

The background of the slide is a large, dark, stylized seal of the City of Atlanta. It features an eagle with spread wings, a shield on its chest, and a banner at the bottom. The year '1847' is visible on the left and '1895' on the right. The seal is rendered in shades of grey, blue, and red.

MTAP: DESIGN REVIEW FOR CITY OF ATLANTA

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An aerial photograph of the Atlanta skyline at dusk. The sky is a mix of orange, purple, and blue. The most prominent building is the Bank of America Tower, which has a distinctive golden, pointed top. Other buildings are visible, some with lights on, indicating the transition from day to night. The word "OVERVIEW" is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the image.

OVERVIEW



Atlanta

PROJECT SCOPE

City of Atlanta Department of City Planning (“Client”) requested assistance to develop a strategic approach to implementing a design review process customized to the specialized needs of Atlanta

- Background research on considerations in implementing design review;
- Survey of best practices for design review in other cities;
- Interviews of Atlanta stakeholders (internal to the City government and external) to determine needs and opportunities; and
- Recommendation of potential approaches to implementing a design review process in the City of Atlanta, for both public and private development.

An aerial photograph of the Atlanta skyline at dusk. The sky is a gradient of orange, pink, and purple. The city lights are beginning to glow, with many windows in the buildings illuminated. The word "BACKGROUND" is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the image. The Bank of America Tower is the most prominent building, with its golden, pointed top clearly visible. Other buildings like the Emory building and the Philips Arena are also visible. The foreground shows some lower-rise buildings and trees.

