

DOZA Testimony (2020-2021)

Testimony on the process, value and timeliness of the Design Review Process

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KURT SCHULTZ

Testimony to Portland City Council on the Design Overlay Zone Amendments, Recommended Draft.

Current Proposal Status: Design Overlay Zone Amendments adopted by Portland City Council on Jun 30, 2021. Public record is closed.

“ I am Kurt Schultz, a design principal with SERA Architects in Portland. I frequently am an applicant for Type III Design Reviews in the Central City for a wide variety of projects, ranging from multi-family housing to office buildings and hotels. I am very supportive of the design review process city wide as it leads to a much higher quality of projects and a better built environment for our citizens. I do not support weakening design review overlays throughout the City of Portland. I do support expanding design overlay zones where warranted. Also, I wanted to show my sincere appreciation for the design review staff at BDS as well as to members of the design commission. The design review process has improved tremendously over the last few years and I believe that is due to the commitment of design commission members and staff to make the process run smoother for applicants while still upholding strong and clear standards for new construction. I work in many jurisdictions across the west coast and the City of Portland's design review process is the most well run and predictable for applicants that I encounter. I hope our Design Review process will continue to be a point of pride for our City. Thank you.

Testimony text is presented without formatting.



Dear Mayor and Council members,

I was scheduled as the last person to testify regarding the DOZA proposal but was unable to connect. Thank you for inviting me to submit this written testimony.

I am the owner of a 60-person architecture firm that has practiced in our city for 35 years. I have taken more than a dozen projects through the design review process including multi-family housing and served on Design Commission for 5 years.

My experience on both sides of Design Review, as an applicant and as a commissioner, demonstrated there are two distinct applicants moving through the process. Applicants that are skilled at knitting buildings into the urban fabric of our city and who genuinely care about making our city better, and those who see our neighborhoods as a distraction from their development goals and design review as a hurdle to overcome.

Consistently, those that approach their work as a contribution to our city sail through the design review process, and those who see their work as self-serving and autonomous struggle. **This proposal is not about affordable housing. It is an effort to remove a process a specific group of architects and developers are bad at.**

It is not about cost. Significantly market forces and funding sources dictate the same financial constraints regardless of the approach to design review. Projects that breeze through are no more expensive than projects that flounder. It is all about the focus of the design work, the way resources are allocated within the projects, and the skill of the designer to make great urban contributions with tight budgets.

The Oral testimony Wednesday reflects these two groups. Those who have struggled with design review and those who haven't.

The primary goal of the organization behind this proposal is not to champion affordable housing in all of our neighborhoods. This is a great goal we should all support. **The real goal is to eliminate design review from our city** and this is the first step toward that end.

The way design review has been portrayed is misleading and the scope of this proposal is much further reaching.

Building more affordable housing faster and throughout the city is a goal that is much more widely supported than a stand-alone proposal to eliminate design review to make it easier for a specific group of applicants who struggle with it. PNW has worked hard to conflate their goal of eliminating design review to this much more popular goal promoting affordable housing.

The idea that design review is a barrier to affordable housing is false. In fact, the opposite is true. This is clear to those who serve on the commission and anyone who witnesses the process

weekly across hundreds of cases. Design review is only a barrier to those who approach it that way and who ignore Portland's goal of creating a denser more affordable city that is also a great place to be. Design review does not require buildings to be more expensive and the added money to go through the process is negligible (less than .2%) for most projects.

Type III design review is not a vehicle for Nimby's. While the appeal potential is certainly problematic, the review itself is not the problem. In the extremely rare cases where an appeal has been pursued design review had already approved the project. **There has never been a case where a Nimby neighborhood appealed a project to design review and had it shut down.** It is not a thing that has ever happened. Design Review is a champion of our city's goals of affordability and density. This proposal casts an ally as a problem and misses the actual problem which is the ability to appeal these projects.

This proposal disguises the reality of its scope. Because of inclusionary housing requirements any project over 20 units must have 1 affordable unit. When a building has 1 unit, the entire building is considered 'affordable'. While seeming to remove design review only from affordable housing, it is actually removing design review from every housing project over 20 units. The next step for this group will be an attempt to remove design review in totality.

