

Central Area LURC

January 9, 2024 MEETING NOTES

More than thirty people attended the January 9 LURC meeting to talk with newly elected D3 City Councilmember Joy Hollingsworth.

LURC members and others expressed appreciation for the Councilmember's spending her time with the group and for her attention to land use issues.

The major issues discussed were issues related to the City's Design Review process. The City Council says, beginning as early as next month, public meetings will be held to help inform the revision of the D. R. process. Changing D.R. has long been a goal for a number of Councilmembers and, it appears, the Mayor's office. Also, legislation passed in the 2023 session in Olympia significantly changed what any local government can undertake in regard to design review.

Hard copies of LURC position paper on Design Review (attached) were shared w/CM Hollingsworth and meeting attendees.

Despite the changes enacted by the State in 2023, it still appears possible that there could be one public meeting (but no more than one public meeting) as part of the D.R. process.

LURC members and members of the public expressed to CM Hollingsworth how and why a public meeting is important.

The Central Area Design Review standards were developed after a grass-roots effort of residents and groups. The Central Area standards, including the vehicle of a public meeting, were intended to educate and inform investors and developers in the hopes that new development could become more equitable for Seattle's historic Black community. As noted in the introduction to the Central Area Design Guidelines, race and social equity compels that "resources and opportunities must be shared, and the inclusion of under-represented communities in decision-making processes is necessary."

To remove from the public a meaningful opportunity to participate in the D.R. process and leave review to conversations entirely among City staff and developers would seriously undercut efforts to create new equitable development.

Also, it was noted that according to the City's own study, development proposals that have gone through Administrative D.R. (i.e. D.R. without a public meeting) take almost the same amount of time as proposals that go through full D.R.

Cutting the amount of time that is required to get a Master Use Permit is good. Why not attack the parts of the process that are actually causing delay? D.R. is not the cause.

Those attending included local developers who pointed out that the successful design of a project can and should influence the design of the ground floor of mixed-use and commercial buildings.

Ground-floor design can greatly influence the impact --- for good or bad--- that the development has on the community.

Two other important Land Use issue, not entirely related to D.R. were pointed out by Councilmember Hollingsworth and others:

- Although many areas have been upzoned, encouraging the replacement of existing small-scale houses, the developments replacing them have not been apartments or condos, as would be allowed by zoning. Rather, there are new townhouses, a lot taller than what they have replaced, but without a significantly larger number of people living in them than the number that had been living on the site before.
- The City has not been honoring it's own zoning code, which directs any increase in the intensity of a zone must be accompanied by transitions to adjacent zones of lower intensity. Multiple examples of upzones with abrupt conditions next to low intensity zones have been created in recent years.

Councilmember Hollingsworth expressed a willingness to continue the conversation.