BACKGROUND



Atlanta

BACKGROUND

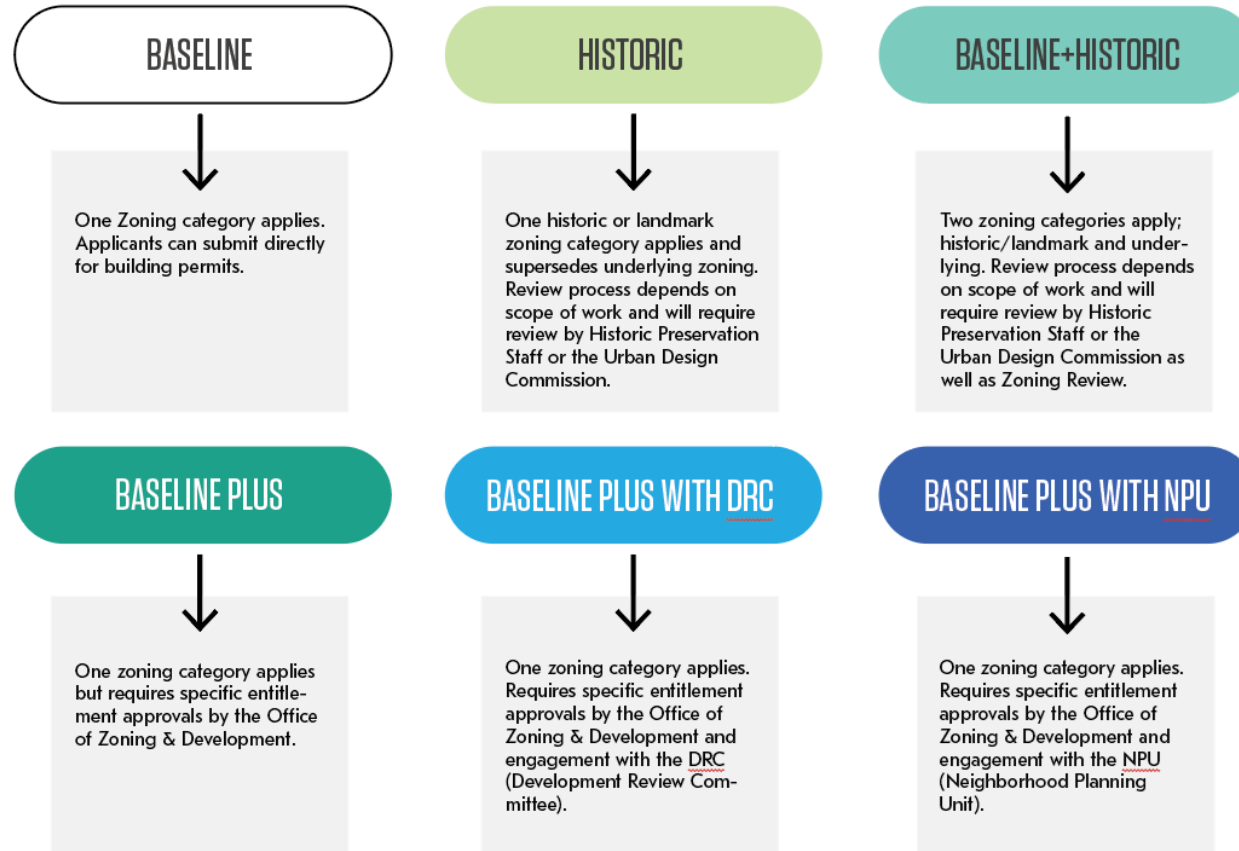
Definition

- DESIGN REVIEW: process by which development proposals receive independent criticism under the sponsorship of the local government
 - City of Atlanta currently undertaking a zoning code rewrite that will include some design-related requirements that are objective, enforceable by staff, and primarily site-related, such as building placement and massing.
 - Our project focused on the potential implementation of architectural standards, on top of any zoning requirements, applied by an independent commission or board.
 - Benefits: better-looking buildings; minimum standards for things like materials
 - Potential drawbacks: as with any regulation, inefficiency and cost. Also more philosophical issues, such as freedom of creativity, determining whose taste should govern, and design equity - will only more advantaged neighborhoods get good design?

BACKGROUND

Atlanta Development Process

SIX PATHWAYS OF DEVELOPMENT



To note:

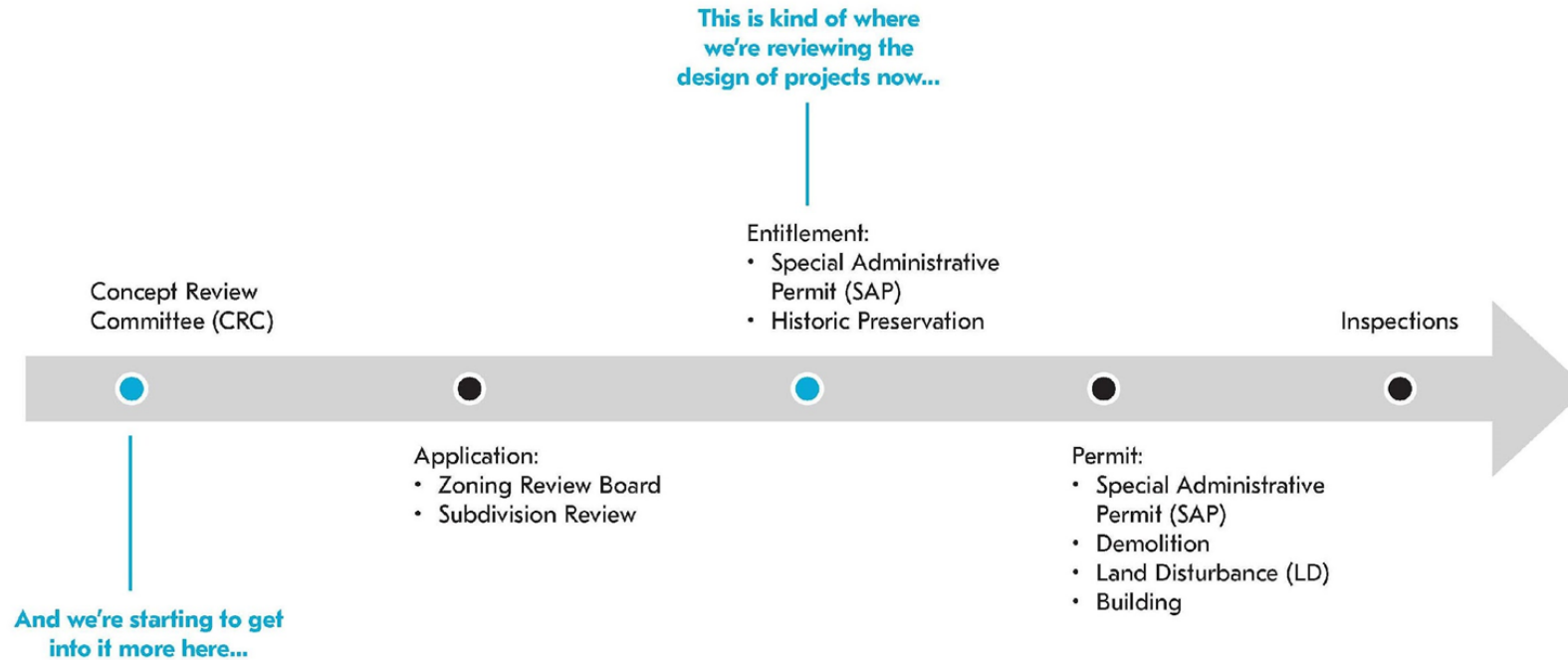
*Any pathway can be elevated based on project locale and its applicable zoning overlays. Specifically, the Beltline Overlay has significant impact to regulation and process and would almost always land a project in the Baseline Plus with DRC process.

