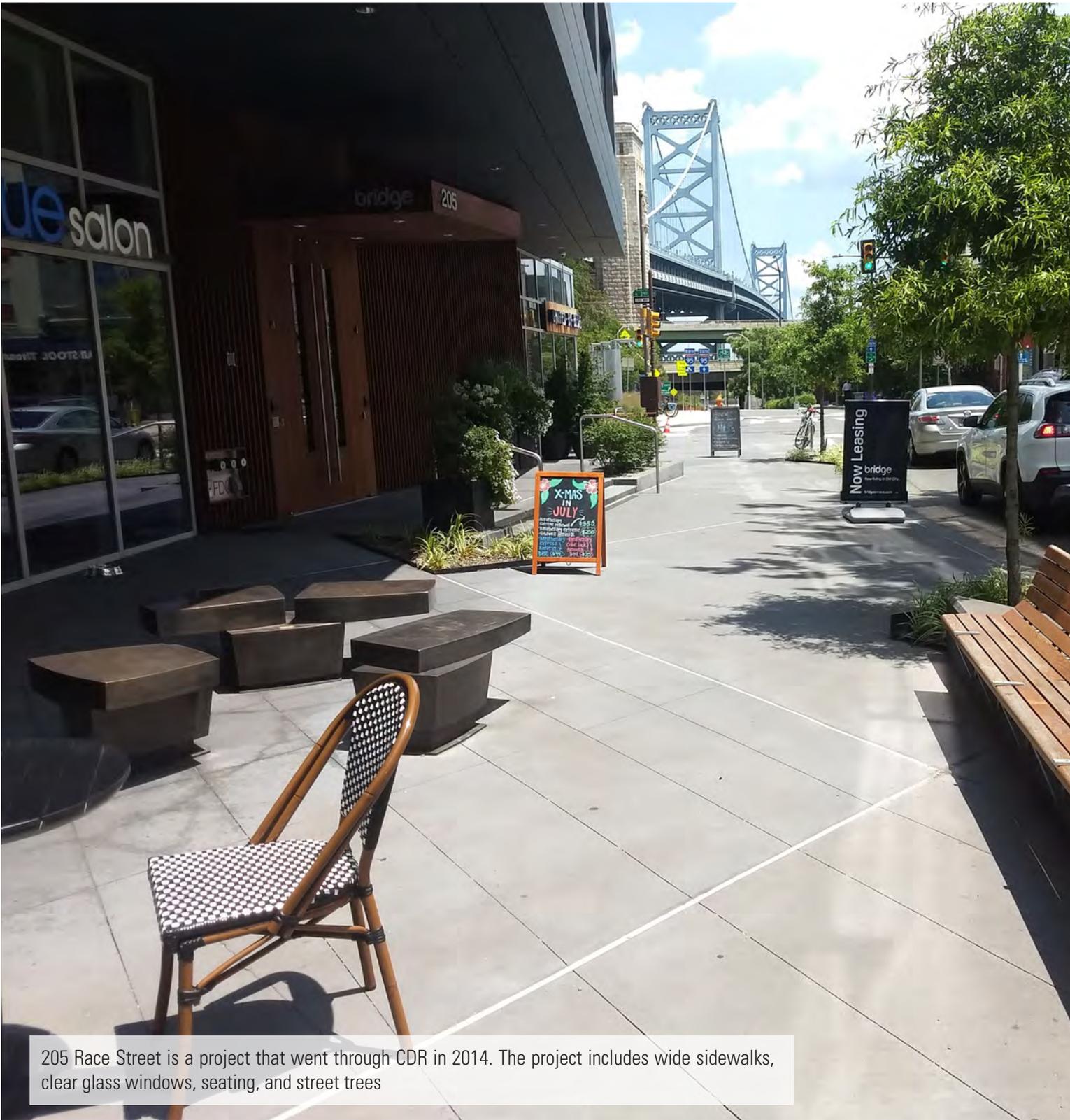


# 6 YEARS OF CIVIC DESIGN REVIEW

Observations of Philadelphia's Public Design Review Process

November 2012 - December 2018





205 Race Street is a project that went through CDR in 2014. The project includes wide sidewalks, clear glass windows, seating, and street trees



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### Civic Design Review Committee Members

#### 2019 Members

Nancy Rogo Trainer, FAIA, AICP  
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#### Former Members

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Gary Jastrzab  
Director of Philadelphia  
City Planning Commission

R.David Schaaf, RA  
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Matthew Pickering  
Mike Pini  
Sarah Richardsen



Philadelphia City Planning Commission

# Civic Design Review's Positive Impact on New Development

Civic Design Review (CDR) is an advisory public review process for large developments. It strives to raise the standards for project design and its impact on the public realm. This is a brief summary report of CDR's first six years of implementation.

The Mayor of Philadelphia appoints the CDR committee. Members include design and development professionals and local community members. Over the past six years, they have reviewed more than 28 million square feet, including more than 16,000 dwelling units. They have issued more than 1,200 findings. Many have led to positive changes such as:

- Better screening and locations of parking areas
- Improved sidewalks
- More welcoming ground floors
- Better building materials
- New pedestrian paths
- Park, trail, and plaza improvements
- Reduction of building bulk and mass

It is important to note that Civic Design Review is advisory. Development teams are not required to follow the recommendations of the committee. The following pages provide more information on response rates and areas of concern.

CDR's process is similar to reviews conducted by several American cities. These cities have binding reviews with community input and design standards. While Philadelphia's CDR is advisory, it has resulted in many positive changes. Community consultation and input has been a strong contributor to these changes.

CDR has also allowed for more discussion of the codes and policies that affect public spaces. For example, this has led to changes in the requirements for receiving a bonus for building a public open space. Also, City agencies have created more ways to cooperate on the review of proposed open spaces.

## Examples of Common Findings:

### Better screening and location of parking areas



*Is there a parking garage behind that park? Yes! CDR comments led to better screening so that people walking by can't see the garage.*

### Improved Sidewalks



*A recent project included a long blank wall along the sidewalk. The CDR committee asked for landscaping to improve the pedestrian experience.*

## Zoning Code Goals and The Civic Design Review Process

Civic Design Review (CDR) was added to the Zoning Code as a component of the 2012 update. CDR is a component of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission’s (PCPC) review processes and reviews are organized and prepared by PCPC staff. With the CDR process, PCPC believes that the code can do more than simply regulate land use. It can also encourage development that improves our communities and our quality of life through thoughtful design of the public realm. This includes our sidewalks and streets, public open spaces such as parks and trails, and the buildings that engage all of them.

The goal of the 2012 Zoning Code update was to create a new rule book for construction and development in Philadelphia that was simple and predictable. Each of the goals of the Zoning Code update has support within the CDR process. See the chart below:



## Public and Interagency Communications

### Public and Community Engagement

CDR has clear expectations for public input. This includes meeting with local Registered Community Organizations (RCO) and local residents:

- Development teams must have at least one meeting with designated RCO(s)
- One or two RCO representatives sit on the CDR panel
- Any member of the public may comment during a review

For almost every review in the past six years, an RCO member has attended to offer comments and vote on the process. Together, the RCO representative and the other members of the committee form recommendations. It is worth noting that local press often attend public reviews and write summaries of CDR discussions.

### Applicant CDR Process



Public meeting or hearing required

## Interagency Communication and Reviews

Since it began, CDR has encouraged more cooperation between City agencies. If triggered, CDR can happen at the same time as other reviews. PCPC staff meet with these agencies to consider proposals:

- The Streets Department
- The Philadelphia Water Department
- Licenses and Inspections (including Flood Management)
- Office of Transportation, Infrastructure, and Sustainability (oTIS)
- Philadelphia Historical Commission (staff)

These meetings help PCPC staff present the concerns of other City agencies at CDR. These can include concerns about access, safety, utilities, the environment, and more. The CDR committee can include these comments in their findings if they choose. CDR recommendations can also affect the actions of other City agencies. They often hold their final decisions until CDR is complete. This allows them to consider recommendations and changes that may be needed for approvals.

## Early and Preliminary Reviews

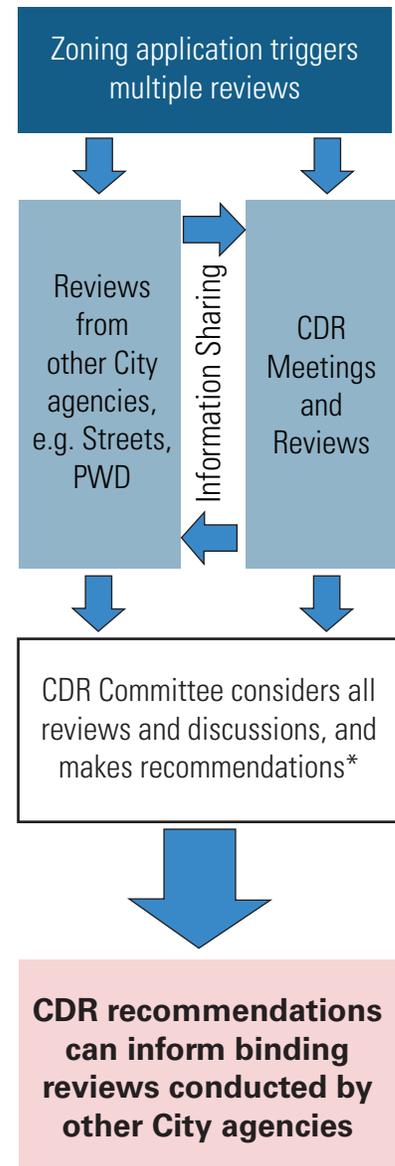
Development teams have started to ask PCPC staff to review their projects before CDR. These reviews often happen before they begin the zoning permit process. This allows staff to give feedback on design, best practices, adopted plans, and more. This can lead to a smoother CDR process, with fewer questions from the committee.

## Impacts on Binding Reviews

Though advisory, committee recommendations can inform binding reviews conducted by other City agencies, including:

- The Philadelphia Historical Commission
- The Zoning Board of Adjustment
- Philadelphia Streets Department
- Philadelphia City Planning Commission staff
  - > Facade reviews, including parking garage facades
  - > Open space reviews

## Interagency CDR Process



\*CDR recommendations do not include discussions of zoning issues

## Definition of “The Public Realm”

Streets, plazas, parks, and other spaces open to the public have a special role in the city. They offer opportunities for civic life and shared urban experiences.