CENTRAL AREA LAND USE REVIEW COMMITTEE

POSITION STATEMENT ON DESIGN REVIEW

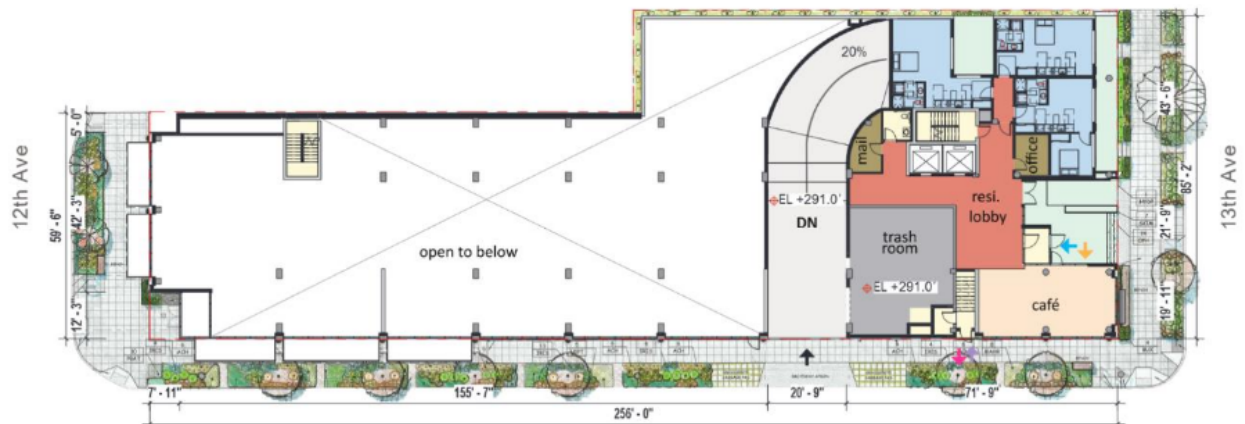
- 1. An opportunity for the public to participate in a design review process in the Central Area of Seattle is a Race and Social Equity issue.** Seattle Central Area residents desire and support new development providing homes for those in need and for an increasing population. However, Central Area residents know that new development is not necessarily equitable development. Approximately five years ago neighborhood residents and groups sought and achieved Central Area specific design guidelines intended to educate and inform investors and developers in the hopes that new development could become more equitable for our city's historic Black community. Briefly, the Guidelines, in the "Context and Priority Issues" section state: "(Seattle's) historic pattern of discrimination established a structural foundation of inequity in our city, prioritizing homeownership and business opportunities for White residents. Because of this history, the City has made it a priority to evolve into a community of opportunity for all people, regardless of race or socio-economic status. This is noted in Seattle's Comprehensive Plan, Seattle 2035, with one of its core values being: RACE AND SOCIAL EQUITY -limited resources and opportunities must be shared; and the inclusion of under-represented communities in decision-making processes is necessary. "This value greatly informs the Central Area Design Guidelines. It is, however, important to note that the language within this document often speaks specifically to the preservation of the African and Black American community in the Central Area. "The inequities endured by Seattle's Black residents during these times makes preserving African American culture and community a high priority in the Central Area. These (Design) Guidelines are both in response to this historic inequity and aligned with other Seattle programs with seek to facilitate public and private investments in neighborhoods that support those most in need." **To remove from the public meaningful opportunity to participate in the design review process and leave review and decisions to conversations entirely among City staff and developers would seriously undercut efforts to create new equitable development in the Central Area.**
- 2. Eliminating public meetings from the process would not significantly reduce the amount of time required in the permitting process.** The City of Seattle, as part of its review of the effectiveness and impact of the Design Review process commissioned a study of the effects of the current system. The results indicate that, for proposals going through the full Design Review (the process including an opportunity for public meetings) the design review process equaled 23% of the time required to obtain a Master Use permit. For proposals going through Administrative Design Review process the design review process equaled 22% of the time required to obtain a Master Use permit. (Note that this overall time frame does not include the full process for obtaining a building permit; if it did, that 23%/22% portion would be significantly smaller).

3. Our experience has shown us numerous examples of positive impact for the community, directly attributable to explicit public input. **Successful outcomes are the product of hearing the genuine high-level concerns from people on the ground regarding vehicle and pedestrian access, daylight and shadow, massing decisions, etc., and implementing them with reasonable conditions for a project to move forward with.** These well-grounded directives would not have been possible if the only review came from city staff. Attached are three images of recent projects from recent where clear community benefit was the direct result of the full Design Review process.

Public open space within the Midtown Square project at 23rd and Union. Both this space and the curated art throughout the public exterior were a direct result of the public involvement through the Design Review program. Original scheme only included an elevated, residents-only court.



Public pedestrian access through the 23rd and Jackson Apartments, connecting the residential blocks on 24th Avenue to the south with the commercial activity of Jackson street to the north – a direct outcome of the Design Review process. Developer was originally resistant to the idea, then wanted it to be gated. The public DR process obligated it to be an open connection 24/7.



Site plan for Photographic Center Northwest mixed-use (multi-family) project. Community expressed via Design Review process that the parking garage and loading facilities orient to Marion Street rather than 13th Avenue. Design team found the approach feasible, revised their documents in short order and all parties are happy.