* Additionally, these pathways can be altered if there are requests for rezonings, land use changes, variances, or special exceptions.

BACKGROUND

Atlanta Development Process

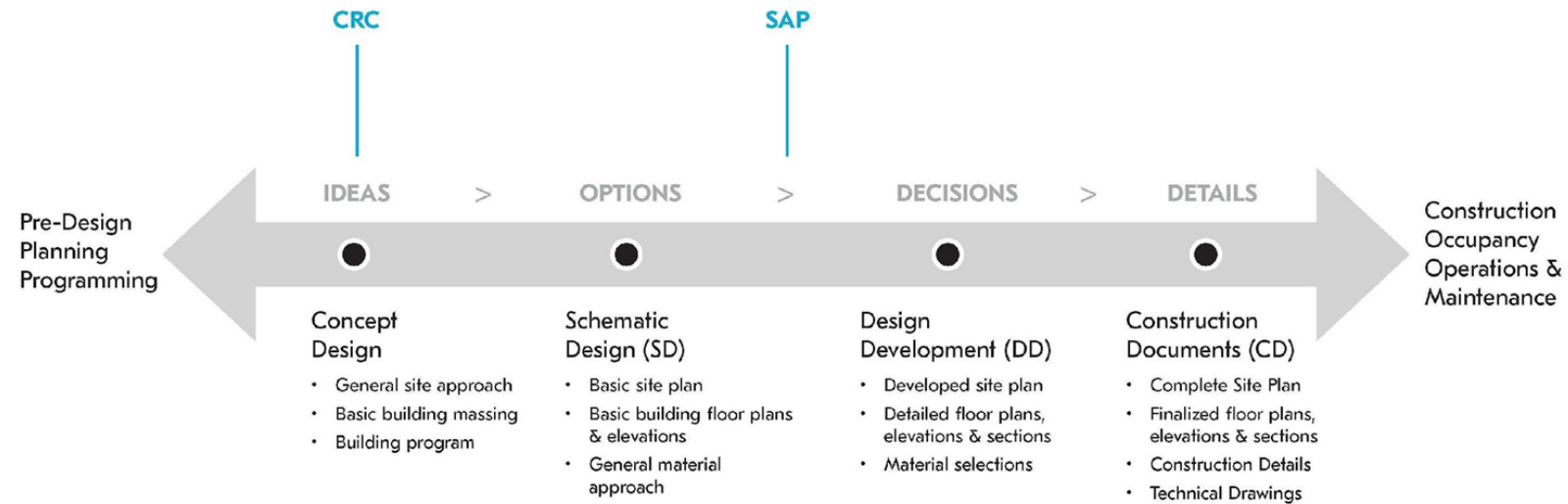
CITY OF ATLANTA DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