### What is the Public Realm?

The public realm is often defined as the public spaces which are between buildings. Yet, it also includes those parts of private properties which have public access. Examples of both public and private spaces include:

- Streets and sidewalks
- Parks and recreation facilities
- Trails
- Plazas on private property
- Internal paths to front doors
- Access through a site to a public place, such as a waterfront trail.

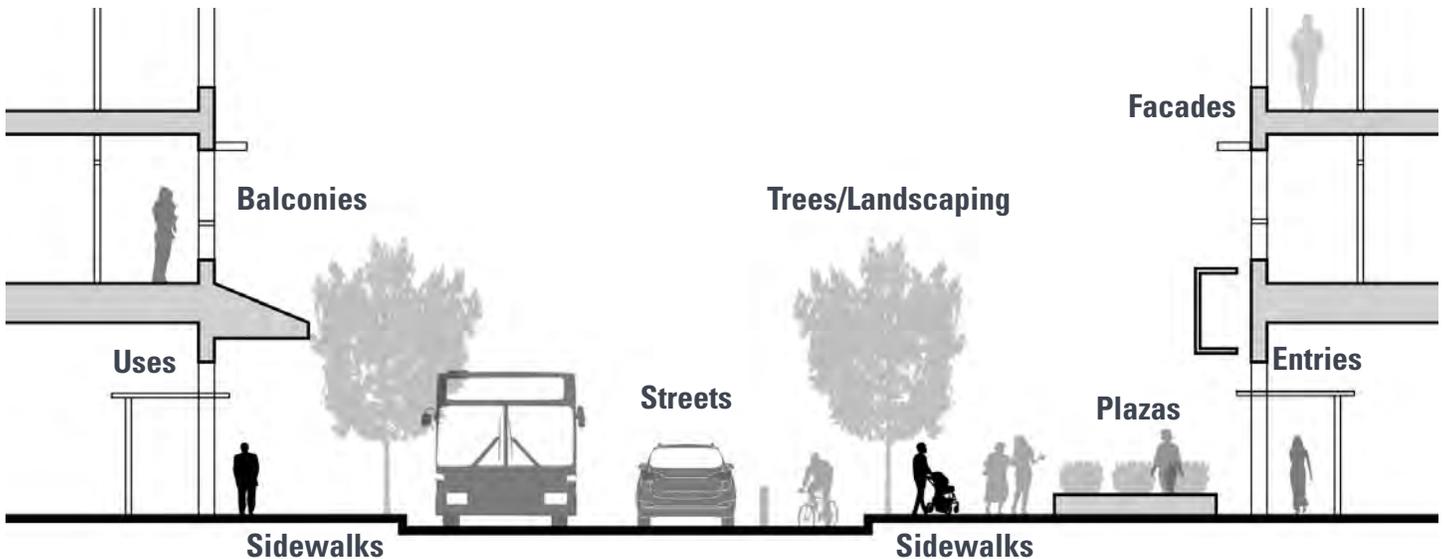
The design of buildings also affects the public realm. This includes the character of the architecture, ground floor uses, and the placement of entrances. A street surrounded by blank walls, inactive uses, and few entrances can be unfriendly. Yet the same street with open storefronts, stoops, balconies, and lots of windows can feel welcoming. A project’s greatest effect is usually in the first two floors, and most CDR comments have focused on those levels.

### Included in the Public Realm

Streets and Sidewalks      Private Open Spaces and Walkways with Public Access



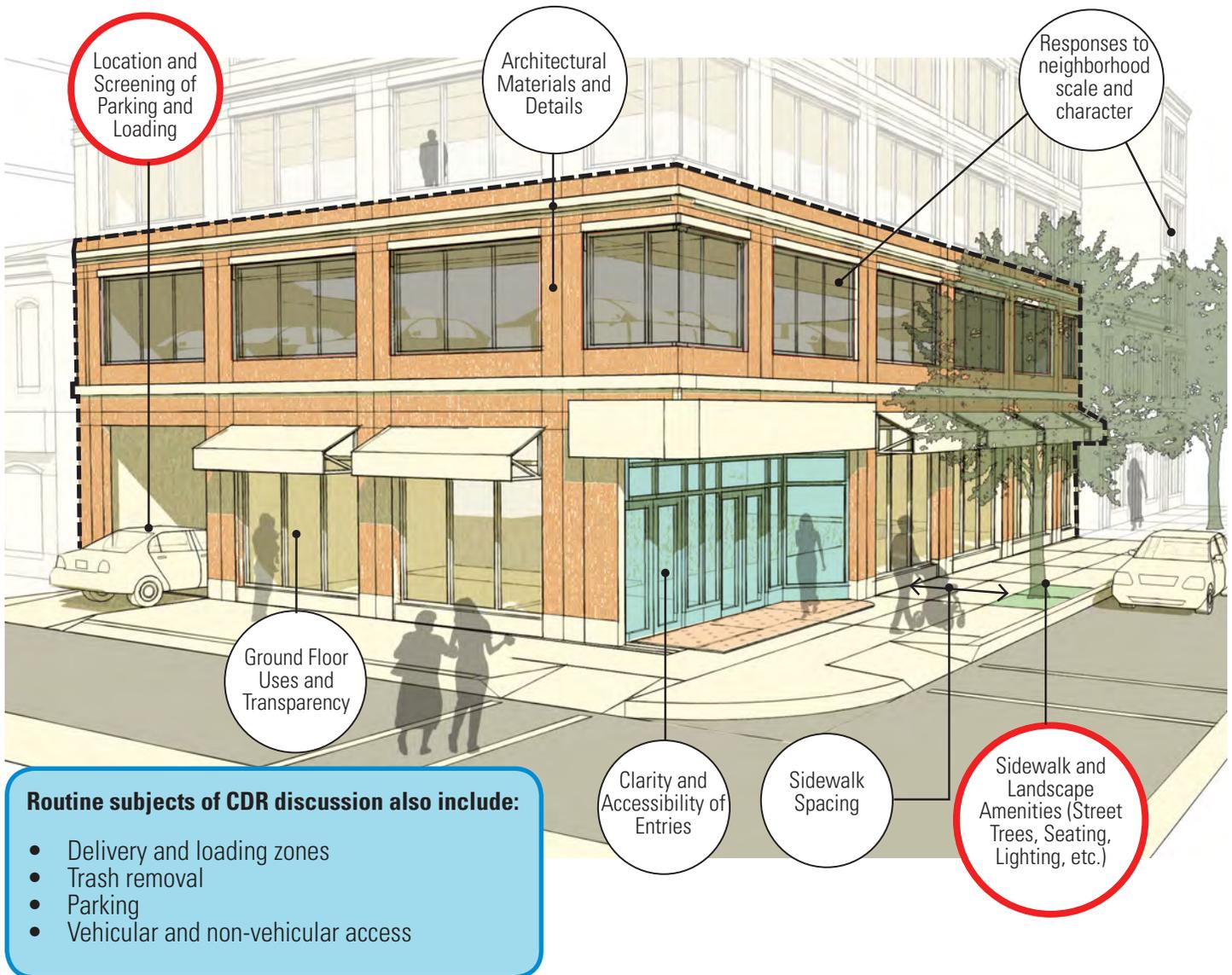
## The Public Realm



## 80% of CDR Findings in the Lower Levels

The CDR Committee issued over 1,200 findings related to project design. 80% of those findings respond to the design of the first two levels, showing their focus on the public realm. The committee gave guidance on sidewalks, building facades, landscaping, interior uses, and more. These are the elements that work together to create the immediate experience of a place.

Subjects with the highest number of comments

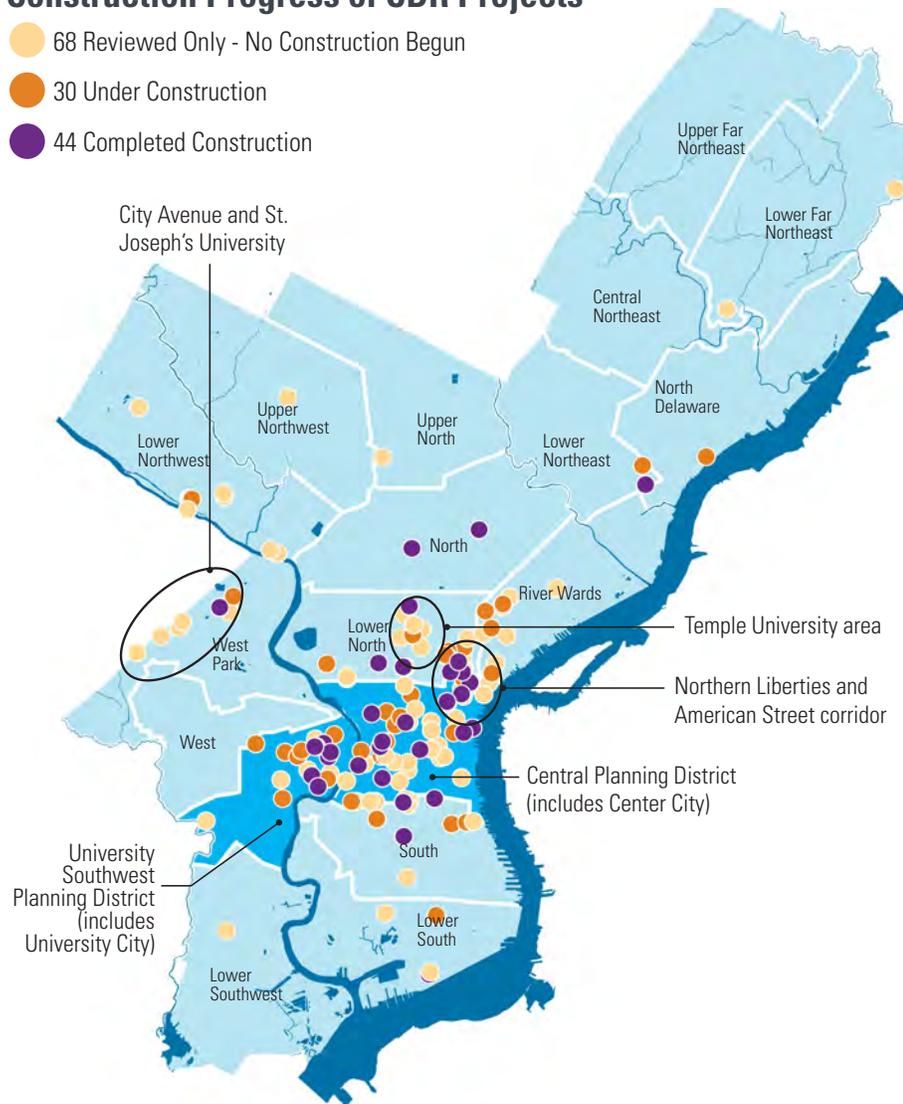


## Numbers, Locations, and Types of Reviews

The CDR committee has reviewed almost 150 projects in the past six years. This includes more than 28 million square feet and 16,000 dwelling units. Most are in Center City and University City and over half are complete or under construction.

