Pittsburgh Department of City Planning
DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

WHAT IS THE DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS?

Design Review is an important part of the permitting process in the Department of City Planning. In this process, architects and developers work with staff, panels and commissions to help ensure high-quality development in Pittsburgh. Successful design improves quality of life, enhances neighborhood character, and provides economic and environmental benefits.

Design Review is a collaborative process between City Planning and project representatives. It is in iterative process through which staff work continuously with the applicant until design-related zoning requirements and Urban Design Targets are satisfied.

Design Review is specific to each application and project. The extent of the Design Review process can vary depending on the location, scale and scope of the project, necessary review, and what urban design issues or criteria are present in the project.

Design Review does not require a separate application and can begin once a complete application has been filed. Design Review has two stages: internal Staff Design Review and, when recommended, Contextual Design Advisory Panel (CDAP) review.

WHAT PROJECTS REQUIRE DESIGN REVIEW?

Projects requiring Design Review can include:

- New construction or renovations in commercial or industrial zones
- New residential construction with 4 or more units
- Construction or renovations in Downtown, Oakland, and the North Shore
- Developments in an Interim Planning Overlay District or Specially Planned District
- New or renovated high wall signs
- As required by the Zoning Administrator

Over-the-counter projects generally do not require design review. For properties with a local historic designation or on public property, exterior renovations to locally designated historic properties go through the Historic Review process instead of Design Review. Projects on public property are reviewed by the Public Art and Civic Design Commission.

HOW DO PRE-APPLICATION MEETINGS WORK WITH DESIGN REVIEW?

The first step in the application process is often the optional pre-application meeting. Design staff attend pre-application meetings and can give preliminary design comments and discuss the project's likely course through design review, such as whether CDAP will be necessary, and may be able to provide early Urban Design Targets.

WHAT IS STAFF DESIGN REVIEW?

All Design Review starts at the staff level. After a Building and Development Application (BDA) is filed, City Planning design staff and the neighborhood planner make an initial evaluation of the project. Staff Design Review is an internal meeting for staff to review the proposed design.

During this initial design review, design staff assign Urban Design Targets for the project. In developing each set of targets, staff draw from the neighborhood context, relevant master plans and design guidelines. The Urban Design Targets are specific to the project, and are broad (not prescriptive) guidelines for the project to achieve.

Staff send the Urban Design Targets, as well as staff comments and recommendations, to the applicant and confirm the next steps in the review process. In some cases, a project may meet some or all of the Urban Design Targets on initial submission, and no further Design Review will be necessary.

For projects that do not meet all the Urban Design Targets, Staff will recommend one of two paths: continued review by staff or review by the Contextual Design Advisory Panel (CDAP).

If the Design Review remains with staff, the applicant will work to respond to and meet the Urban Design Targets and the staff's design comments.

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WHEN IS CDAP REQUIRED?

For large scale projects, staff can refer a project to the Contextual Design Advisory Panel (CDAP). CDAP is a high level advisory panel comprised of practicing architects, planners, landscape architects, and city building advocates. Together with Staff Design Review, this multi-disciplinary team provides pro-bono design and planning assistance within each of their professional fields.

The panel's mission is "promoting quality of life in the City of Pittsburgh through professional, voluntary design assistance to maximize the economic, civic, contextual, and aesthetic value of new development projects which significantly impact the public realm."

The CDAP review is a one hour charrette style meeting. The applicant's team, including developer, are encouraged to attend. City Planning staff attend the meeting as well.

At the CDAP review, the project representative gives a 20 minute presentation that explains the project's surrounding context and design concepts. In the remaining meeting time, CDAP members provide comments, suggestions, recommendations on how to improve and refine the design.

The Urban Design Targets set by Staff Design Review guide the review at CDAP meetings. Discussion will focus on the targets, which will provide consistency to the process and benchmarks to evaluate progress.

Staff will work with the applicant to schedule a time on the CDAP agenda for the project presentation and review.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER CDAP?

After the CDAP meeting, Staff send a summary of the Panel's recommendations to the applicant. The applicant then follows up with staff to reply and respond to the comments by updating the design accordingly.

For projects requiring approval by Planning Commission, staff will write a summary of the Design Review process, which is included in the Staff Report to the Commission. This summary encapsulates staff's and CDAP's design recommendations, and subsequent design changes that the applicant has taken in response.

WHEN IS DESIGN REVIEW COMPLETED?

The Design Review process is complete when the applicant has met all the design-related zoning requirements and incorporated the Urban Design Targets to the fullest extent possible. All other Zoning Code requirements will have to be met prior to the issuance of zoning approval for a project.

WHAT ARE THE SUBMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS?

The materials required depend on the scope and size of the project. For instance, a facade renovation of an existing building may not require perspectives or night time lighting renderings. Please submit as much of the following as possible with the application:

- Location map
- Labeled photos of surrounding context
- Elevations of all sides with materials labeled
- Landscaping plan
- Streetscape renderings showing the building in context
- Materials information labeled on elevations or included in materials board
- Massing studies of 3-D model
- Any alternative site or massing designs considered
- Perspectives of the project from the human scale

For high wall signage, please submit:

- Site plan indicating where the sign is located
- Elevations illustrating sign on building
- Section drawing illustrating how the sign is attached to the building face
- Description of sign lighting and materials
- View of sign from key vantage points
- Any alternative placements or lighting programs under consideration

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the Design Review process and submission requirements, contact PACD@pittsburghpa.gov