BACKGROUND

Atlanta Development Process

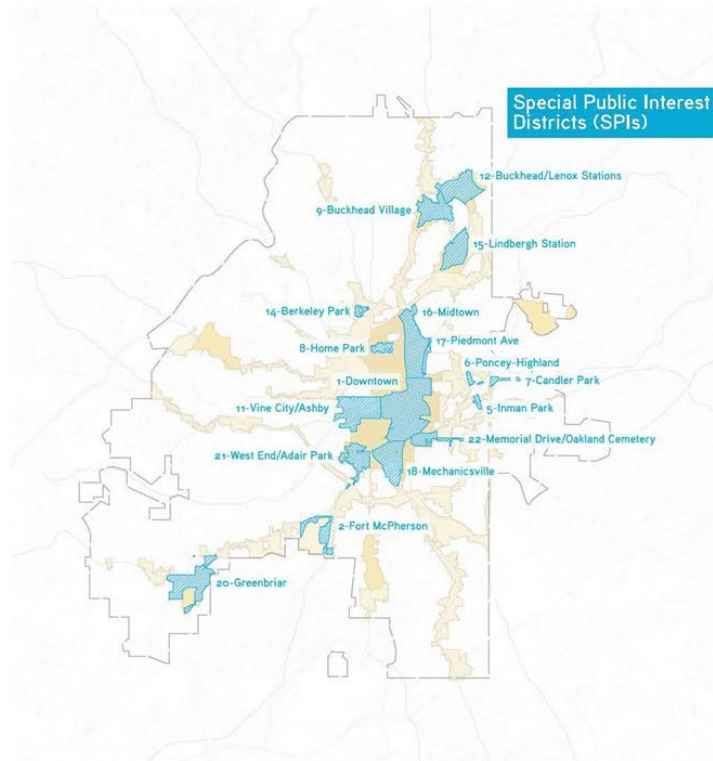
TYPICAL (OVERLY SIMPLIFIED) DESIGN PROCESS



BACKGROUND

Atlanta Development Process

GROWTH AREAS & SPECIAL PUBLIC INTEREST



Growth Areas will be designed to connect people and accommodate growth.

It is the intent of these regulations to permit creation of Special Public Interest (SPI) Districts:

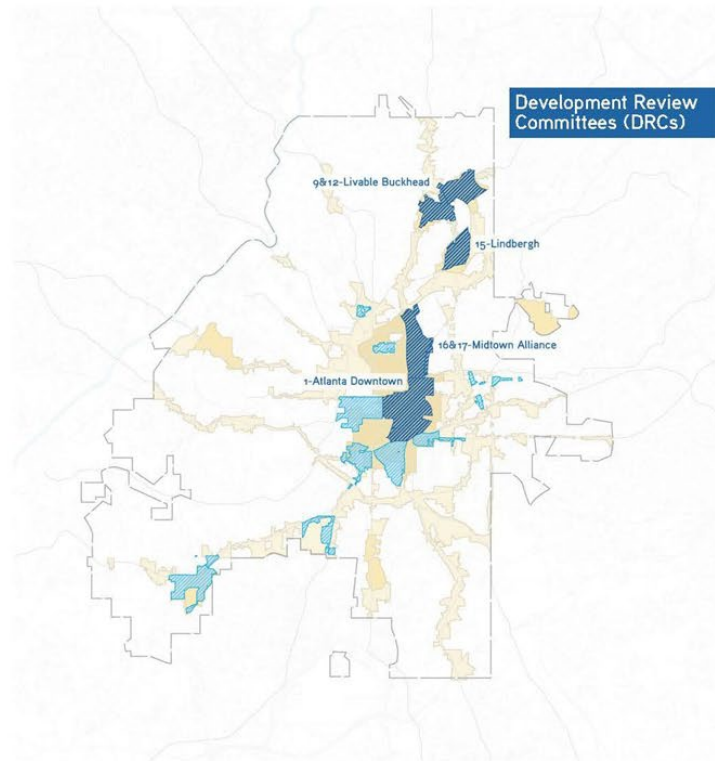
1. In general areas officially designated as having special and substantial public interest in protection of existing or proposed character, or of principal views of, from, or through such areas;
2. Surrounding individual buildings or grounds where there is special and substantial public interest in protecting such buildings and their visual environment; or
3. In other cases where special and substantial public interest requires modification of existing zoning regulations, or repeal and replacement of such regulations, for the accomplishment of special public purposes for which the district was established.

It is further intended that such districts and the regulations established therein shall be in accord with and promote the purposes set forth in the comprehensive development plan and other officially adopted plans of the city in accordance with it, and shall encourage land use and development in substantial accord with the physical design set forth therein.

