



City of Tacoma

City Council Action Memorandum

**TO:** Elizabeth A. Pauli  
**FROM:** Stephen Antupit, Senior Planner, Planning and Development Services  
Carl Metz, Senior Planner, Planning and Development Services  
Peter Huffman, Director, Planning and Development Services *PA*  
**COPY:** City Council and City Clerk  
**SUBJECT:** Resolution – Set Public Hearing on Consideration of creating the Urban Design Project Review and associated Tacoma Municipal Code Amendments – April 2, 2024  
**DATE:** March 14, 2024

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### **SUMMARY AND PURPOSE:**

A resolution setting Tuesday, April 23, 2024, as the date for a public hearing before the City Council to consider creation of the Urban Design Project Review permit and associated amendments to Title 13 of the Tacoma Municipal Code.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The City of Tacoma recognizes the importance of a high-quality built environment, including the relationship with other City goals related to equity, mobility, safety, and sustainability. These priorities specifically identified employing design guidance to achieve a desired urban form within the One Tacoma Comprehensive Plan. Specific relevant Comprehensive Plan goals and policies are outlined in the project's Findings and Recommendations Report, available [here](#).

The Design Review Analysis Manual was completed to identify the key components and options for the potential development a design review program in 2016. The City Council approved the project budget for the development of a design review program in 2017.

Consultants were hired to develop a work plan and initiate the program development. The Planning Commission chartered a Project Advisory Group (PAG) in 2019. Urban Design Studio staff have worked closely with the PAG to develop the proposed Urban Design Project Review (UDPR) project package. The PAG's membership reflects a range of industry and community interests, including affordable housing organizations, and whose engaged members were instrumental in the project's development. From early 2022 through 2023, the PAG had more than 20 working meetings and technical workshops.

Staff also engaged with the Tacoma community through an online open house/survey, particularly to guide program priorities, garnering 314 unique responses. More than a dozen in-person events and online presentations created opportunities for discussion with various stakeholder groups such as neighborhood councils and neighborhood planning groups, business districts, Permit Advisory Group, Sustainable Tacoma Commission, and other subject matter experts.

The Planning Commission released the proposal package for public review on July 19, 2023, and a public hearing was held on August 16, 2023. Public notice was mailed to over 22,000 potentially affected property owners and occupants. Written comments were provided by 20 individuals. Oral testimony was provided by seven additional community members. The Planning Commission made a recommendation of the revised proposal package to the City Council on October 18, 2023.



At its meeting of February 28, 2024, the Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability (IPS) Committee of the City Council voted to recommend the proposal to the full City Council for a public hearing and consideration (see attached Letter of Recommendation).

The proposal comprises the following elements:

1. **Establish an Urban Design Project Review (UDPR) permit process** consisting of administrative and Urban Design Board review paths.
2. **Establish an UDB** of a specified size and composition, with its nominees to be solicited by the City Clerk, in consultation with the Office of Equity and Human Rights, and to be appointed by City Council for specific terms of service.
3. **Employ an Urban Design Project Review Manual** to provide clear and objective guidance that meets Urban Design Project Review permit approval criteria.
4. **Amend Tacoma Municipal Code** to a) create an Urban Design Project Review Permit, b) establish an UDB.
5. **Amend certain development and design standards** pertaining to Mixed-Use Center and Downtown Zoning Districts.

Each of these items are described and provided in full at the project webpage: [www.cityoftacoma.org/urbandesign](http://www.cityoftacoma.org/urbandesign). Other items, including the recommended Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) Title 13 amendments and the draft UDPR Manual can also be found at the project webpage.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/ CUSTOMER RESEARCH:**

#### City Council Process:

To support the proposed City Council public hearing, public notice will be sent to all taxpayers and occupants inside Tacoma's mapped mixed-use centers, as shown on the [project webpage here](#). Additional notification will be provided to email contact lists, including the potentially affected neighborhood councils and business districts, and distributed via social media and news releases.

### **2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

Setting this public hearing will not have a significant impact on the City's 2025 Strategic Priorities, however, based on public comments received, the Planning Commission and the City Council's IPS Committee review and action, the UDPR permit process is expected to help address the following major issues, which tie directly to the City's strategic priorities around livability, civic engagement, and equity and accessibility:

- Equitable Design Outcomes
- Climate Resilient Design
- Walkability, Transit Access, and Active Transportation
- Public Participation and Outreach

### **Explain how your legislation will affect the selected indicator(s).**

There is no significant impact on the equity indicators associated with setting the public hearing date.



**ALTERNATIVES:**

Alternative(s)	Positive Impact(s)	Negative Impact(s)
Schedule the public hearing at a later date.	The City Council would have additional time to consider the proposal recommendation from IPS Committee and the Planning Commission process.	Uncertainty to Planning and Development Services customers and stakeholders anticipating timely implementation of the UDPR permit process.

**EVALUATION AND FOLLOW UP:**

Staff will facilitate the City Council’s debriefing of the public hearing input at a study session tentatively scheduled for April 30, 2024.

