrances, weather protection, signs, lighting, parking entries, and materials on the ground level. However, massing, upper level quality, end walls, rooftops/mechanical, light and air, open spaces should be addressed as well, recognizing changes resulting from increased density, infill, and redevelopment.

3

Recognize the changing nature of the city.

The current guidelines include a section that addresses “blending into the neighborhood.” While this may be an important aspect for some areas, the extent of recent development makes this guideline more difficult to accomplish. However, an analysis and recognition of the context is an important step in the design process and should be required for Type II Review (as well as Type III). The outcome might not be so much about “blending in” but drawing from and echoing certain previous patterns of development. Alternatively, some proposals might establish entirely new directions, if the existing context does not display desirable attributes. This type of analysis should be conveyed through photos and diagrams describing a larger neighborhood context, not just adjacent parcels.

It could be very useful for the City to initiate a program to examine particular corridors or districts having a high likelihood of significant change in the near future and develop framework plans to guide both private development and public investment. Some sources that can guide a consideration of the evolving context:

- **Area plans**, which indicate intent (cautionary note: some might be outdated)
- **Comprehensive Plan Policy 3.12.** “Enhance and celebrate significant places throughout Portland with symbolic features or iconic structures that reinforce local identity, histories, and cultures and contribute to way-finding throughout the city.” Candidates include: high-visibility intersections, attractions, Schools, libraries, parks, and other civic places, bridges, rivers, viewpoints and view corridor locations, historically or culturally significant places, connections to volcanic buttes and other geologic and natural landscape features and neighborhood boundaries and transitions.
- **Low Rise storefront commercial areas.** “Character-giving” places in the heart of Portland’s corridors with d-overlay which has potential new growth, as mapped in the MUZ project.
- **Early feedback** in the process, like in a DAR, that serves to identify these contributors.
- **Next Portland**, which carefully indicates where development has been occurring, such that concentrations of change are evident.
- **WalkScore, Transit Score and Bikescore** which can indicate where goods and services are available to people without requiring a car and suggest a changing context
- **Neighborhood groups**, such as is the case for Division, who can provide localized information and ideas about corridors and districts.
- **Designated landmark buildings and districts**, which indicate places where efforts to retain and maintain existing structures are more likely.

As indicated previously, this set of guidelines is a great model to follow to describe expectation. It is clear, readable, graphically rich, and inspirational. It invites users to understand the big picture and contribute to a larger whole – and good examples are provided.

1 Make modest refinements.

These could also be consolidated and compressed to make them less overwhelming in length and subjects and to eliminate redundancies.

- Collapse them into one coherent set, including districts
- Delete aspects that are irrelevant or addressed by code

2 Provide somewhat more focus.

Some topics, such as the pedestrian realm, should be given greater priority and attention, with more detail given to how private sector buildings can contribute. Some of the examples are of streets or civic structures; it is not clear how private sector development would accomplish the guidelines. Revisions could address the following:

- **Stronger Response to Context**
District guidelines
Draw from relevant specificity in CC2035
- **Ground Floor/Pedestrian Emphasis**
Draw from Street Character guidance in CC2035

3 Revisit some of the Guidelines.

Some guidelines should be either rethought or deleted. Examples include “Integrate the River” and “Emphasize Portland Themes.” It is also not evident that these adequately address the small-scale, hand-crafted, personalized kind of social and commercial environments that Portland is well-known for having. One issue might be how to encourage this small, quirky end of the development spectrum.

4 Broaden the issue of Quality and Permanence.

The use of high quality, durable, long-lasting materials seems to be a the subject of considerable time and energy by the Design Commission. This should be broadened to encompass other subjects such as sustainability, energy use, and ability to adapt over time. Currently, there is a lot of focus on specific details of cladding systems. Given long-range policy directions of the City, this subject matter could be given a different cast.

RECOMMENDATIONS | SPECIAL DISTRICT GUIDELINES

1 Update some Districts.

Some of these, such as Macadam and the Terwilliger Parkway, are more than thirty years old. Any set created more than fifteen years ago run the risk of becoming increasingly less in sync with evolving types of development, uses, technologies, and other factors that influence development. These should be at least examined to see if they are still relevant or could benefit from newer thinking. Indeed, guidelines should be re-evaluated every 10 years or so to make sure they are still relevant.

2 Coordinate formats.

Having multiple sets of guidelines suggests a need for a template of sorts to maintain consistency and to ensure that all subjects are considered. This endeavor could reveal duplication and repetition.