BACKGROUND

Atlanta Development Process

GROWTH AREAS & DEVELOPMENT REVIEW COMMITTEES



Growth Areas will be designed to connect people and accommodate growth.

Development Review Committees (DRC) have been established as an advisory group for the purpose of providing to the Director of the Bureau of Planning (and staff) formal comments on Special Administrative Permit (SAP) applications within a particular SPI zoning District. Applicants are required to make a presentation of their project to the applicable DRC committee.

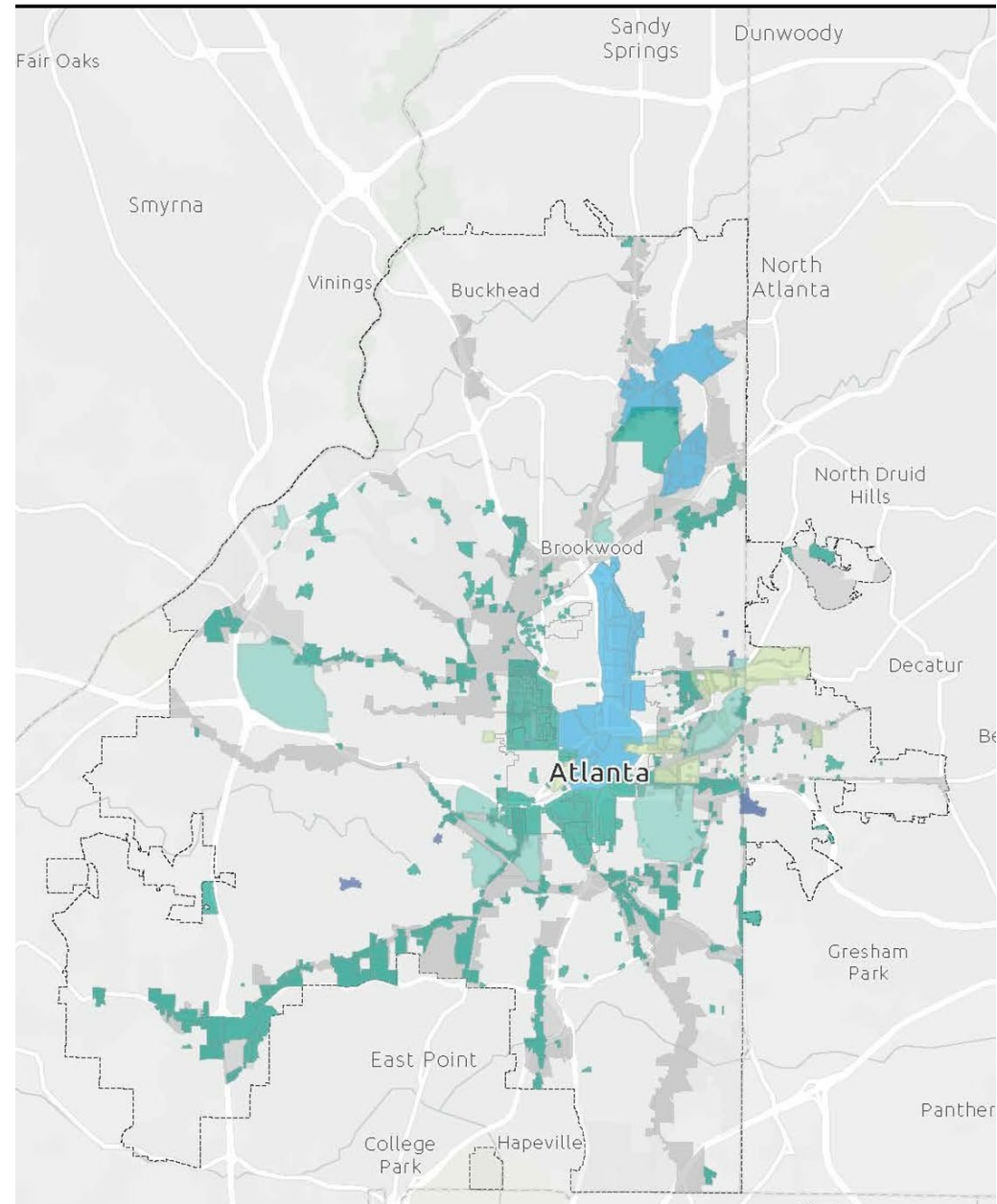
Each DRC shall consist of several members representing a property owner, business owner or resident, and an applicable neighborhood organization located within a particular SPI district.