### Construction Progress of CDR Projects

- 68 Reviewed Only - No Construction Begun
- 30 Under Construction
- 44 Completed Construction



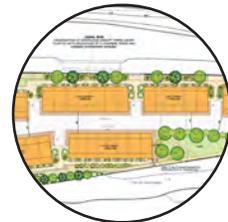
### Types of Projects



**Case 1**  
**98 Projects Reviewed**  
 Greater than 100,000 square feet and/or 100 dwelling units.



**Case 2**  
**38 Projects Reviewed**  
 Greater than 50,000 square feet and/or 50 dwelling units, and are within 300 feet of a residential zoning district.



### Masterplans

**10 Projects Reviewed**

Masterplans are land use and circulation plans with multiple structures and large areas. Master Plans amendments are subject to Civic Design Review when they achieve certain types of size thresholds of 25,000 sf or more.

## Review Trends

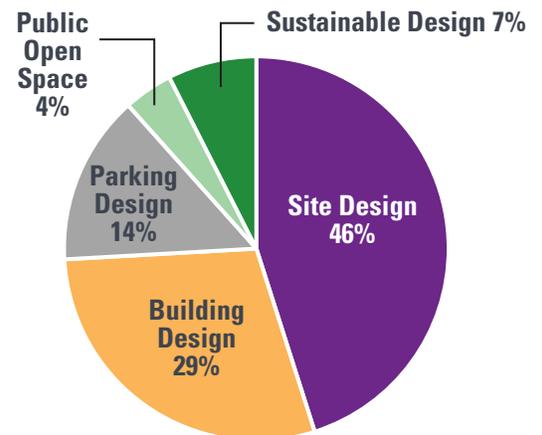
The number of CDR cases has been generally increasing since the review program began. 2019 continues the trend with 28 projects reviewed by June of this year. The number of projects asked to return for a second review has also been increasing. Most findings focus on concerns with site design and building design.

The CDR committee comments have also evolved over time. General statements have made way for more specific recommendations. For example:

*April 2013 - "The committee asks that the function and character of the north elevation be respectful to any potential (future) development"*

*May 2019 - "Red brick is not in keeping in character with this neighborhood, consider a different material or a lighter brick"*

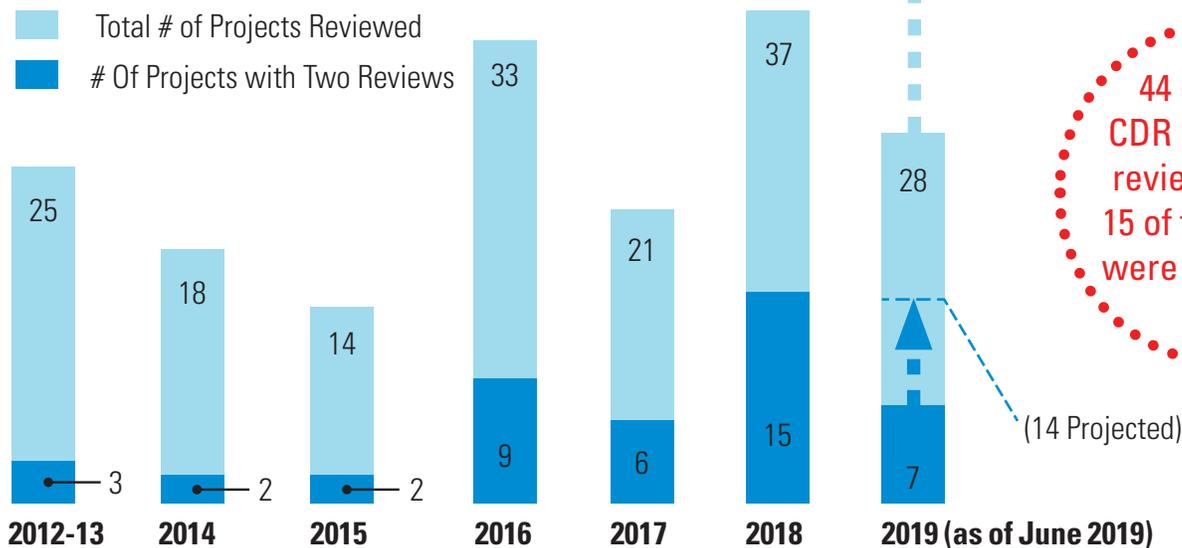
**% of Findings by Review Categories**  
(Over 1,200 Findings)



(56 Projected)

All proposals had Building Design and Site Design elements to review. Only a few projects were adjacent to or proposed Public Open Space, which resulted in fewer comments. The Sustainable Design checklist was not introduced until 2016.

## Number of Projects Reviewed By Year



44 of the 174 CDR cases were reviewed twice. 15 of those cases were reviewed in 2018.

## Response Rates To CDR Findings

### How the Analysis Was Done

Between 2012 and 2018, the CDR Committee made over 1200 findings for 146 projects. Although Civic Design Review is advisory, developers still respond to committee comments. As one measure of effectiveness, PCPC staff looked at the rates of positive responses to CDR comments. This included:

- Changes between the first and second CDR reviews
- Changes between the CDR reviews and the built project
- Construction of design decisions praised by the committee

Of the 146 CDR projects, 64 provided an opportunity for this analysis. 45 projects were complete enough for assessment by PCPC staff\*. Another 19 projects, though not yet constructed, allowed for comparisons between the first and second CDR reviews.

### Results of the Analysis

**About 70% of development teams made some positive changes and/or built praised design decisions**

PCPC staff notes that the CDR process resulted in positive changes for the majority of projects.

- Favorable changes in response to CDR recommendations
- Construction of design decisions praised by the CDR committee

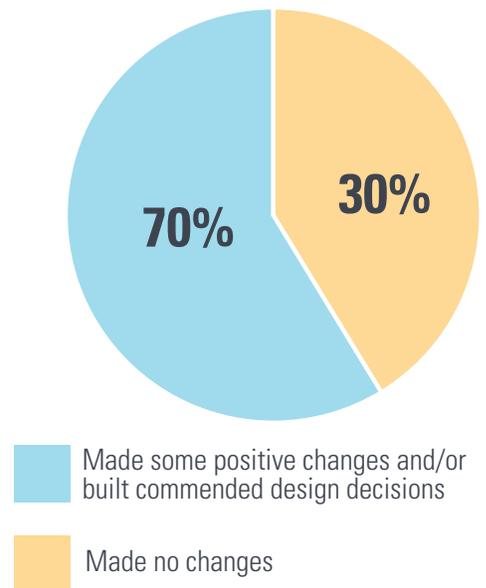
#### Why weren't all recommendations followed?

PCPC staff cannot know the reasons that development teams proceeded without making all suggested changes. Some may include:

- Site conditions, such as utilities or easements, prevented modifications
- The development team considered changes too expensive to make
- Changes required the cooperation of parties outside of the control of the developer. This could include neighbors or other public agencies
- The project was too far along in its process to make changes

*\* PCPC staff visited many projects under construction to assess responses to Civic Design Review recommendations. Not all projects were substantially complete enough to perform a full assessment.*

### Proportion of Projects that Made Positive Changes



## Positive Additions to the Public Realm

Several designs improved the public realm. Many development teams achieved good results despite challenging sites. Some best practices include:

- Ground floors with large windows and active uses
- Well-designed sidewalk stoops
- Replacement of parking lots with vegetation
- Engaging and welcoming entrances
- Safe, shared spaces for cars and people
- Better connections to transit
- Open spaces with clear public access

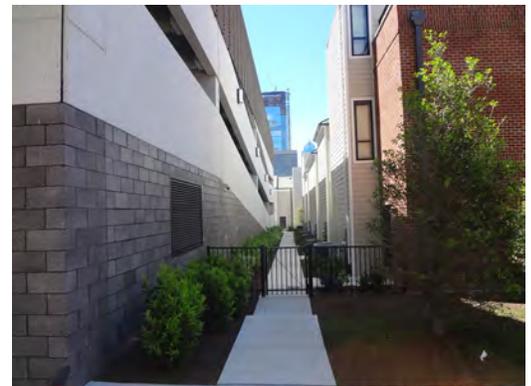
For more examples, please see the case studies beginning on page 14.

## Common Concerns

Some projects weakened the public realm, making it less welcoming. These included problems with access, window sizes, screening, and uses. Common concerns include:

- Quality of screening for parking and loading
- Sidewalk intrusions
- Missing street trees
- Inappropriate ground floor uses
- Window sizes and placements
- Size, number, and location of entries
- Public open space design
- Rowhomes without street access
- Location and design of stormwater ponds
- Uses of industrially zoned property

For more examples, please see the case studies beginning on page 14.



*These images are from the same project. They show best practices as well as common concerns.*

*Above: There are welcoming entrances from a street with trees and landscaping. The ground floors have large amounts of glass and transparency.*

*Below: A gated and narrow pathway leads to other homes in the development. The pathway is between a parking structure and blank walls of low quality materials.*

# Civic Design Review Case Studies: An Overview

In preparation for the CDR report, PCPC staff visited many project sites. One intention was to assess built results in comparison to the CDR findings. Another purpose was to document best practices and conditions that needed improvement. Does the city need to address a repetitive problem in new development? Likewise did a particular project create a good example that others might want to follow? The following pages provide highlights from these visits. These include priority concerns and positive contributions.

