

May 1, 2019

MITHUN

The Honorably Ted Wheeler
Mayor, City of Portland
1221 SW 4th Ave, Room 340
Portland, Oregon 97204

Re: 2018 State of the City Design Report

Dear Mayor Wheeler and City Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Mithun and as a landscape architect. Over 20 years ago I moved to Portland from the middle of the country to attend college. Portland was the first city I lived in with a walkable urban environment and in many ways those years in Portland, independent from my family, shaped my perception of how great cities should be designed. It is through exposure to Pioneer Square, the Park Blocks, the Keller Fountain Park and others that I was introduced to the profession of landscape architecture and the idea of designed public spaces for people. I consider myself lucky to have the opportunity as a design professional to contribute to Portland's evolving, dynamic environment, and it is an opportunity I take seriously. It is my hope that the City's thoughtful design and attention to the natural environment will continue to inspire future generations as it inspired me.

With our development partner Security Properties, Mithun has participated in the design review of 3 projects in the last 4 years: Heartline, which opened this past fall, the Oregonian Press Blocks and most recently the Pepsi Blocks Planned Development. Our office practices across the country, and I have been involved in design review processes in multiple cities, primarily on the West Coast. I can say from experience that Portland's process, while rigorous, is unique in its interactive and collaborative approach, especially early in the design. Applicants have an opportunity to not only present their projects, but also engage Commissioners in a thoughtful conversation about how the design creatively recognizes its context, addresses the neighborhood, and contributes to the success of the City. Unlike other municipalities, the multiple opportunities for conversation with the Design Commission, and the thoroughness of the application, can produce projects of high caliber without surprises during the review process.

As a designer focused primarily on the public realm, the design review is both exhilarating and challenging, but the results have

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produced more thoughtful designs. The early Design Advice Requests is especially essential to this, providing the feedback on the conceptual approach, programming of outdoor rooms and pedestrian connectivity with time to incorporate before the details are developed. This early, collaborative feedback is key for projects to remain cost effective and on-schedule.

Through the DAR process on Heartline, the overall project was greatly improved. The design commission challenged us to consider how our early design was addressing the Design Guidelines, specifically how it responded to: (B4) Provide Stopping and Viewing Spaces, (B5) Make Plazas, Parks and Open Spaces Successful and (C6) Develop Transitions between Buildings and Public Spaces, while also emphasizing Portland Themes (A2). With this feedback, we developed the 'log jam' concept that influenced design decisions and site furnishings, inspired the art added to the project, created more outdoor gathering spaces of varying scales, including the bocce court that also treats stormwater. All of these were design innovations and improvements we made because of the early DAR feedback and have led to a successful project. Had we received these comments later in the design, it would have been much more difficult and costlier to incorporate the design changes.

The success of this process is also due to great partners. Our client, Security Properties, recognizes the value in the design quality of Portland and supports the development of project of permanence. We consider the committed BDS staff, who willingly work with us to streamline and facilitate a successful application, as partners. The collaborative attitude and varied experience of the Design Commissioners also contribute to the process. They bring an awareness of design and development challenges, an interest in protecting the City's high caliber of design, and a recognition of the evolving needs of the City.

Over the last few years, the design review process has improved through more clarity on deliverables, decisions and efficiency of the Hearings. Since much of my work is within the right-of-way, I would offer the following recommendations to further improve the efficiency and efficacy of design review:

- Formally tie Land Use review process and Public Works Permit process to synchronize responses from PBOT and BDS
- Consider requiring attendance by PBOT decision makers at DAR and LUR meetings when the ROW is subject to review
- Similarly, recommend BDS staff presence at Public Works Permit reviews to speak to the goals of the Commission and hear concerns from PBOT.

It is also important to recognize that designs will change. During Contract Documents, Bidding and through construction, changes will likely need to be made that impact the approved LUR document. Furthermore, landscapes are living and while we hope we design them to succeed, sometimes changes need to be made. Empowering BDS staff to work with the design team and approve changes is important to the timely delivery of high-quality projects.

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The Design Review process is not easy, nor is it complicated. It requires the applicants to be respectful, prepared, dedicated and thoughtful in their decisions. But shouldn't every city require those qualities in those responsible for its future built form? As I have seen and participated in, the results of this rigor speak to the city's commitment to build places that will last for decades to come. The attention to detail and fundamental moves, set up projects – and neighborhoods – for long term success.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dorothy Faris', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dorothy Faris
Principal, ASLA

May 1, 2019

Mr. Ted Wheeler, Mayor
City of Portland
SW 5th Avenue
Portland, OR 97201

Re: Portland Design Commission Testimony

Dear Mayor Wheeler and the Commissioners:

I am pleased to speak today on behalf of my experience with the Portland Design Commission in support of the value of the Design Advice Request process.