The DRC convenes monthly or as needed to comment on SAP applications within a particular District. Each DRC shall have a time period of 30 days from the date the formal SAP is presented to the DRC to submit written recommendations concerning a project to the Director of the Bureau of Planning.

Development Review Pathways

BACKGROUND

Atlanta Development Process



An aerial photograph of the Atlanta skyline at dusk. The sky is a gradient of orange, pink, and purple. The city lights are beginning to glow, with many windows in the buildings illuminated. The most prominent feature is the Bank of America Tower, which has a distinctive golden, pointed top. Other buildings visible include the Emory University building and various other skyscrapers. The text 'CASE STUDIES / BEST PRACTICE REVIEW' is overlaid in white, sans-serif font in the center of the image.

CASE STUDIES / BEST PRACTICE REVIEW



Atlanta

CASE STUDIES / BEST PRACTICES REVIEW

Summary

City	Scope of Design Review	Population*	Median Income*	Poverty Rate*
Seattle	Guidelines are city wide, with separate requirements for the downtown area, as well as several neighborhoods	737,015	\$97,185	10.2%
Mesa	Design review is required for the following scenarios: 1. Buildings of four or more stories 2. Commercial and industrial projects that have frontage on arterial street or are part of an existing or planned development that front an arterial street 3. Commercial or industrial projects that will have greater than 20,000 sf of gross floor area	504,258	\$61,640	13.3%
Charlotte	Required for projects with the following zoning: Uptown Mixed-Use District (UMUD), Mixed Use Development Districts (MUDD), Transit Oriented District (TOD) Overlay, Pedestrian (PED) Overlay, and Transit Station (TS) Overlay	874,579	\$62,817	11.9%
Denver	Guidelines are applicable to the Denver neighborhoods of Arapahoe Square, Central Platte Valley - Auraria and Golden Triangle.	715,522	\$72,661	11.9%
Toronto	Applicable to capital projects and private development within specific design review districts, designated avenues and streets, transit priority corridors. Separate guidelines exist for specific areas within Toronto.	6,197,000	\$65,829	
Atlanta		498,715	\$64,179	19.2%
United States		331,449,281	\$64,994	11.4%

CASE STUDIES / BEST PRACTICES REVIEW

Seattle, Washington

- 8 geographic districts, each with its own Design Review Board (DRB)
 - volunteer members appointed by Mayor and Council
- Citywide design guidelines + district/neighborhood specific guidelines -
- Process - 5 steps
 1. Pre-application Conference and Early Community Outreach – public blog
 2. Early Design Guidance Public Meeting – DRB visits site
 3. Guideline prioritization – recommendations for project from DRB based on guidelines
 4. Application for Master Use Permit – must address guidelines
 5. Design Review Board Meeting and Recommendation
- 3 levels of design review: streamlined (8k-15k sf or recently rezoned from single family), administrative (15k-35k sf), and full (> 35k sf)
- Timing: 2-3 weeks for simple permit applications; 8 weeks for more complex

CASE STUDIES / BEST PRACTICES REVIEW

Mesa, Arizona

- Design Review Board
 - 7 volunteer members appointed by Mayor with City Council approval
- Process - 2 steps
 - Pre-Submittal
 - Submittal of Complete Application to Design Review Board
- Projects Reviewed by Board
 - Buildings 4+ stories
 - Residential projects exceeding RM-2 density range
 - Arterial commercial and industrial projects
 - Commercial and industrial projects > 20K SF
- Timing - approx 20 days

CASE STUDIES / BEST PRACTICES REVIEW

Charlotte, NC

- Charlotte's Urban Design Center was established in 2020 consolidate its urban design consultation, placemaking and community engagement services under one roof
 - focuses on advancing the quality of Charlotte's built environment, bringing awareness to the importance of urban design, quality of life and economic resilience, and advocates for "great public places in a livable city."
- Process - 4 steps
 1. Presubmittal meeting - initial meeting for concept plans reviewed by members of the Commercial Zoning, Land Development (Engineering, Site Inspector, Urban Forestry, and Erosion Control), and Charlotte Dept. of Transportation, and the Planning Department
 2. Review of Site-Specific Prerequisites
 3. Gateway Review - self-certified checklist to ensure submittal is complete
 4. Detailed Plan Review - 15 business day review
- 5 zoning districts require Urban Design Review

