

THE REVIEW PROCESS

Design review in the Historic District is authorized by Chapter 14.225 SMC. This chapter describes actions subject to design review in the Historic District and adopts the Historic District Design Standards and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings by reference; the chapter also provides for reviews by the full board and individual reviews for minor development.

When Design Review is Required

Modifications to the exterior of a site or building located in the Historic District that require a building permit are subject to Design Review, as well as certain other activities that require no permit. Such application types may include:

- Modifications to the exterior of existing structures
- New commercial or residential structures
- Signs
- Fences
- Street tree removal
- Mobile vendor structures and trailers
- Building demolitions

Other actions that require review by the Design Review Board, but are not associated with development activity include:

- Special tax valuations for historic structures
- Requests for additions to the list of officially designated historic structures

Design Review is combined with other development reviews. Findings of compliance with applicable design standards must be made, either as the project is proposed or subject to special conditions of approval, before the associated permit or other approval can be granted.

The Design Review Board

The Design Review Board (DRB) was established by the City Council on July 3, 1973, under Ordinance 1185, for the purpose of "...contributing to the social, cultural, and economic welfare of the citizens of Snohomish by developing an awareness of its historical heritage..." In most cases the DRB's role is advisory, with the City Planner making the final determination.

The DRB is comprised of five members who have an interest in the community either through living or working in the city, or participating in a Snohomish civic organization. Boardmembers are appointed to four-year terms by the Mayor, based on a background in a design discipline such as architecture, design, landscape architecture, or a more purely artistic pursuit. With several exceptions, the DRB makes recommendations to the City

Planner on development proposals as well as other work items related to the community's cultural heritage and historic character.

DRB Meetings

The DRB normally meets the second Wednesday of each month. Meetings are typically held in the evenings at City Hall and are open to the public. Agendas are prepared the week prior to the meeting and published to the City's website. Meeting agendas include a written report for each application, with a staff evaluation of the proposal's consistency with applicable design standards.

A typical meeting of the DRB begins with an opportunity for members of the public to speak about items not on the agenda, followed by approval of the previous meeting's minutes. Applications for development are then discussed, beginning with an overview of the proposal by City staff. The applicant is provided an opportunity to present additional information, if desired. Public comments may also be provided regarding the project. The DRB then deliberates, and may ask for clarification from the applicant.

The DRB appreciates that each applicant designs their project to enhance the character and visual appeal of the Historic District. The DRB's role is to assist applicants in finding design solutions that meet the needs of the applicant and contribute to the character of the Historic District, as determined by compliance with these standards. Applications are reviewed for consistency with adopted design standards, based on information provided by the applicant. Additional information or revisions to the original design may be necessary to confirm consistency. Recommendations for approval may include conditions to achieve conformance. If the DRB is unable to determine consistency with applicable standards due to insufficient information, the recommendation may be deferred to a future meeting when the applicant supplemented the record with additional materials.

Applications for Design Review must be submitted to the Planning and Development Services (PDS) counter at City Hall by the last business day of the month, in order to be included on the following meeting agenda. City staff will review the submittal for completeness, and may request additional information before adding the proposal to the agenda.

Individual Design Review

If an application will result in only minor changes to the appearance of an existing building, the City Planner may request review by one member of the DRB. Signs and fences are commonly reviewed by an individual member rather than the full Board. In such cases, the individual member will make a recommendation to the City Planner or refer the application to the full DRB. Individual reviews may occur outside of the regular DRB meeting schedule to expedite reviews, where warranted.

Conceptual Review

The DRB welcomes discussion of preliminary designs with applicants. Conceptual reviews are conducted at a regular meeting of the Board. However no recommendation is made on

the proposal. Rather, the project would be discussed in greater detail at a future meeting, and the DRB would make a recommendation to the City Planner at that time. The benefit of a conceptual application is that an applicant can receive early guidance from the DRB on compliance with applicable standards before making a significant investment in project planning and design.

Materials Needed for the Review Process

Required materials will vary widely depending on the circumstances of the site and the specific proposal. In all cases, a completed application form and color photographs of the property and/or structure are required. Site plans, building elevations, and manufacturer's catalog data for fixtures and devices will help the DRB determine what the completed project will look like. Substantial modifications—such as new buildings and developments—will require more information and detail than minor modifications, although in all cases the information provided must be sufficient for the DRB to determine compliance with all applicable standards. Application forms and submittal checklists are available at City Hall, or can be downloaded from the City's website. City staff is available to help determine what materials may be needed for review.

Demolitions

Each building within the Historic District is a record of the city's past. Once removed, this record is lost forever. One of the main priorities of the DRB is to encourage preservation of existing historic structures. To that end, applications for demolition are carefully considered. The DRB has a quasi-judicial role in reviewing demolition applications. If the DRB determines that preservation of the structure is physically or economically infeasible, approval will be recommended. If the DRB determines that it is both physically and economically feasible to preserve the structure, the application will be placed on hold for 90 days, while a new owner is located who will preserve the structure, or the existing owner is encouraged to pursue preservation rather than demolition. If this cannot be accomplished by the end of the 90 day period, a demolition permit may be issued, subject to compliance with other applicable regulations.

Exceptions

The standards and guidelines within this document are specific, to limit potential confusion about the requirement or intended result. In certain rare circumstances, the physical conditions of a building or site make enforcement of the standards inappropriate and without public benefit. If special circumstances of a property are sufficient to justify waiving or modifying a standard, the DRB may make such findings in its recommendation. The City Planner may then concur, or override the Board's determination. Exceptions will not be used to circumvent merely inconvenient standards. In all cases, the burden of proof is on the applicant to establish during project review that such extraordinary conditions exist and that the intent of the standard is not impaired.

Modifications to Approved Plans

Sometimes even the most carefully planned project must be revised following design approval due to the availability of materials, unexpected complications in implementation, further design refinements, or other reasons. In such cases, the DRB must review changes to the approved plans. Depending on the significance of the modification, the revised proposal may need to be discussed at a Board meeting, reviewed by an individual Boardmember, or in some cases, approved by City staff. In all cases, if a change is desired, the applicant should bring the requested modification to City Hall and speak with staff. If a change to the approved plans is identified during the inspection process, final approval for occupancy may be held until the DRB has reviewed the modified proposal. If changes are not approved beforehand, this could result in delays and additional cost to applicants.

Design Review Determination & Appeals

After the DRB review and recommendation, the City Planner will issue a written determination that the application is or is not consistent with applicable design standards. The City Planner Design Review Determination may include conditions to achieve consistency, or recommendations to increase consistency. Conditions are required, while recommendations are discretionary. Findings of noncompliance is grounds for denial of the associated application.

The denial or conditioning of a permit may be appealed according to the provisions of Chapter 14.75 of the Snohomish Municipal Code.