


Date: May 6, 2013

To: Tim Heron, City of Portland, Bureau of Development Services

From: Bob Hastings FAIA, Agency Architect, TriMet 

Subject: Importance of Design Review process to the City of Portland

Over the last two decades I've witnessed firsthand how important the City's Design Review process has become, and the many benefits it provides to the City and its citizens.

As both an architect in private practice, and public servant as TriMet's Agency Architect, I've seen the importance and effects of Design Review from both the side of design professional and as an owner. While some may view the process as onerous and costly, I've come to appreciate its efficiencies and cost savings to a project. Simply stated it brings together highly experienced, knowledgeable, and civic mind talents to carefully consider the effects of the build environment to serve the public good.

But considering these issues up front in a proactive dialogue, rather than a rear-guard defensive action, the project can save time, money, and reduce risk. A direct example of this is the Portland Mall Revitalization Project. The Project's design team, both its design professionals and its leadership, understood the value and process of the City's Design Review Commission and was able to build this into the Project's schedule. After a series of meetings with the Design Review Commission we were able to share the Project's vision, challenges, and opportunities. The result was a refined design that met the Project's budget and schedule, and delivered far more design quality than initially envisioned.

But the other tangible benefit that cannot be over stated or ignored is the huge benefit to the City's "human infrastructure". Portland has a well deserved international reputation for design excellence in its private buildings and public spaces. This is direct manifestation of its community's investment in 'human capital'- civitas. Our future economic, environmental, and social health is based on this noblest of historical principles. Design Review brings together the rights of the citizens with their civic responsibility. This wonderful agreement has a life of its own, creating a "res publica" or public entity (synonymous with civitas). The civitas is not just the collective body of all the citizens; it is the agreement binding us all together. Our city is the physical manifestation of these principles. TriMet greatly appreciates the institution of Design Review, the selfless dedication of its Commissioners, and its experienced and helpful staff.

Cc: Neil McFarlane, Dan Blocher, Rob Barnard, Dave Unsworth, Steve Witter, Sean Batty, Ann Becklund,