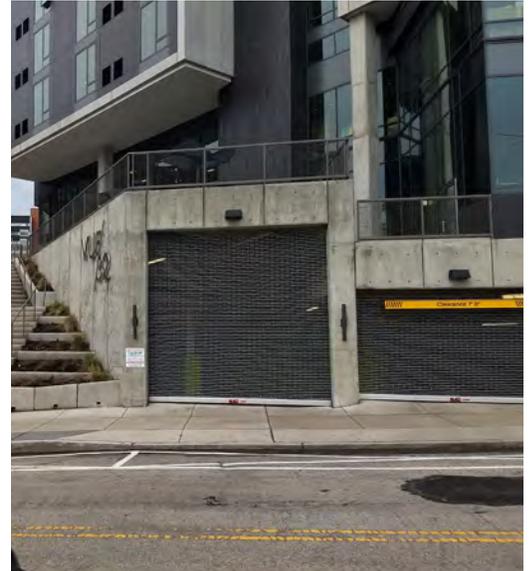
To cover all of the subjects of Civic Design Review, PCPC staff has prepared case studies for each of the five realms of review:

- Site Design
- Building Design
- Open Space
- Parking Design
- Sustainable Design

## Common Concern or Best Practice - Why No Project Identifications?

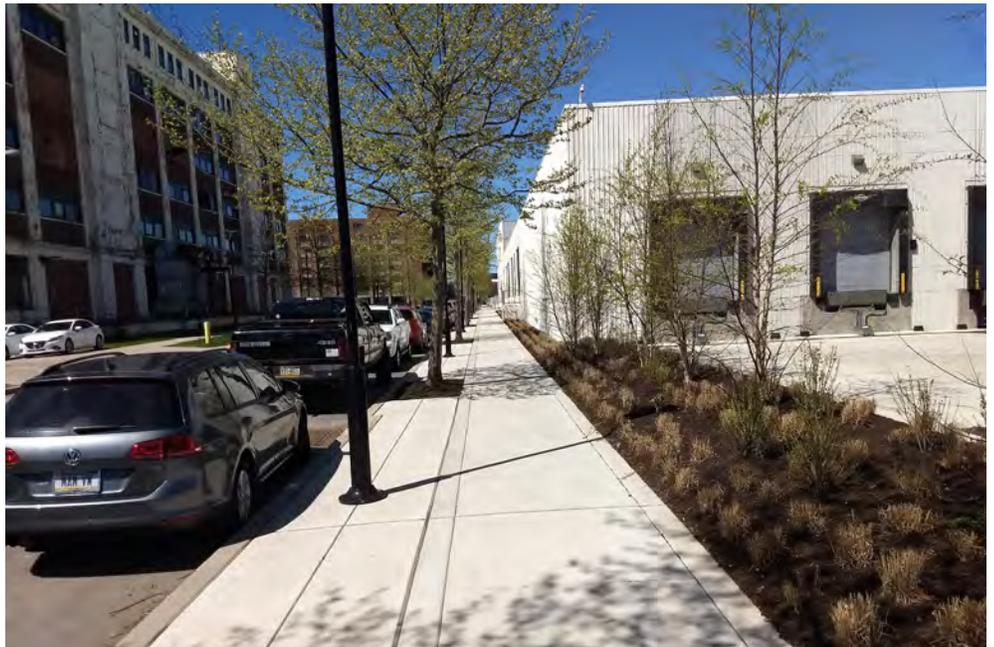
The purpose of Civic Design Review is to raise the quality of the public realm throughout the city. It is not intended to rate specific designs or the professionals that created them. Case studies do not identify locations or creators. Some readers may be able to recognize a project from the drawings or photographs. Yet, PCPC staff asks that all readers avoid focusing on a specific site. Rather consider the case study as a guideline for future work anywhere in the city.

### Example of Common Concern



*Parking and loading access consistently present challenges on tight sites*

### Example of Best Practice

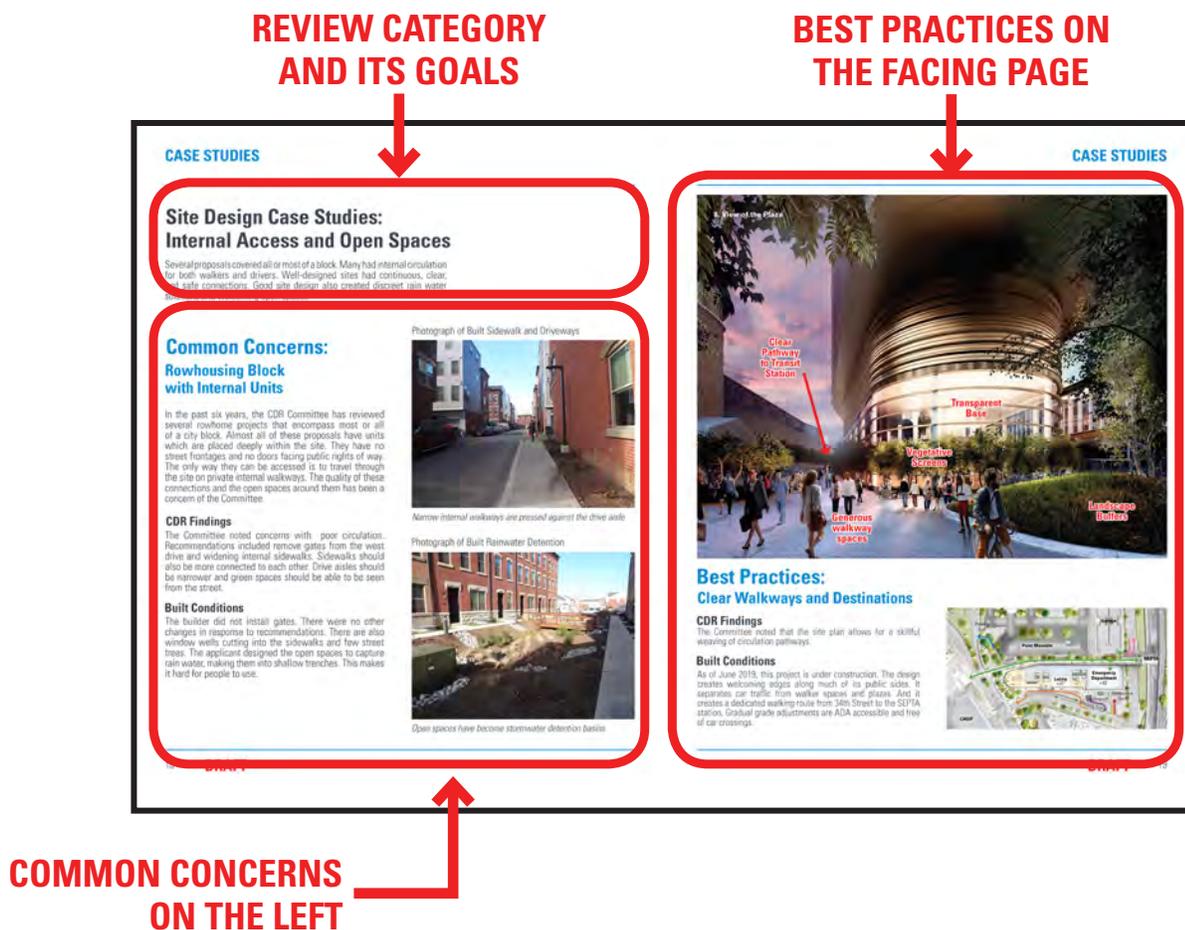


*This project put in extra effort to make a great sidewalk environment near its loading docks*

## How to Read Case Studies

In preparing a case study, PCPC staff examine a few important parts of a project. They focus on public realm issues which relate to the review comments. Examples include sidewalk access, the ground floor of a building, and/or the layout of a parking area. Then they summarize committee findings and compare them to the built project.

For each category of review PCPC staff identified Common Concerns and Best Practices. Common Concerns are examples where the committee recommended improvements on an issue that several projects share. Sometimes the improvement was made and these can serve as an example for future development teams. Best Practices represent a design or plan that clearly illustrates many of the goals of a review category.



# Site Design: Complete Streets

Many site design comments looked at the spaces between the building edge and the curb line. Philadelphia's *Complete Streets Handbook* has standards for these spaces. When well designed, these places can create a welcoming and inclusive public realm.

## Common Concerns: Egress Wells and Street Trees

### CDR Findings

The CDR committee acknowledged how hard it is to place some street trees. They recommended replacing missing trees in the block's interior. The applicant added egress wells to this project after its CDR presentation. City Planning staff and the CDR committee had concerns with egress wells cut into the narrow sidewalks.

### Built Conditions

The applicant proposed 13 street trees, but did not plant any. They planted three trees in the interior driving court. Egress wells, many of which had raised curbs, often cut into the narrow sidewalks.

## Retail Entries and Exposed Sidewalks

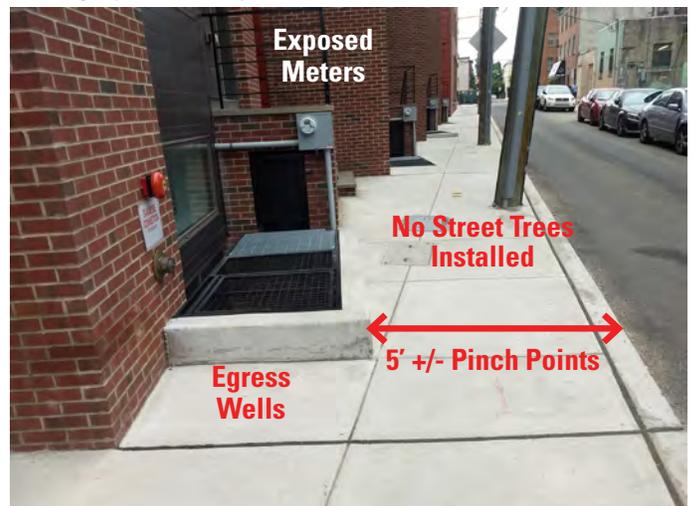
### CDR Findings

The CDR committee recommended improvements to the retail podium. They encouraged more entries and changing the building to widen portions of the sidewalk. They also wanted to see active uses along the sidewalk.