Timing: goal is to complete each level of review within 5 business days, and 15 days for last level

CASE STUDIES / BEST PRACTICES REVIEW

Denver, CO

- Downtown Design Advisory Board
 - 9 volunteer members
- Process - 6 steps
 - Optional Informal Urban Design Workshop
 - Pre-Application/Concept Review Meeting
 - Site Design & Massing Review Submittal
 - Site Design and Massing Review Meeting
 - Design Development Review Submittal
 - Final Determination
- Projects Reviewed by Board
 - Three key neighborhoods: Arapahoe Square, Central Platte Valley - Auraria and Golden Triangle
- Timing - approx 30 days

CASE STUDIES / BEST PRACTICES REVIEW

Toronto, Ontario

- Toronto's DRB was first initiated as part of a pilot project in 2007 to examine the feasibility of incorporating a Design Review Panel into the process of development approvals. Pilot period ran from 2007-2009 and was made permanent
- Downtown Design Advisory Board
 - Private sector design professionals
 - 17 panel members, appointed for 2 years
- Process
 - First/Schematic Review
 - Second/Final Review
- Projects Reviewed by Board
 - All large-scale site plan and rezoning applications within the Design Review Districts
 - Fort York Neighborhood, Humber Bay Shores, Mimico-by-the-Lake, King-Parliament Neighborhood, St. Lawrence Neighborhood, Etobicoke City Centre, North York Centre, Yonge-Eglinton Centre, King-Spadina and Scarborough City Centre)

An aerial photograph of the Atlanta skyline at dusk. The sky is a mix of orange, purple, and blue. The city lights are beginning to glow. The most prominent building is the Georgia State Capitol, with its distinctive gold-colored dome. Other buildings like the Emory University building and the Peachtree Center are visible. The title 'STAKEHOLDER SURVEYS and INTERVIEWS' is overlaid in white, sans-serif font in the center of the image.

STAKEHOLDER SURVEYS and INTERVIEWS



Atlanta

STAKEHOLDER RESEARCH

Online survey followed by face-to-face interviews

- Survey respondents
 - City of Atlanta Department of City Planning employees
 - Developers
 - Architects
- Interviewees
 - Large commercial developer
 - Mid-sized residential developer (single family and multifamily)
 - 2 Architects
 - Designer & entrepreneur
 - Members of design review committees - Beltline and Midtown
 - Atlanta DOT employee
 - Group of planners from City of Atlanta Office of Zoning and Development
 - Consultant working on City code rewrite

SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER INPUT

- Appreciation for Concept Review Committee - interdepartmental coordination
- Current permitting process needs to be improved before adding another layer
- Current Design Review Process needs improvement
 - But, good experiences with Beltline and Midtown DRC
- External stakeholder concerns about additional design review (cost, uncertainty, time...)
- Internal stakeholder concerns (staffing)
- City also needs to improve code enforcement, including making sure improved plans are what gets built
- Process Ideas

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Atlanta

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Emphasis on Efficiency

- Do not slow down or complicate an already slow and complicated process
- Necessary to build capacity before rolling out
- Speed up existing processes that are currently lagging (LDP, Watershed)

Stick to basics

- Focus on the basics (massing, fenestration, and relationship to street)
- Consider aspects of project are less subjective

Follow a process and timeline

- The process must be predictable
- Applicants should be aware of timeline
- Predictable results are crucial to effective design review – therefore design review should be handled by a central body of qualified review staff

Integrate DR into a holistic approach to permitting

- Design review should be adopted as a part of a larger zoning and permitting process system overhaul, not as an add-on to existing processes.
- Design review should be centralized, but should be responsive to city masterplan and community led planning initiatives
- Interdepartmental review is critical.

Don't be too prescriptive

- Atlanta is a city of neighborhoods, each with distinct personalities
- Involve community stakeholders in development of neighborhood specific guidelines

Involve the community

- Early neighborhood and community engagement is key
- Design equity