As a landscape architect and urban designer working in Portland for the last 35 years, I have had vast experience in using the Design Review and Type III Land Use Review process for a wide variety of projects in the city—28 projects to be specific. These projects range from public spaces, civic and institutional buildings to private development projects such as mixed-use, housing, hotels and office buildings. Some of these include:

- Director Park
- the Oregon Convention Center plaza
- the new Hyatt Regency Hotel at the Oregon Convention Center
- the new Lincoln High School
- the Collaborative Life Sciences Building and the Knight Cancer Research Building on the Schnitzer Campus, and
- The Karl Miller Center and Newberger Hall renovation, both on the PSU campus.

For most of these projects we serve a key role on architect-led teams as site designers. We find ourselves in a good position to strategize and advise on the consulting teams, especially on teams with architects from out of town.

On the planning and design of our city, we tend to have a different way of seeing our city. We give a strong emphasis and consideration to the public realm. We work to improve the context of every building and open space. We look beyond the project borders to understand, if not anticipate, the next adjacent development and how our project might set a framework for future design response. We look to support pedestrian connections and high-quality urban spaces so that our city is welcoming and inviting.

We, our design teams, and our clients both public and private, feel that the Design Advice Request process provides great value. Most of the projects are very complex. There are many layers of design thinking that go into how to shape form, address the public realm and provide connectivity to everything around it.

In fact, we feel that it is essential to have early conversations with staff and the commission about site analysis, issues, concerns and questions. We understand that the best projects come with a rigor and adherence to guidelines set by the city. But there are also many ways to interpret the guidelines

or apply them to any given site or context. This is where getting early advice from the commission to inform the designer team is the most useful, ahead of the Land Use Hearings. We feel more free to test ideas, illustrate and discuss multiple concepts and ask for guidance in the early stages of design.

We strongly encourage you and the council to retain this ability for Design Advice Request so that we are strengthen our city to be designed for people and support civic life and design excellence.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to commend the leadership of Julie Livingston who currently serves as the Chair.

Sincerely,

Mayer/Reed, Inc.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carol Mayer-Reed". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Carol Mayer-Reed, FASLA
Landscape Architect

Moore-Love, Karla

From: Matt Segrest <matt.segrest@alamomanhattan.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 30, 2019 8:30 AM
To: Council Clerk – Testimony
Cc: Heron, Tim; Julie Livingston; Fioravanti, Kara; Wade Johns
Subject: Testimony letter
Attachments: PDX DC Testimony Letter 4-30-19.pdf

Please see the attached letter regarding testimony for the May 2, 2019 City Council - *2018 Portland Design Commission State of the City Report*.

Thank you,
Matt

Matt Segrest
Alamo Manhattan
3012 Fairmount Street
Suite 100
Dallas, Texas 75201
469.941.4510

ALAMO MANHATTAN

April 30, 2019

Portland City Council
City Hall
1221 SW 4th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97204

RE: 2018 Portland Design Commission State of the City Report Testimony

Dear Portland City Council Members:

This letter is written to provide testimony regarding Alamo Manhattan's experience with the Bureau of Development Services ("BDS") and Portland Design Commission. Alamo Manhattan is a Dallas-based development company with extensive involvement in Portland. This cycle, we have successfully entitled four major projects through the design review process: Ella apartments (199-unit mid-rise in South Waterfront), 140 Columbia (348-unit high-rise in downtown), Block 40A (190-unit mid-rise in South Waterfront), Block 40B (232-unit mid-rise in South Waterfront). Additionally, we currently have the 9.8-acre Prometheus land in the South Waterfront under contract. We expect to acquire new land use entitlements for four new developments on this property in 2019. These projects (a mix of mid-rise and high-rise buildings) will include over 1,000 new units and 20,000 square-feet of commercial space.

Our experience with both BDS staff and the Design Commission has been overwhelmingly positive. While we recognize our interactions with BDS and the Design Commission is limited to ours alone, the sample size is relatively large. Given this, we believe with a high level of confidence that our impressions are reflective of objective reality. Specifically, this letter would like to provide testimony regarding the following:

1. Design Advice Request process. Our firm considers the Design Advice Request ("DAR") process to be extremely valuable. The DAR hearing provides a structured forum for a developer to explore key design questions early-on before expending the considerable time and resources required to submit a full Design Review ("DR") package. In our experience, there are two primary benefits to the DAR process, each discussed below.

First, a developer can evaluate key "go/no-go" design assumptions quickly so as to assess project feasibility. A formal DR process takes too long to obtain such feedback within a typical development transaction due diligence period (usually 90-120 days). Given this, the DAR process is essential to diligently evaluate complicated projects, especially because financial feasibility is usually contingent on key design assumptions.