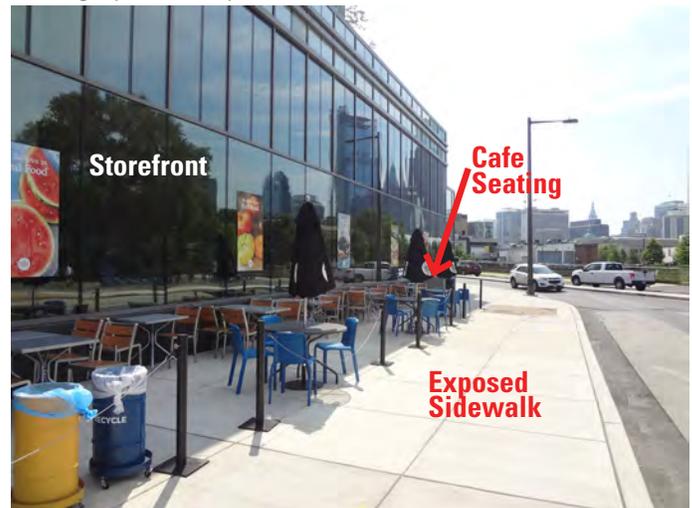
### Built Conditions

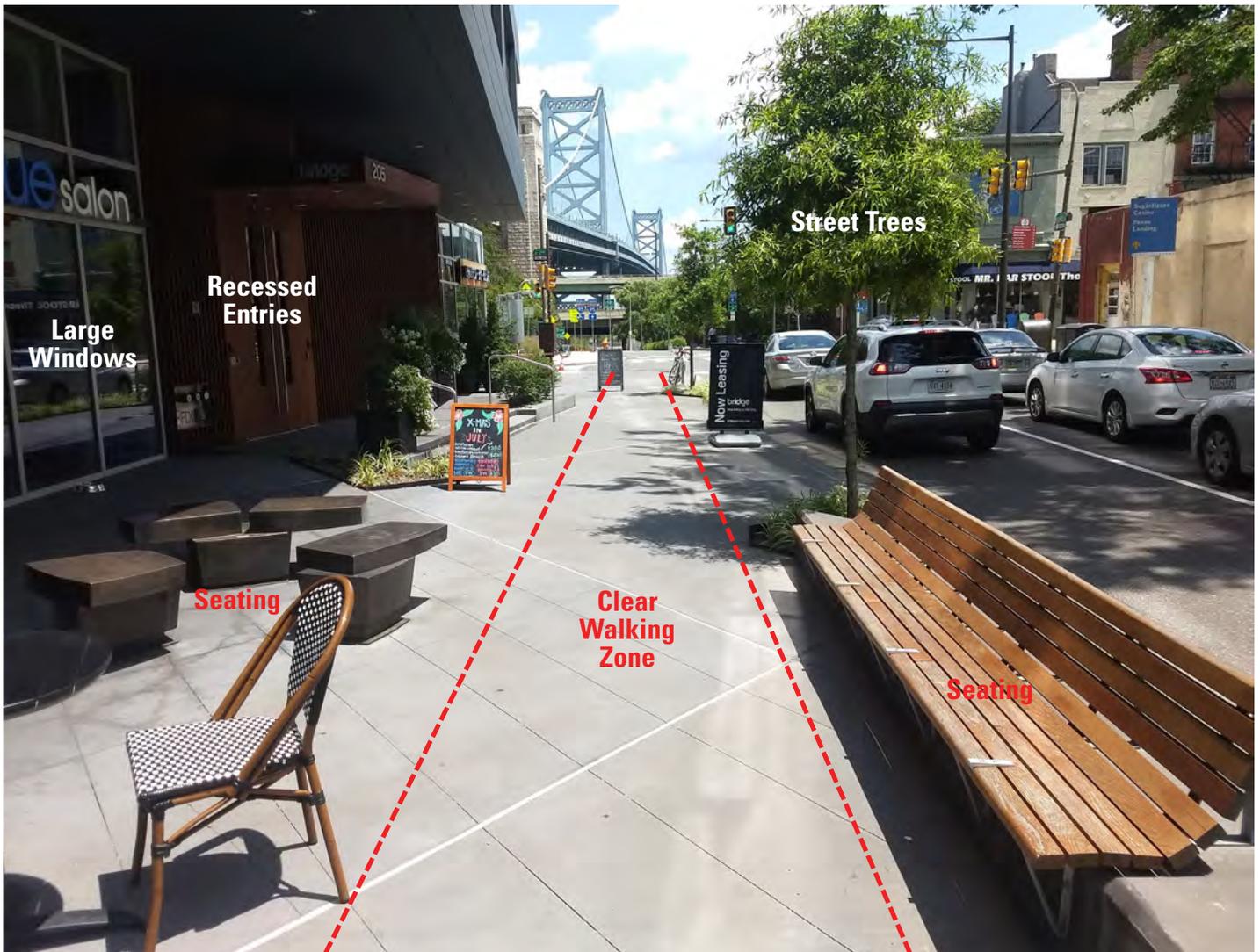
The applicant built the project without adding doors or changing the building footprint. Yet they created cafe seating which activates the sidewalk. They haven't planted street trees, maybe because of underground pipes and wires. However they could have added planters to safely separate the sidewalk from the street.

Photographs of completed sidewalks



Photograph of completed sidewalks





Photograph of completed sidewalk environment

## Best Practices: Multi-Purpose Sidewalk

### CDR Findings

The design presented at CDR showed a good start to a welcoming ground floor. The building had large windows and in some places, the designers created a wider sidewalk. Yet there were few other improvements. The CDR committee requested more landscaping, seating, and better paving.

### Built Conditions

In response to comments, the development team created a unique paving pattern and added landscaping at the tree pits. They also added seating and further widened the sidewalk. Additionally they used the building footprint to clearly mark the residential entry and recessed it to avoid conflicts with the walking zone.

Design rendering



# Site Design: Internal Access and Open Spaces

Several proposals covered all or most of a block. Many had internal circulation for both walkers and drivers. Well-designed sites had continuous, clear, and safe connections. Good site design also created discreet rain water solutions and welcoming open spaces.

## Common Concerns: Rowhousing Block with Internal Units

In the past six years, the CDR committee has reviewed several rowhome projects that encompass most or all of a city block. Almost all of these proposals have units which are placed deeply within the site. They have no street frontages and no doors facing public rights of way. The only way they can be accessed is to travel through the site on private internal walkways. The quality of these connections and the open spaces around them has been a concern of the Committee.

### CDR Findings

The committee noted concerns with poor circulation. Recommendations included removing gates from the west drive and widening internal sidewalks. Sidewalks should also be more connected to each other. Drive aisles should be narrower and green spaces should be able to be seen from the street.

### Built Conditions

The builder did not install gates. There were no other changes in response to recommendations. There are also window wells cutting into the sidewalks and few street trees. The applicant designed the open spaces to capture rain water, making them into shallow trenches. This makes it hard for people to use.

Photograph of built sidewalk and driveways



*Narrow internal walkways are pressed against the drive aisle*

Photograph of built rainwater detention



*Open spaces have become stormwater detention basins*



Rendering of view from walkway to railway station

## Best Practices: Clear Walkways and Destinations

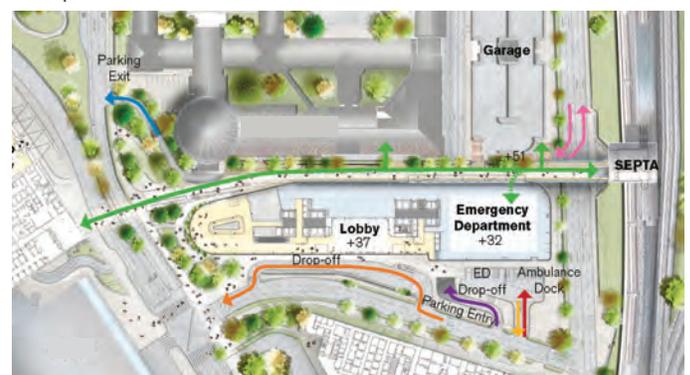
### CDR Findings

The committee noted that the site plan allows for a skillful weaving of circulation pathways.

### Built Conditions

As of June 2019, this project is under construction. The design creates welcoming edges along much of its public sides. It separates car traffic from walker spaces and plazas. And it creates a dedicated walking route to the SEPTA station. Gradual grade adjustments are ADA accessible and free of car crossings.

Site plan



# Building Design: Ground Floors

Many CDR committee comments were about the design of the ground floor. Window sizes and placements, materials and entries have a large effect on public spaces such as sidewalks and street corners. Ground floor uses, such as a stores or housing also has a large effect.

## Common Concerns: Appropriate Corner Design

### CDR Findings

The committee supported several design decisions. Yet, they had concerns with how far away the entries were from the street corner and hard to see signs. They felt that the garden on the corner was confusing and could be improved with seating and clear pathways.

### Built Conditions

Much of the project matches the design presented to the CDR committee. Walking paths are wide, windows are large, and outdoor seats boost sidewalk activity. Yet, entries remain remote and signs are hard to see. Plants, trees and walls hide the corner, which is not ideal for a busy, populated intersection.

## Opaque Ground Floors

### CDR Findings

The committee had some concerns with the lack of active spaces on the ground floor of a public street. They encouraged more transparency. Or, to develop the edge with a planting plan and some other benefit, such as seating.