Additionally, staff will support the City Council in facilitating the first and final readings of the ordinance creating the UDPR permit and associated amendments to TMC Title 13, which are tentatively scheduled for April 30, 2024, and May 7, 2024.

It is expected that in October of this year, City Council action will be required to appoint members of the UDB as authorized by the proposed legislation.

**STAFF/SPONSOR RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends that the City Council conduct the public hearing on April 23, 2024.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact related to setting the public hearing date.

**ATTACHMENT:**

IPS Letter of Recommendation



## City of Tacoma

Council Member Kristina Walker

At-Large Position 8

Mayor Victoria Woodards  
City of Tacoma  
747 Market Street  
Tacoma, WA 98402

February 29, 2024

Mayor Woodards and Members of the City Council,

The Infrastructure, Planning and Sustainability (IPS) Committee of the City Council has completed our review of the Urban Design Studio's Urban Design Project Review (UDPR) proposal. Since 2022, the Committee has been briefed five times, and provided important policy guidance and program priorities throughout. On February 28, 2024, the IPS Committee voted to recommend Urban Design Project Review to City Council.

The Committee's recommendation is based on:

**Policy Alignment:** The plan implements key goals from *One Tacoma Comprehensive Plan; Vision 2025*; the *Transportation Master Plan*, the *Climate Action Plan*; the *Affordable Housing Action Strategy*, the *Vision Zero Action Plan* and the *Equity and Empowerment Framework*, as well as initiatives such as Home in Tacoma and the Neighborhood Planning Program.

### **Three key goals for Urban Design Project Review (UDPR):**

#### Equitable outcomes

Central to the approach and procedures set forth in the UDPR proposal are consistent process, diverse representation, and reasonable expectations to be applied equitably citywide. Its focus is on improved public health through livability, walkability, climate responsiveness, and connectivity to support active transportation. The proposal focuses on those goals for **all** of Tacoma's Mixed-Use centers—those places identified for most intensive development—regardless of privilege and/or neighborhood capacity to self-advocate.

#### Community responsiveness

The IPS Committee especially appreciates the "lessons learned from others" approach taken in the UDPR proposal package. We acknowledge that some other cities' programs have been "weaponized" to delay, stymie, and obstruct needed new housing and other allowable development. Notably, the scope, objectives, processes, and development of the UDPR proposal achieves a good balance between local community interest in urban design issues and new State law limitations on public meetings, setting firm review timelines, and other controls on Design Review.

#### Efficiency and predictability

This proposal embodies predictability—one of the key variables the City controls in establishing Tacoma as a development-friendly community. With the current housing supply crisis clearly in mind, the UDPR also provides flexibility for creative and innovative design approaches that prescriptive design standards can neither anticipate nor accommodate in specific site contexts.

In that regard, the IPS Committee especially notes and appreciates the successful effort to engage active Tacoma design and development professionals through the Project Advisory Group, including nonprofit affordable housing developers –

up to and including their participation in presenting the Planning Commission Recommendation to the IPS Committee.

**Engagement:** The Urban Design Studio worked extensively in consultation with the Tacoma Planning Commission (19 briefings and three technical workshops) a Commission-chartered Project Advisory Group (PAG) (19 meetings), as well as the Tacoma Permit Advisory Group (TPAG), and Sustainable Tacoma Commission. Engagement with community members included presentations to Neighborhood Councils, Neighborhood Planning Steering Committees and their in-person events. Staff conducted an online Urban Design Priorities survey to align desires from the wider community with City policy goals, which yielded over three hundred unique responses. Since the project was relaunched at the end of 2021, the IPS Committee has provided important policy direction to staff over the course of five briefings.

**Implementation:**

1. Tacoma Municipal Code Amendments

We recommend that Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) Title 13 amendments be effective thirty (30) days after Council's Approval of the Ordinance. Along with the proposed TMC Design Standard amendments, this would include establishing the authority for an Urban Design Board. The UDPR program requirements would have a later effective date – see below.

2. Urban Design Board

The IPS Committee is scheduled to interview Urban Design Board candidates on October 23, 2024. This date has been secured through coordination with Clerk's Office and OEHR. They have counseled staff that standing up a completely new Board roster will require the Spring and Summer months to appropriately solicit a diverse and qualified pool of candidates. Therefore, the October date best aligns with the committee's standing CBC candidate interview calendar.

3. UDPR Effective date

Two factors inform our recommendation that UDPR program requirement have an effective date of January 1, 2025. First, the Council's process to appoint a new Urban Design Board through the IPS Committee must be complete and Board members trained before applicable development proposals can be processed through UDPR. Second, staff will use the Spring and Summer months for an externally-focused campaign of customer education, working with the PAG, TPAG, and other stakeholders to engage in proactive outreach to likely PDS customers.

Please do not hesitate to contact myself, Vice Chair Diaz, or staff regarding the IPS Committee's recommendation. As Chair, I would like to extend my gratitude to my fellow Committee members, as well as the Project Advisory Group for their commitment to implementing the vision and individual objectives of Urban Design Project Review.

Sincerely,



Council Member Kristina Walker

Chair, Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee