



# 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 the project representative. It is an iterative process, meaning that Staff works continuously with the applicant to address the Urban Design Targets until these goals are met and design-related zoning requirements 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 from the Zoning Development Review Application and can begin once a complete application has been filed. Refer to the **Design Review Submissions Handout** for what materials are required to initiate design review.

Design Review has two stages: internal Staff Design Review and Contextual Design Advisory Panel (CDAP) review.

## WHAT PROJECTS REQUIRE DESIGN REVIEW?

Design Review is a component of Zoning Development Review processes, such as Site Plan Review and Project Development 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

## Most projects requiring a Zoning Development Review Application must undergo Design Review.

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 Art 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. As these meetings concern projects at the conceptual stage, design staff touch on broad topics.

## WHAT IS STAFF DESIGN REVIEW?

All Design Review starts at the staff level. Staff Design Review can be concurrent with Site Plan Review or Project Development Code reviews. After a Development Review Application 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, Pittsburgh's P4 principles, and design guidelines. The Urban Design Targets are specific to the project, but are broad not prescriptive guidelines for the project to achieve. Once established, the Urban Design Targets guide the project throughout the Design Review process, regardless of the kind of Code review.

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.



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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.

## 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."

CDAP review is voluntary, but highly recommended for some projects. The applicant will update the design to address staff's earlier Urban Design Targets and design comments in preparation for the CDAP meeting.

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.

Regular CDAP meetings are held every other Tuesday from 4 PM to 6 PM in the Department of City Planning, 200 Ross Street, 4th Floor. 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.

For all other projects, the staff will convey the Design Review process through the Zoning Administrator and/or staff.

## 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.

Design Review is considered complete when all of staff's initial and CDAP's subsequent comments have been addressed.

## WHAT ARE THE SUBMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS?

Please see the supplemental handout **Design Review Submission Requirements** for a list of what drawings and renderings are required, based on the type of submission and the stage of review.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the Design Review process, Staff Design Review or CDAP, contact William Gregory, Planner 2 (Design Review), at [william.gregory@pittsburghpa.gov](mailto:william.gregory@pittsburghpa.gov) or 412-255-2470.