### Built Conditions

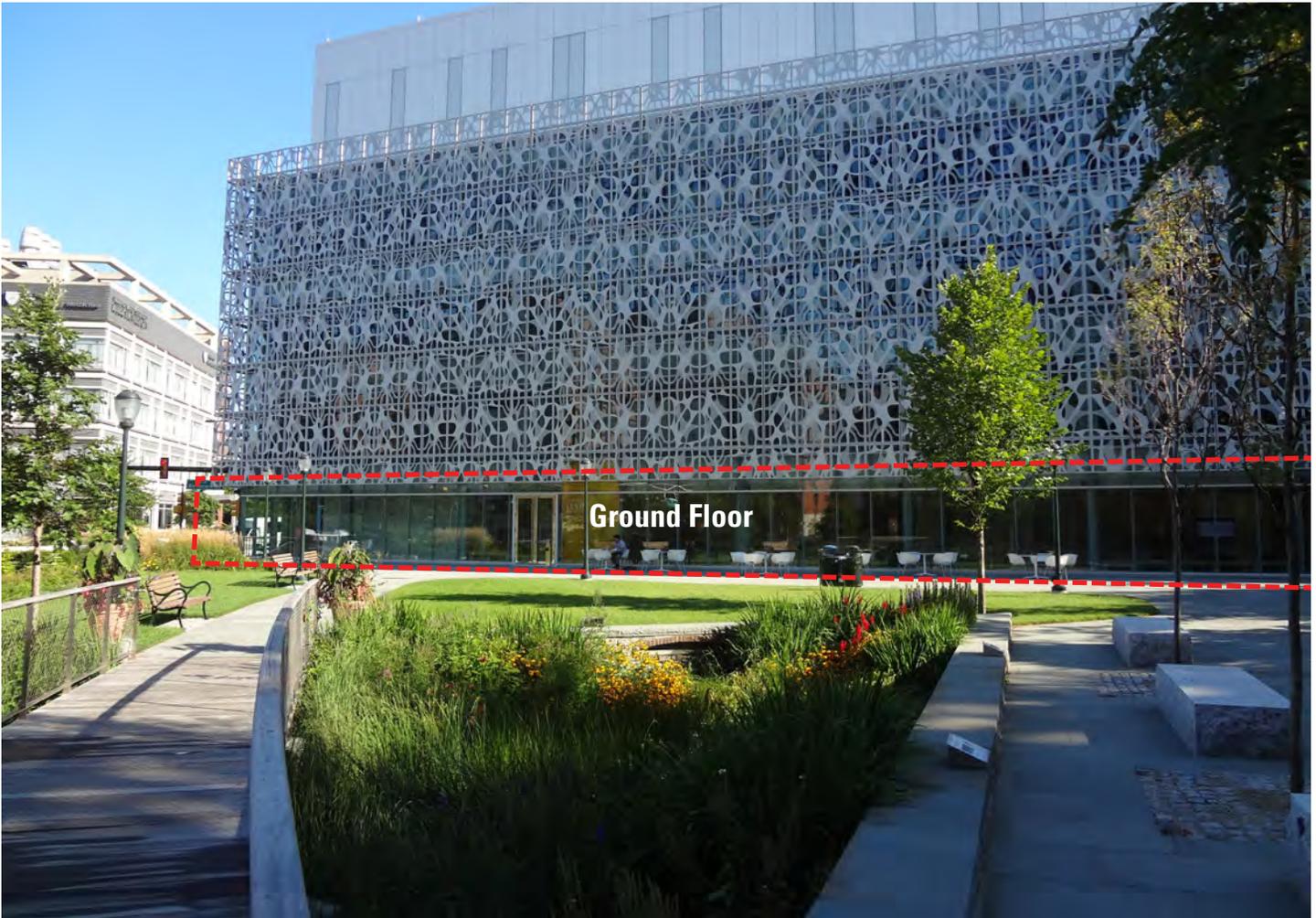
On one side, the building has good transparency and many architectural details. Along the street, it is mostly opaque at the ground floor. Yet the development team added a low wall that surrounds planting beds, provides seating, and buffers the sidewalk from the building.

Photograph of completed building



Photograph of completed building





Photograph of completed building

## Best Practices: Open Ground Floor Along Walkways

### CDR Findings

The CDR findings for this project included asking for greater transparency along the facade facing the public street.

### Built Conditions

While there were no changes to the facade facing the public street, the project did meet a public realm objective for how it engaged the internal walkways and open spaces. The ornate screening of the curtain wall stops at the second floor. This creates transparency along the ground level, connecting interior lobbies with pedestrian pathways and associated open spaces.



Design submission rendering of interior

# Public Open Space

New public open spaces appeared in only a few of the Civic Design Review proposals. Some developers used the space to qualify for a density bonus and have extra approval steps. These create rare opportunities to provide public benefits in Philadelphia's dense neighborhoods. The CDR committee often comments to ensure that the public is well served by the open space design.

## Common Concerns: Use of Public Open Space Bonus

### CDR Findings

A recognition that the public open space bonus is being used. Recommendations for more public benefits and greater care for the space's design.

### Built Conditions

Open spaces function as landscape barriers. They have dense plantings with few points of access. They offer none of the bike racks and less welcoming seating than the plans submitted for CDR.

Photograph of built open spaces



No water feature and seating pressed against walking area

## Activating a Commercial Plaza

### CDR Findings

The committee encouraged larger and more frequent windows facing a proposed plaza. They also advised the development team to activate the plaza with a restaurant and a public lobby. Additionally, explore materials other than metal louvers for the garage facing the plaza.

### Built Conditions

The developers installed metal garage louvers as presented at CDR. Yet, they also provided a restaurant and seating for it in the plaza. They added an entrance at the end of the plaza to promote further activity. Changes in paving patterns and a vegetated wall also add to the design of the public realm.

Photograph of built plaza



The development team implemented many of the committee's open space recommendations

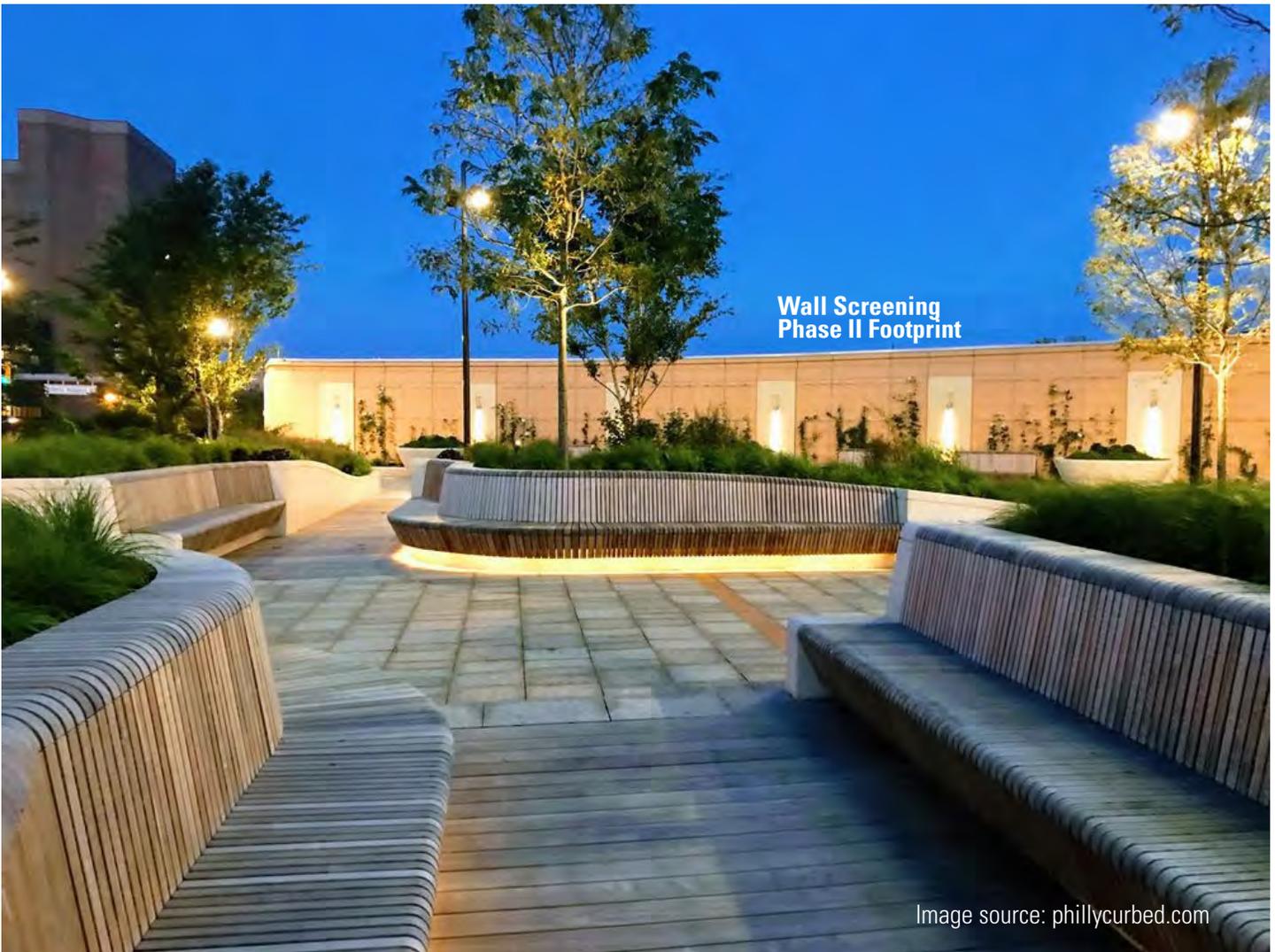


Image source: phillycurbed.com

Photograph of completed plaza above parking

## Best Practices: Arrival Open Spaces

### CDR Findings

The terraced levels of the parking deck create positive public access from the bridge and provide urban amenities in the form of public plazas and esplanades.

### Built Conditions

The developers provided an accessible riverfront promenade and park facing a river. It is at the base of a prominent river crossing and maintains views. The new construction also includes all of the design elements presented at CDR. And, it incorporates recommendations from the CDR committee. This included masking future development sites with one-story walls and seating.

Site plan



# Parking Design

Parking lots and parking garages can be necessary for development. Yet, they can dominate the project and confuse public access to a site. The CDR committee encourages development teams to have appropriate entries and landscaping. They are also concerned with the design of garage facades and screening of cars.

## Common Concerns:

### Strip Shopping Center Design

#### CDR Findings

The committee recommended several improvements. They encouraged linking all pathways within the site, and connecting them to streets. They also wanted to add seating and more landscaping. Additionally, they urged architectural improvements to the facades which face streets.

#### Built Conditions

In the built project there were improvements to walkways but not on the buildings. The project comes close to the goal of connected walkways from all buildings back to the street. During CDR, the development team showed architectural improvements to the stores. Yet, they were not present on site.

### Parking Podium at Sidewalk

#### CDR Findings

The design has a parking garage at the base of the building with a bike room. Someone walking on the sidewalk might see either a blank wall, or parked cars and bicycles. This is an unfriendly condition. The committee urged the designer to consider ways to screen the parking for a better pedestrian environment.

#### Built Conditions

The design team attempted to screen the parking with a perforated metal panel. They made a similar effort with translucent panels for the bike room. Yet, as installed, these materials presented as solid or opaque. This created an unfriendly condition for pedestrians.

