



**City of Portland, Oregon**  
**Bureau of Development Services**  
**Office of the Director**  
FROM CONCEPT TO CONSTRUCTION

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**Report to Council**

July 31, 2014

**TO:** Mayor Charlie Hales  
Commissioner Nick Fish  
Commissioner Amanda Fritz  
Commissioner Steve Novick  
Commissioner Dan Saltzman

**FROM:** Paul L. Scarlett, Director  
Bureau of Development Services

PLS

**SUBJECT: Portland Design Commission State of the City Design Report**

The attached report is a required Annual Report of the Portland Design Commission State of the City Design Report for 2014. The report is required by Portland City Code [Title 33] to fulfill the Annual Report requirement for its actions and accomplishments for each fiscal year.

**Current Issues and Concern before Council today:**

In August 2013, Commissioner Amanda Fritz spoke before the Design Commission to thank them for their service and advocacy on behalf of urban design and architecture for the City of Portland. Due to a schedule conflict, I was unable to meet with the Commission in 2013. However, since that time, it has been shared with the Commission that the bureau has experienced an increase in construction activities, including development projects triggering design review and that the bureau is committed to providing sufficient staffing levels to manage the increasing workload.

The Design Commission is a particularly active volunteer Commission, meeting 28 times in 2013 for Land Use cases and holding 23 required advisory briefings on matters ranging in scale from four-block multi-story development proposals in the Lloyd sub-District of Central City to code guides for private utility vaults in the Public Rights-of-Way across the City.

Both BDS and the Design Commission see the need to be actively engaged in changes to the Portland Comprehensive Plan and Central City 2035 Quadrant Plan efforts led by the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability. Three specific areas of focus are:

1. Improving the tools BDS has to work with in the Design “d” Overlay Zones. In most parts of the city, the “d” overlay zones provide a two-track system. Both tracks need updates and improvements to be efficient and to get the well-designed projects that were intended. The two tracks are:
  - Non-discretionary Track: Community Design Standards
  - Discretionary Track: Design Review

We hope City Council will fund a project to both update the Zoning Code’s Community Design Standards [Zoning Code Section 33.218], as well as update the Design Guidelines used for the discretionary Design Review track. Some of the Design Guidelines have not been updated since the 1980’s, and the city has changed a lot since then, including how we want new development to be designed. These outdated Standards and the Design Guidelines need to be updated and improved, to better address the variety of building types and sites being developed, to produce well-designed projects in our neighborhoods.

2. Advocating for more equity in some of Portland’s rapidly changing neighborhoods by helping us eliminate issues such as split-zoned blocks, especially in cases where a significant difference in property value is effectively created by the split zone.
3. Considering discretionary Design Review’s future role in our city, either through the expansion of design districts and/or considering some sort of threshold that would trigger discretionary design review anywhere in the city, for projects of a certain scale, or on main street corridors or other special areas where enhanced design review oversight would be beneficial. But before this can be done, we must first assess the current issues with the “d” overlay, and then update and improve the “d” overlay tools we have, before expanding them to apply in more situations and/or locations.

BDS staff possess expertise in the issues and problems with the existing codes and processes, and we want to work with stakeholders in recrafting, realigning and improving our codes and processes, but this can't be accomplished without

- a) staffing capacity to participate in identifying problems and developing workable solutions; and
- b) other Bureau staff involvement, specifically the Mayor's Office and the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.

I look forward to working with you and the Design Commission in my capacity as the Director of BDS, as we work together to make these needed improvements.

**Background:**

The Design Commission provides leadership and expertise on urban design and architecture and on maintaining and enhancing Portland's historical and architectural heritage.

The Design Commission consists of seven members, none of whom may hold public elective office. The Commission must include a representative of the Regional Arts and Culture Council, one person representing the public at-large, and five members experienced in either design, engineering, financing, construction or management of buildings, and land development. No more than two members may be appointed from any one of these areas of expertise. The Regional Arts and Culture Council member is nominated by the Regional Arts and Culture Council chair and approved by the Mayor. The other members are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council.

The Design Commission meets at least once a month and as necessary to act on reviews assigned to them by this Title 33. Meetings are conducted in accordance with adopted rules of procedure. Four members constitute a quorum at a meeting. The election of officers takes place at the first meeting of each calendar year.

The Design Commission may divide its membership into special subcommittees which are authorized to act on behalf of the Commission for an assigned purpose. Three members of the Commission constitute a quorum on such subcommittees. Subcommittee actions require the affirmative vote of at least three members.

**Powers and duties:**

The Design Commission has all of the powers and duties which are assigned to it by this Title or by City Council. The Commission powers and duties include:

1. Recommending the establishment, amendment, or removal of a design district to the Planning and Sustainability Commission and City Council;
2. Developing design guidelines for adoption by City Council for all design districts except Historic Districts and Conservation Districts;
3. Reviewing major developments within design districts, except those projects involving or located within the following:
  - a. Historic Districts;
  - b. Conservation Districts;
  - c. Historic Landmarks; and
  - d. Conservation Landmarks.
4. Reviewing other land use requests assigned to the Design Commission; and

5. Providing advice on design matters to the Hearings Officer, Planning and Sustainability Commission, Historic Landmarks Commission, Portland Development Commission, and City Council.

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TO THE COUNCIL

The Commissioner of Public Utilities concurs with the recommendations of the Director of the Bureau of Development Services and

RECOMMENDS:

That the Council accepts this Portland Design Commission State of the City Design Report to Council and report as set forth in Exhibit A.

Respectfully submitted,  
Commissioner Amanda Fritz

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Agenda No.  
**REPORT NO.**  
Title

Accept the Portland Design Commission State of the City Design Report (Report)

<b>INTRODUCED BY</b> Commissioner/Auditor: Commissioner <del>Dan Saltzman</del> <i>FRITZ</i>	CLERK USE: DATE FILED <u>JUL 25 2014</u>
<b>COMMISSIONER APPROVAL</b> Mayor—Finance and Administration - Hales Position 1/Utilities - Fritz <i>March 7th</i> Position 2/Works - Fish Position 3/Affairs - Saltzman Position 4/Safety - Novick	LaVonne Griffin-Valade Auditor of the City of Portland  By: <i>Susan Parsons</i> Deputy  <b>ACTION TAKEN:</b>
<b>BUREAU APPROVAL</b> Bureau: Development Services Bureau Head: <i>P. Scarlett</i> Paul L. Scarlett, Director	<b>JUL 31 2014 ACCEPTED</b>
Prepared by: Leanne Torgerson Date Prepared: 7/22/14	
<b>Financial Impact &amp; Public Involvement Statement</b> Completed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Amends Budget <input type="checkbox"/>	
Council Meeting Date <b>7/31/14, 2:45 p.m. TC</b>	
<b>City Attorney Approval</b>	

<b>AGENDA</b>
<b>TIME CERTAIN</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Start time: 2:45 p.m. TC</b>  <b>Total amount of time needed: 45 minutes</b> (for presentation, testimony and discussion)
<b>CONSENT</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>REGULAR</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Total amount of time needed: 45 minutes</b> (for presentation, testimony and discussion)

FOUR-FIFTHS AGENDA	COMMISSIONERS VOTED AS FOLLOWS:	
	YEAS	NAYS
1. Fritz	1. Fritz	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. Fish	2. Fish	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. Saltzman	3. Saltzman	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. Novick	4. Novick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hales	Hales	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>