A point system is being proposed as a replacement. This would eliminate dialogue and discourse from the artful work of knitting buildings into their context; into the wonderfully idiosyncratic and varied character of our neighborhoods. **There is no point system or standard that can replace creative dialogue without losing the richness and diversity that makes our city great.** Human beings are better at doing this than scorecards and systems of standards that can be gamed and manipulated.

If this proposal is adopted, it will start the process of eliminating people and dialogue from the the making of our city. A dialogue no different than the one you have engaged by considering this testimony.

This proposal is misleading in its scope, serves developers and architects who want to avoid dialogue with the neighborhoods they are impacting, and falsely connects a flawed appeal process to design review which is a champion of density and affordable housing.

Thank you for your consideration.

David Keltner
Hacker Architects
Principal

MICHELLE SCHULZ

Testimony to Portland City Council on the Design Overlay Zone Amendments, Recommended Draft

Current Proposal Status: Design Overlay Zone Amendments adopted by Portland City Council on Jun 30, 2021. Public record is closed.

“ Mayor Wheeler and Commissioners, Thank you for your time and commitment to our City. I am providing written testimony to support what I see as positive changes to the Design Review process that have come through the proposed DOZA amendments to Design Review. As an Architect in the City, I have prepared for and participated in a number of Design Review Commission hearings throughout my 20+ years of practice. The DR process prior to the assessment and DOZA amendments was extremely challenging to navigate, and very unpredictable in nature. Our clients rely on our ability to understand the City’s design requirements, and to design buildings that work within them so that we can efficiently and effectively entitle our work. However, my experience with Design Commission hearings prior to DOZA was anything but predictable or reliable. Creating excessing amounts of design iterations, a multitude of hearings, and a process that greatly impacted the timelines and cost for development projects in our City. However, my most recent project experience going through Design Review was greatly improved. The process is more efficient, the commission are focused on assessment based on guidelines and not personal opinion, and required documentation is more clearly defined. As a steward of design, I understand and appreciate the need for the Design Review process to help ensure quality design of our City. On our most recent project, we struggled to work with grade changes on our site that were creating elevated glazing above the pedestrian realm. However, working in collaboration with our client and City staff prior to our hearing, we were able to find a design solution that better engaged the surrounding site and created a richer pedestrian interface. Which in the end allowed our team to complete our Design Review process for two buildings, with two height options, in a single hearing. With the revised DOZA timelines for Design Review hearings happening earlier on in the design process, our work is now better aligned with the timing of review and input so that we can adjust and modify the design more affordably and efficiently. The revisions DOZA has implemented in the Design Review process are much improved from the process in years past. Thank you.

Testimony text is presented without formatting.

Good afternoon. My name is Tony Bernal and I am the senior director of public policy and funding for Transition Projects, an organization that helps people end their homelessness. I want to speak, briefly, in favor of Portland's design review process as it relates to building affordable housing.

Design review is a collaborative process that has long-term benefits for the building occupants and the neighborhoods they become part of. Households with little money deserve to be afforded the right to live in buildings that benefit from the same level of public discussion that informs, improves, and validates the design of all other buildings in the neighborhood.

In 2020, we opened Argyle Gardens, 72 units of very low-income housing in the Kenton neighborhood. In addition to consulting with neighborhood about the design, we participated voluntarily in the Design Advice Request process with the design commission. The feedback that we received was invaluable for informing our project—particularly the design commission's advice on how some of our exterior spaces interacted with the neighborhood. The design commission urged us to consider adding a covered outdoor gathering space for residents.

Design review was not a barrier to building affordable housing. Our project had an accelerated timeline and was constructed faster than typical projects. There was sufficient time in the development process to consult with the design commission and to incorporate their suggestions. BDS staff and the design commission both moved swiftly and were responsive to us.

I would encourage you to retain the Design Advice Request as part of the land use review for affordable housing, and to provide the opportunity for affordable housing to have the DAR be a front-of-the-line service, and free to affordable housing developers. Thank you.