Photographs of completed project



*Sidewalk network is well defined but fewer architectural features were installed than shown in the second CDR meeting*

Photographs of completed bike room





Large Windows Face Motor Court

Tree Stands

Lighting Features and public art

Rowhome Patios with Low Fences

Curbless Motor Court with varied paving patterns

Completed motor court with installed trees

## Best Practices:

### Curbless Motor Court

#### CDR Findings

The committee requested that the motor court and access drives not be constructed of asphalt.

#### Built Conditions

The motor court lets pedestrians and vehicles share the same space. Its focus is the safety and enjoyment of pedestrians. It is curbless but its design and landscaping slows down cars. It is also has rich paving materials, water features, and public art.



Design submission rendering of motor court

# Sustainable Design

The City does not have sustainable design requirements for development on private property. Yet, it encourages it in new construction by requiring the submittal of a sustainable design checklist. The checklist asks applicants to state which sustainable design goals they are pursuing. This gives the CDR committee a starting point for discussion.

## Common Concerns: Balancing Stormwater and Site Design

Rain water detention and open spaces can be a part of successful sustainable design. Yet, in some cases they can interfere with other public realm goals such as access from the street.

### CDR Findings

The CDR committee applauded the sustainable design elements incorporated into this project. Yet they had concerns with the street frontage. The building side facing the street has small windows and no direct entrance. It also has a rainwater detention pond which limits where people can walk. In this instance, the CDR committee recommended improving the frontage with public art and/or additional landscaping.

### Built Conditions

The built project was consistent with the CDR presentation. The rain water detention is well designed and constructed. Yet, there were no additions to the landscaping, no public art, and no changes to the access.

## Bringing Sustainable Design to Market Rate Projects

### CDR Findings

This proposal included a half million square feet and more than 350 dwelling units. This was a very visible project in a prominent location. The committee recommended third party certification for sustainable design.

### Built Conditions

After the completion of the CDR process, the development team pursued certification. They achieved a LEED Silver rating for all three buildings. Many measures, such as vegetated roofs, are visible sustainable elements.

Photograph of completed detention pond facing street



Photograph of completed green roof



*After CDR, this project pursued and achieved LEED Silver*



Building under construction

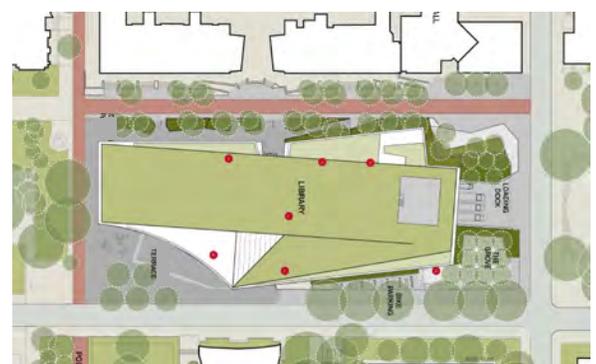
## Best Practices: Pursuing LEED Gold

### CDR Findings

While the CDR Committee did not comment on sustainable design for this project, it has been the practice of both the committee and PCPC staff to encourage third party certification of sustainable design. LEED Gold is one of the highest standards available.

### Built Conditions

This project intends to achieve a LEED gold rating. The site design makes good use of sustainable elements. It welcomes people with landscaping, open spaces, seating, and lighting. Main entries link to pathways and face larger gathering spaces. More landscaping and lighting highlight an important pedestrian route through the area.



Design submittal site plan

### Ongoing Refinements To the CDR Process

Since Civic Design Review began, Planning Commission staff and the CDR committee have been reflecting on the review process. They have made adjustments to improve the use of staff time and to address critical concerns. Changes have included:

- Elimination of reviews for smaller projects (2013)  
Projects between 25,000 and 50,000 sf and/or between 25 and 50 dwelling units
- Use of Complete Streets review standards  
Adoption of a Complete Streets form and the Complete Streets Handbook
- Addition of Sustainable Design checklist  
Applicants must state whether or not they meet specific sustainable design goals
- Addition of Sustainable Design expert on the CDR committee  
CDR Committee member who can speak to current best practices
- Addition of masterplan sequencing  
Review processes for masterplans have been clarified and streamlined
- Recommendations have become more specific  
The responses to more recommendations can be verified in built projects
- More development teams have asked for a pre-CDR discussion with PCPC staff  
These meetings help identify issues and foster changes in early design phases
- Improved communication between City agencies for large projects  
Regular meetings between PCPC, Streets, and PWD to coordinate concerns
- CDR review criteria added to the Central Delaware Overlay  
Proposals along much of the Delaware waterfront get extra scrutiny

# Conclusions and Questions to Explore

Analysis of responses to CDR and field observations suggest that the process has created improvements. Nonetheless, there may be many ways to boost its impacts. Below are some questions which could begin the dialogue for making changes.

## Questions to Explore

**1) Could the process benefit from earlier, conceptual design reviews?**

*(Many development teams have already been requesting earlier staff level reviews)*

**2) Should we consider additional changes to the zoning code in response to issues raised at CDR?**

*(Some changes, such as mandatory reviews for a public open space bonus, have already been added to the zoning code as a result of concerns raised by a CDR project)*

**3) How can we increase the number of positive responses to CDR recommendations?**

*(Current practice includes coordination with other City agencies that have binding reviews)*

**4) Should some types of recommendations be binding?**

*(Some recommendations already relate to binding reviews conducted by other City agencies. Additionally, some cities' review processes tie binding recommendations to publicly adopted design guidelines. These guidelines can provide clear expectations for both developers and reviewers.)*

**5) How should we celebrate exemplary design and development work?**

*(Annual awards and public recognition for exemplary built work is being explored by PCPC staff)*

**Any other recommendations to improve the CDR process that the City should explore?  
If so, please share them with us!**

You can email us your comments and suggestions to: [CDR@phila.gov](mailto:CDR@phila.gov)

# APPENDIX

## More Information on the CDR Process

### Resource Links

There are a lot of resources available to learn more about the Civic Design Review process. This includes design guides and regulations that contribute to the Civic Design Reviews.

Civic Design Review Webpage:

<https://www.phila.gov/services/zoning-planning-development/philadelphia-city-planning-commission-plan-reviews/get-a-civic-design-review/>

Complete Streets Handbook:

<https://www.phila.gov/documents/complete-streets-design-handbook/>

CDR Brochure

<https://www.phila.gov/documents/civic-design-review-cdr-application-materials/>

### Registered Community Organizations (RCOs)

RCOs are a critical part of the Civic Design Review process. There are regulations that govern the formation, functions, and maintenance of RCOs. To learn more:

RCO General Information

<https://www.phila.gov/programs/registered-community-organizations-rcos/>

Rules for RCOs and Neighborhood Meetings with Zoning Applicants

[http://library.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/Pennsylvania/philadelphia\\_pa/title14zoningandplanning/chapter14-300administrationandprocedures?f=templates\\$fn=default.htm\\$3.0\\$vid=amlegal:philadelphia\\_pa\\$sanc=JD\\_14-303\(11A\)](http://library.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/Pennsylvania/philadelphia_pa/title14zoningandplanning/chapter14-300administrationandprocedures?f=templates$fn=default.htm$3.0$vid=amlegal:philadelphia_pa$sanc=JD_14-303(11A))



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# Other Design Reviews Conducted by the City of Philadelphia

Civic Design Review, within the Department of Planning and Development, is only one form of design review for new projects. Other City agencies conduct reviews for a variety of issues and concerns. These include selected areas of the City, particular streets and corridors, properties with historic value, projects large enough to affect environmental concerns and more. Below is a listing of some of the other agencies and types of reviews conducted by the City of Philadelphia.

## Philadelphia Art Commission

The Art Commission conducts binding reviews in certain sections of the City. This includes properties along the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and Independence Mall. For more information, see:

<https://www.phila.gov/departments/philadelphia-art-commission/>

## Philadelphia Historical Commission

The Philadelphia Historical Commission protects the City's historic resources. Designated landmarks and sites may be subject to additional staff and/or public reviews. For more information, see:

<https://www.phila.gov/departments/philadelphia-historical-commission/>

## Philadelphia City Planning Commission

The Philadelphia City Planning Commission has other forms of design reviews for specific neighborhoods and corridors within the City. Some density bonuses and parking designs are also subject to a staff review. These include:

These include:

- Facade Reviews
- Neighborhood Conservation Overlays
- Neighborhood Commercial Areas
- Garage Facade Reviews
- Public Open Spaces (when applying for a bonus)
- Affordable Housing Design (when applying for a bonus)

For more information, see:

<https://www.phila.gov/departments/philadelphia-city-planning-commission/>

# APPENDIX

## Reviews in Comparable Cities

### Common and Uncommon Practices

The Civic Design Review process has only been in place for a few years. PCPC staff and the CDR committee are often reflecting on ways to improve the process and its results. To gain understanding, PCPC staff looked at other peer cities that have robust design reviews. We looked into their histories, goals, processes, and means of enforcement. In 2017, we also spoke with the planning staff members who administered the review programs.

Below are some of the key takeaways from this analysis:

- Outside Philadelphia, peer cities have binding reviews
- Conceptual plan reviews are often required
- Community meetings often but not always required
- Philadelphia has the shortest review process
- Some peer cities use design guidelines



### City to City Comparisons

City	Early and Multiple Reviews Required?	Binding?	Community Meeting Required?	Review Metrics	Approximate timeline to complete process
Philadelphia	No	No	Yes	Categories	1-3 months
Boston	Yes	Yes	Yes	Categories	3-9 months, based on project size
Baltimore	Yes	Yes*	Sometimes	Categories	3-6 months, based on project size
Portland	Multiple reviews are common	Yes	Sometimes	Design Guidelines	4-6 months, extensions possible
Seattle	Yes	Yes	Yes	Design Guidelines	3-4 Months for the Early Review and 6-9 months for the Recommendations Phase

\*The Baltimore Director of Planning and Baltimore Planning Commission monitor the application of review panel approvals through the permitting process. Often they act as the enforcement arm for changes recommended by the panel.

