

Design Overlay Zone Assessment

JANUARY 2017

Findings

The consultant team's findings are based on stakeholder interviews, site evaluations for over seventy built projects, a citywide questionnaire and research of the review criteria and processes that implement the city's design overlay zones.

1. Portland is recognized as national model for good urban design, but is in need of a major "refresh".

Achieving place-specific results in the built environment is perhaps being discouraged by the current procedures and standards of design review.



2. The current d-overlay does not necessarily guarantee good design; good design can occur regardless of its presence.

Application of the d-overlay should not be assumed to be the universally appropriate and beneficial.



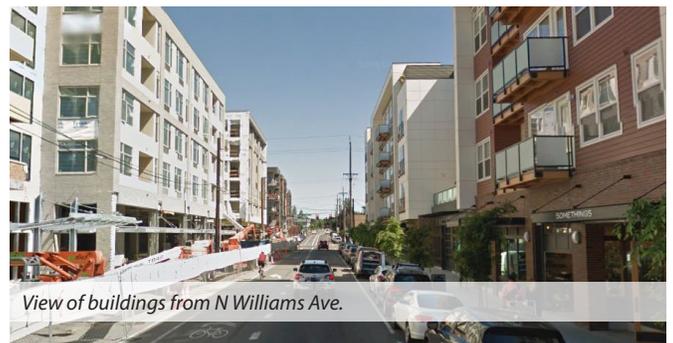
3. Although community support for thoughtful design is strong, the perception of whether new buildings exhibit good design is widely mixed.

The process of shaping implementation tools, such as the d-overlay, has not been linked closely enough to community-driven urban design.



4. The current system doesn't recognize the varied impacts of different scales of development.

Thresholds for larger projects, such as those that occupy half-blocks and entire blocks, could be restructured to ensure that such projects receive greater scrutiny both through design review and by involving the public in the review process.



5. The d-overlay has benefited the Central City but other areas less so.

Guidelines applicable to the Central City could use some updating but the more serious issues are associated with other areas.

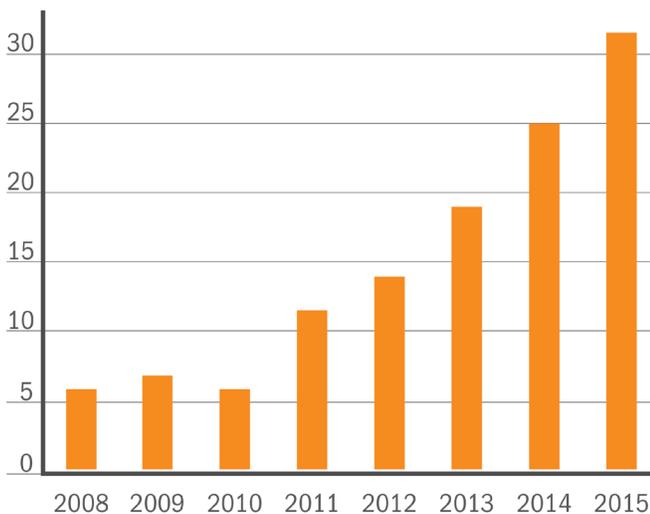


6. Standards and guidelines applied to areas outside the Central City may be impeding good urban design.

Parts of Portland outside the Central City would greatly benefit from revising, consolidating and simplifying review criteria, as well as recognizing contextual differences.

7. The recent high volume of projects has thwarted good intentions.

There is a need to adopt ways of reducing the workload, managing the workload better, and incorporating public comments more effectively.



■ number of type III design review development proposals

8. There has been a shift away from the “Big Picture” and toward details and minutiae in Design Commission deliberations.

The amount of time spent discussing specific building components is not allowing sufficient discussion of issues of context and the public realm.



9. An attitude of collaboration is important in having successful design outcomes.

All participants in the process — City staff, Design Commission and design teams — should exhibit a greater spirit of collaborative problem-solving and mutual respect.

