



**Legislative Department  
Seattle City Council  
Memorandum**

**Date:** December 11, 2013

**To:** Richard Conlin, Chair  
Tim Burgess, Vice Chair  
Mike O'Brien, Member  
Planning, Land Use and Sustainability (PLUS) Committee

**From:** Lish Whitson, Council Central Staff

**Subject:** Council Bill (CB) 118006 – update to the Citywide and Neighborhood-Specific Design Review guidelines

## **1. Overview**

Design guidelines provide the foundation for Seattle's design review program. They are "the cornerstone of the Design Review Program... and the primary tool by which proposed projects are evaluated."<sup>1</sup> The City adopted the current design guidelines for projects outside of Downtown Seattle in 1994.

In October 2012, the Department of Planning and Development proposed the first significant update to Seattle's Design Review Guidelines. The DPD legislation, introduced as CB [117619](#), would adopt a new set of citywide design guidelines, intended to be more effective in encouraging better design, and to be clearer and easier to use. The 18 neighborhood guidelines that the City has adopted to interpret and implement the existing citywide guidelines would be reorganized to maintain consistency with the new city-wide design guidelines. CB 117619 would also amend Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) Sections 23.41.002, 23.41.008 and 23.41.010, which sections 1) provide the purpose and intent sections for the City's Design Review program; 2) set the roles and responsibilities of the City's Design Review Boards and 3) adopt by reference the design guidelines.

The proposed changes to the design guidelines were the subject of a public hearing on April 29, 2013. The PLUS Committee last discussed the design guidelines on May 22. At that meeting, the Committee provided direction to DPD to revise the legislation in the following ways:

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<sup>1</sup> Director's Report and Recommendation, Seattle Design Guidelines Update, February 8, 2013.

1. Maintain the current purpose and intent of the design review program
2. Clarify the relationship between the design guidelines and regulations that effect the design of buildings
3. Include introduction and overview statements for the citywide and neighborhood guidelines
4. Add more graphics to better illustrate guidelines
5. Clarify vague and confusing guidelines

DPD has made those changes and released them for public comment in October. In response to Council direction and public comments, DPD has drafted a new Council Bill to replace Council Bill 117619: Council Bill [118006](#).

This memo provides a brief summary of the key differences between Council Bills 117619 and 118006 and recommends adoption of CB 118006.

## **2. Seattle Municipal Code, Chapter 23.41**

Chapter 23.41 of the Seattle Municipal Code guides the Seattle Design Review process. The proposed new legislation would amend the title of Section 23.41 and subsections 23.41.002 and 23.41.008 in order to change the official name of the program to “Design Review” from “Early Project Implementation” and to reference the new administrative and streamlined design review programs. Amendments to Section 23.41.010 would incorporate new design review guidelines.

Compared to the previous version of the legislation, the new legislation significantly reduces the proposed changes to the code. In response to the Committee’s direction and public comment, DPD has removed language that would have changed the stated intent of design review in Seattle and could have changed the authority of the Design Review Boards.

## **3. Citywide Design Guidelines**

The Seattle Design Guidelines are the foundation of the Design Review Program, and are used by the Design Review Boards and designers to shape development. The goal of these guidelines is to “foster design excellence in private development of new multifamily and commercial projects throughout the city.”

In response to direction given at the May 22 PLUS Committee meeting and public comments, DPD has made a number of changes to the proposed Seattle Design Guidelines.

The new proposed Seattle Design Guidelines include the following:

- New references to other codes and departments that have authority in specific areas (as information points on the side to direct people to applicable regulations);
- An introductory and overview statement, modeled on the language in the current design guidelines;
- Additional graphics to better illustrate some guidelines;

- Clarified and simplified language where it was vague or unclear;
- Additional guidelines to address zone transitions and building materials, two topics that are often of particular concern in design review meetings; and
- Changed fonts (increased size, different style or bolded) to enhance readability.

The Department of Planning and Development released the proposed revised Citywide Design Guidelines for public comment in October. In response to comments from members of the public on that October draft, DPD has proposed additional changes to clarify and simplify language in the guidelines, which are incorporated into CB 118006.

There is one graphic on page 6 of the Design Guidelines that may be confusing or misleading to members of the public. The graphic shows a larger than typical setback from a lot line. I recommend removing this graphic from the guidelines.

#### Committee Action

- A. Adopt as proposed
- B. Adopt with the graphic in the middle of the page on page 6 removed

Central Staff recommends option B

#### **4. Neighborhood Guidelines**

Nineteen sets of neighborhood design guidelines were adopted between 2000 and 2010.<sup>2</sup> They provide additional guidance to the Design Review Boards for specific neighborhoods. In order to maintain consistency between the citywide guidelines and the neighborhood guidelines, the proposed legislation would adopt reorganized neighborhood guidelines. Outdated references and maps would also be updated, and the neighborhood guidelines would be reformatted.

DPD had also proposed to remove introductory statements, which had been inconsistently adopted by the City Council, from the neighborhood guidelines. At the May 22 meeting, the PLUS Committee asked DPD to include the introductory statements for all neighborhood guidelines. The Committee also asked DPD to number the neighborhood guidelines and to correct some technical errors. The Committee also directed DPD to incorporate neighborhood context and priority statements and neighborhood goals and objectives in the neighborhood guidelines.

In response to Committee recommendations, the new proposed neighborhood design guidelines include the following:

- Introductions, context and priority statements, goals, and objectives;

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to the eighteen sets of neighborhood design guidelines that apply to areas outside of Downtown Seattle and would be updated as part of this proposed legislation, the Belltown Guidelines apply in that neighborhood and provide greater direction in applying the Downtown Design Guidelines there.

- A “guidelines at a glance” section, correlating the citywide and neighborhood guidelines by subject;
- Updated references in neighborhood guidelines to correspond to the new citywide guidelines;
- Updated references to maps;
- Improved maps, made more readable and simpler<sup>3</sup>;
- A standard footnote to maps, where appropriate, referring readers to DPD for specific zoning information;
- Numbering for the neighborhood guidelines;
- Clarified or updated language where needed (note: changes to the text were kept to a minimum as much as possible to try to avoid changes to the original of the guidelines).

### **Recommendation**

Central Staff recommends adoption of CB 118006, as amended.

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<sup>3</sup> The maps included in the design guidelines show the areas where the guidelines apply. The neighborhood guidelines apply in the urban villages or neighborhood planning areas shown on the maps, whichever is larger.