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# Review Programs of Other Cities: A Summary

## Seattle, WA

- Reviews for:
  - Projects as small as 8,000 square feet, depending on location\*
- Eight geographical areas with separate review boards and guidelines
- Adopted design guidelines are a basis for decisions
- Number of projects reviewed: About 200 per year in total from all boards

City staffing: 17 land use planners and 3 administrative staff

\*Some smaller and mid-sized projects may be administratively approved.



## Portland, OR

- Reviews for:
  - Projects within an overlay and meeting size and/or cost thresholds
  - Smaller projects, Type II have staff level reviews
  - Larger projects, Type III have public hearings
- Adopted design guidelines are a basis for decisions
- Number of projects reviewed (2018): 124 Type II, 27 Type III

City staffing: 17, including city planners and administrative staff



## Baltimore, MD

- Reviews for:
  - Planned Unit Developments (PUDs), Master Plans
  - "Signature sites and projects" chosen at the discretion of the planning director and staff
- Review subjects include site design, bulk/massing, urban context, and architectural design and details
- Number of projects reviewed: About 70-80 per year

City staffing: 2 city planners



## Boston, MA

- Reviews for:
  - Projects as low as 20,000 square feet and 15 units
  - Projects greater than 50,000 square feet will be reviewed by an Impact Advisory Group (IAG) selected by elected officials
- Reviews include design, infrastructural, and environmental concerns
- Multiple submittals for staff reviews and public comment

City staffing: 15, including city planners and administrative staff



# Design Review Processes in Comparable Cities

## Seattle, Washington Design Review Program

Seattle's Design Review Program is for proposed development on private property. There are eight review boards that serve different areas of the city. This allows them to provide comments specific to the location of the project. There is a separate review process for projects built on public land and/or for City government purposes.

### When does a project require a review?

Currently, thresholds begin as low as 8,000 sf in areas of the city with lower buildings. Smaller projects and in some cases mid-sized projects may be approved by city staff without a public hearing. This can happen after completing an Early Design Guidance review with the land use planner.

### Review process and content

Submittals pass through three phases of comment and review. This includes a Pre-submittal meeting between the applicant teams and relevant city agencies. Next is an Early Design Guidance review by staff. Lastly, the Design Review Board reviews the project at one or more public meetings.

Design Review Boards rely on Design Guidelines. Design Guidelines provide direction on citywide concerns and on issues for specific neighborhoods. City-wide and neighborhood guidelines contain the same categories, including:

#### Context and Site

Natural Systems and Site Features, Urban Pattern and Form, Architectural Context and Character

#### Public Life

Connectivity, Walkability, Street Level Interaction, Active Transportation

#### Design Concept

Project Uses and Activities, Architectural Concept, Open Space Concept, Materials

### How are review recommendations enforced?

The Department of Construction and Inspections will not allow a project to proceed until it addresses the recommendations of the Design Review Board. Yet, for recommendations to be binding, four or more board members must be present when they issue their findings.



Photos: Greenfire Campus, Seattle - "Gallery of Great Projects"

### Community Engagement

Seattle's Design Review Program divides the city into 8 geographical areas. Each area has their own Design Review Board that holds public hearings where the public can make comments. Public meetings with stakeholder groups are mandatory. They must occur before the Early Design Guidance review by staff.

The City also has a website that shows current and ongoing review projects. People can search for review projects near them by using the GPS signal of their computer or phone.

### Number of Reviews

Design review boards see about 200 cases per year.

### City Staffing

17 land use planners, 1 program manager and 2 support staff.

### For more information, see:

<http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/shapingseattle/map.aspx>

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# Portland, Oregon

## Portland Design Commission

The Portland Design Commission reviews projects of certain sizes and costs in designated areas of the city. They use design guidelines, created with public input, to make recommendations. The city is also considering changes, including:

- Expanding review areas
- Adjusting sizes or costs that trigger reviews
- Making conceptual design review mandatory

### When does a project require a review?

Projects within an overlay and meeting size and/or cost thresholds must have a review. Smaller projects outside the Central City or Regional City overlays may be Type II. Larger projects, especially within the Central City or Regional City overlays, may be Type III.

### Review process and content

Type II projects may only need a staff level review and it may take 6-8 weeks to complete the process. Type III are likely to need a public review with the Design Commission and they may need 4-6 months to complete the process. Based on location, city staff will advise the applicant on the “approval criteria” or design guidelines that apply to the site’s location.

State law requires that local municipalities take no more than 4 months for a review. Review periods longer than 4 months are often the result of requests by the developer. This happens when they wish to make changes to avoid a denial, which can cause them to start over. Also, the Design Commission will not grant an approval unless other affected city agencies express confidence that the project meets their requirements. This includes their water departments and departments of public works.

### Review topics include:

Massing options, Site Organization, Ground Level, Parking and Loading Systems, Circulation Routes, Landscape Concept, Utilities, Preliminary Materials Options, Approach of Public Art, and Modifications and adjustments under consideration (including height and FAR bonus requests).

### How are review recommendations enforced?

A project cannot proceed until they receive an approval from the Design Commission or planning staff. A staff level review can be appealed to the Design Commission. Design Commission reviews can be appealed to the City Council. Design Commission staff considers appeals to be rare. Most developers will ask for extensions to make changes rather than risk a denial.



### Community Engagement

All Design Commission meetings are open to the public and public testimony. Residents are able to contact the land use planner preparing a case and convey comments to that person. That planner will present those comments to the Design Commission. Community meetings before a public hearing are strongly encouraged throughout the city. They are also mandatory in three overlay districts. The Design Commission staff makes a yearly presentation summarizing the numbers of review, key issues, and recommended improvements.

### Number of Reviews

In 2018, they were 124 Type II and 27 Type III reviews

### City Staffing

17, including land use planners and administrative support. The same planning staff also prepares reviews for sites and districts with historical preservation protections.

### For more information, see:

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bds/article/168799>

# Design Review Processes in Comparable Cities

## Baltimore, Maryland Urban Design & Architectural Advisory Panel

The Urban Design and Architectural Advisory Panel (UDAAP) started in 1964. The panel was a part of the Baltimore Housing and Urban Renewal Agency. It became a part of the Department of Planning in 1997. The reviews focus on larger projects, significant renovations, and projects in special master plan areas. Recent changes in the Baltimore zoning code mandate UDAAP review for certain types of projects.

### When does a project require a review?

Reviews are required for “signature sites, significant projects proposed in renewal and/or conservation areas”, planned unit developments (PUD) and master plans. Projects receiving local municipal funding and/or on public lands may also require reviews. The planning staff and Planning Director have discretion in determining which proposals are “signature sites” and “significant projects”.

### Review process and content

All projects must have a schematic and a final review. The panel can ask applicants to present at extra meetings. At least three meetings are often needed to complete the process. Smaller and mid-sized projects can take as little as three months to go through the process. Six months is not uncommon for larger projects. City staff encourages all applicants to schedule pre-development meetings, which are free. This allows development teams and city staff to discuss review processes and requirements. This can shorten the review timeline.

### Review topics include:

The topics for reviews include: site/landscape design, building height, bulk, and density, urban context, and architecture approach and detail.

### How are review recommendations enforced?

Panel recommendations are advisory to the Director of Planning and the Planning Commission. This office coordinates the approval of building permits with their building department. In most cases, the developer must put in place recommendations to get a building permit. Yet the Planning Director has the discretion to allow projects to proceed even if not every recommendation has been met.



Image: A mixed used proposal for 1100 Key Highway, which was reviewed by UDARP in 2017. Image Source: [www.southbmore.com](http://www.southbmore.com)

### Community Engagement

All meetings are public and the public can attend to observe. Yet there is no public testimony as they are not considered public hearings. The public can send their comments to planning staff and the Planning Director to the panel. Yet, reviewed projects often appear in front the planning commission and the zoning board. In these venues there is public testimony. Community meetings throughout the review process are strongly encouraged but not required.

### Number of Reviews

Approximately 70-80 reviews per year, though several projects have multiple reviews.

### City Staffing

2 city planners

### For more information, see:

<https://planning.baltimorecity.gov/commissions-review-panels/udarp>

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# Boston, Massachusetts

## Article 80 Reviews

Article 80 Reviews cover a broad range of development issues. They combine public realm concerns with other planning needs. These include environmental protection, infrastructure, transportation, sustainable design, historic resources, and social equity. The review process requires community engagement and relies upon local input.

### When does a project require a review?

Article 80 requires different types of reviews based on size and kind of project:

- “Small Projects”: < 20,000-50,000 sf or 15+ units
- “Large Projects”: > 50,000 sf
- Planned Development Areas and Institutional Master Plan Review, 1 or more acres

### Review process and content

BRA staff may review “Small projects” for consistency with zoning and adopted guidelines. “Large projects” may also have many public reviews. There is no maximum time period for a review. Yet it is advisable to allow for 6-9 months for “Large Projects” and 3 months for “Small Projects”.

For “large projects”, there are many submittal stages which allow for staff reviews and public comment. “Large projects” greater than 100,000 sf will also have to have a Boston Civic Design Commission review for their impacts on the public realm.

### Review topics include:

Review subjects include urban design, environmental protection, infrastructure systems, transportation, sustainable design, historic resources, and development impact. Environmental protection includes requirements for waterfront projects. Development impact assessments may trigger requirements for affordable

### How are review recommendations enforced?

Both “Small projects and “Large Projects” must receive BRA design review approval before they can get building permits. City staff may also delay a review process if they feel a proposal fails to address priority concerns.



*Image: Rendering of Boston Landing, a proposed multi-building development that is undergoing Article 80 review. Image source: bostonlandingdevelopment.com*

### Community Engagement

Elected officials create an Impact Advisory Group (IAG) for all “Large Projects”. They select community members and other stakeholders to take part in the review process. The IAG must organize at least one public meeting, though several often take place. All “Small Projects” are also required to have at least one public community meeting.

### Equity Supports

There are requirements for projects with more than 100,000 sf of non-residential uses. There are also requirements for projects which reduce the supply of affordable housing. They must contribute to a fund for affordable housing and job training. Projects with 10 or more dwelling units must reserve 13% as “income restricted”. This is a component of Boston’s Inclusionary Development Policy.

### City Staffing

15 city planners from the Development Review Department. Their work is done in collaboration with 40 Planning, Urban Design, and Legal professionals from departments within the City of Boston.

### For more information, see:

<http://www.bostonplans.org/projects/development-review/what-is-article-80>