



## 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