For example, in the feasibility analysis of our 140 Columbia project, given some considerable site constraints, we had to determine if an above-grade parking garage could be an acceptable design solution for the project. If it could not, the project would not be

financially feasible. This was the key due diligence item to us as we evaluated the project. Because of the availability of the DAR process, we were able to explore acceptable design solutions with staff and Design Commission within our contractual due diligence period. Through much discussion at the DAR hearing, we were able to identify potential acceptable solutions that conformed to design standards. *We would not have taken the risk to push forward with a DR package (and the project overall) if not for receiving this comfort through the DAR process.* Today, the project is under construction.

Second, the feedback from a DAR meeting allows a developer to receive early feedback from staff and design commissioners so as to have a more complete DR submittal. Typically, based on DAR feedback, we are able to submit a DR package that requires few major design revisions. This is valuable because it allows a developer to begin full design of a project sooner, thus shortening the pre-construction period. In general, the quicker a developer can get a project to market, the better.

An additional comment regarding the DAR process: we have greatly valued the ability to engage with the Design Commission on a very candid basis. The more informal structure of a DAR allows for more open and free-flowing back-and-forth discussion between the parties. Usually when we go to DAR, we are looking to discuss how to address specific design challenges. We typically do not approach the meeting with an “intent to sell” a certain solution, but rather with a hope to engage in a group problem solving endeavor. This has been an extremely successful activity. To us, the risk in this type of exchange is that creative, workable solutions are hindered due to subjective personal biases and ego. Thankfully, this has not been our experience. We place such value on DAR that it has become a fundamental milestone to our development process in evaluating any new deal in Portland.

One note of caution regarding DAR: it is important that DAR submittal requirements do not become too onerous. The intent of the meeting is to get prompt feedback on early design issues and to avoid spending time and resources on designs that may be unworkable. If submittal requirements become too detailed and extensive in terms of time or expense, the entire benefit of the DAR will be lost.

2. Highly competent professionals. The BDS staff is exceptional. We have had the privilege of extensive interaction with at least seven different staff members this cycle and can confidently state the staff is the most proficient and capable of any planning staff with which we have worked across all our markets. Staff members are highly-educated, well-trained and very responsive. Staff has also proven to be proactive and creative to help our team solve problems. Staff appears to communicate well internally, which typically is a reflection of solid leadership. The Design Review process is not easy, but it is relatively objective and staff usually meets timelines.

Of note, Staci Monroe has demonstrated herself to be an extremely talented staff member. Staci was the lead planner on our 140 Columbia development, which is an incredibly complicated project. We greatly appreciated her “can-do” spirit and availability throughout the project design. Also, her candor and integrity made us comfortable that we would

always be treated fairly. We have also worked with her on other projects where she demonstrated the same qualities. She has distinguished herself as a model BDS staff member, serving the city well through competence, excellent communication and creativity.

Regarding the Design Commission, we have found the commissioners' comments during hearings to be informed, objective and well-reasoned. While we may disagree at times with their conclusions, such conclusions are usually not subjective, but rather are in alignment with published design standards. Each current commissioner appears to be well-qualified to serve on the committee and a credible voice of critique. We have sought to engage commissioners on a very respectful level and this has always been reciprocated. In our experience, emotion, personal bias and ego appear to play an immaterial role on the current commission. The current Commission supports the notion of applying flexibility to achieve design guidelines. The end result is a fair process whereby the Commission issues clear guidance which allows a developer to move forward with relative certainty.

The current Design Commission appears to be very well led by the current Chair, Julie Livingston. She sets a very positive, inclusive and non-confrontational tone at commission hearings and is adept at guiding discussion and managing potential friction (both applicant-to-commissioner and commissioner-to-commissioner). Under the current Chair, we felt confident our comments would be understood and fully considered and that open discussion would ensue between the parties.

In the end, our projects have become better as a result of engagement with both staff and commissioners.

Portland has distinguished itself with outstanding architecture and innovative land use planning (among other things). Design standards are demanding and are enforced through a rigorous Design Review process. To maintain these standards, the city council should be vigilant in sustaining a high-quality, well-led planning staff and a competent, credible design commission who objectively (but flexibly) enforce design standards.

Also, we recommend the Council should continue to preserve diversity of representation on the Design Commission, with meaningful representation from stakeholders who understand financial feasibility implications for design decisions. The Design Review process needs to be practical and *promote* good development (and not *hinder* it).

Alamo Manhattan looks forward to many years of development in the great city of Portland. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this matter.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Matt Segrest".

Matt Segrest
President