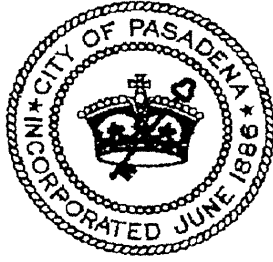


**ATTACHMENT A**

**LETTER FROM THE DESIGN COMMISSION DATED SEPTEMBER 7, 2013**



## DESIGN COMMISSION

September 7, 2013

Vince Bertoni, Planning Director  
Department of Planning & Community Development  
City of Pasadena  
175 North Garfield Avenue  
Pasadena, CA 91101

Re: A Management Study of the Development Review Process prepared by  
Matrix Consulting Group dated December 2012 ("the Study")

Dear Mr. Bertoni:

The City of Pasadena Design Commission ("the Commission") is appreciative of the opportunity to provide input regarding this Study.

We found the Study to be quite comprehensive, spanning several departments and containing some 278 recommendations. Subsequent to your presentation before us on July 8, 2013, we formed a subcommittee that winnowed the Study's recommendations down to only those recommendations that dealt specifically with the Commission or the City's design review process.

Speaking generally, the Commission is keenly aware of the delicate balance that must be struck in providing a predictable, efficient development process with the need to preserve and enhance our City's historic architecture and unique place. In that regard, the Commission found that the Study appears particularly weighted toward a "streamlining" of the process for development, while not fully accounting for the importance this community places on architectural quality and contextual sensitivity.

Of the specific recommendations we reviewed, several dominant themes stood out, about which we found both concurrence and disagreement, as follows:

**50% Design Commission Review (Recommendation # 63)**

The Study states that "*an applicant is encouraged or required to meet with the design commission not less than four different times including preliminary, concept, 50% design, and 100% or final design*" (see page 195 of the Study). By and large, it has been the

experience of the Commission that the 50% review has been utilized only when an applicant was able to generally demonstrate compliance with the bulk of the findings necessary to pass concept review, but where compliance was not a complete certainty to all members of the Commission without further delineation. Of the projects that have come before us in the past, probably something less than 15% have needed a 50% review step. Since even the authors of the Study were confused as to whether a 50% review was mandatory or not, perhaps it may also be equally bewildering to applicants. *In the interest of creating a greater level of certainty, and the appearance of fewer steps to achieving approval, the Commission believes it would not be of any great detriment to eliminate 50% review from Pasadena's process, retaining preliminary, concept and final as the three reviews in Pasadena's design review process.*

### **Creating Citywide Design Guidelines (30, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67)**

A number of recommendations centered on the creation of "citywide design guidelines." It's not clear from the Study that the authors were aware that the City of Pasadena already has "citywide design principles." These principles are, intentionally, very general and limited in recognition of Pasadena's diverse and quite differentiated neighborhoods. Applying some sort of comprehensive, catch-all type guidelines citywide would be inappropriate. Instead, such detailed requirements are better addressed to the particular needs of each neighborhood through their respective specific plans. Projects not covered within the specific plan limits are more successfully handled through typologically-focused guidelines, such as the City's existing *Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial & Multi-family Districts* and the *City of Gardens Standards*.

The study further recommends that, after the completion of said citywide design guidelines, concept review before the Commission could be eliminated entirely – having the Commission judge only final design – as long as applicants conformed to the new citywide guidelines. Final design traditionally deals with colors, materials and details, so this would leave the massing and morphology of new construction – next to some of Pasadena's most treasured "postcard" places – to an untested document written by an outside consultant who may, or may not, even understand or appreciate Pasadena's uniqueness. *The Commission would neither be in favor of creating any kind comprehensive citywide guidelines nor recommend applicants avoid concept review before the Commission simply because they comply with any such ambitious guidelines.*

### **Evaluating planning staff based on their meeting predetermined cycle times (93)**

The Commission believes that having a predictable and efficient design review process is an asset to the City. Developers should expect certainty of process time (for example, when an application is deemed complete, then it will be heard by such and such date) not certainty of outcome (for example, if an application is submitted by such and such date, then approval will be forthcoming by such and such date). *The Commission concurs with instituting more effective project tracking and greater certainty with regard to appearance times, but would not be in favor of any construct that would reward or penalize staff based on how quickly a particular project passes a particular review that is clearly dependent on the competency of the submittal.*

**Requiring an applicant submit only two reviews: a conceptual design and a final design (63)**

Considerable thought and experience went into formulating preliminary review as part of the design review process. The Commission, as part of our investigations for these comments, had several speakers familiar with the development process in Pasadena provide testimony as to the efficacy of preliminary review on the development process from the applicant's perspective. Their position was that providing applicants with an opportunity to hear how their project meets, or doesn't meet, the City's specific plans and guidelines prior to receiving entitlements was considered particularly valuable. It is the Commission's position that applicants will spend less time seeking concept design approval for having gone through the preliminary review process, ultimately spending less time and resources traversing the entire review undertaking. Further, it has been the Commission's experience that discussion and input at the Preliminary Consultation stage often contributes to achieving superior projects. *Again, the Commission recommends leaving preliminary, concept and final as the three reviews in Pasadena's design review process.*

**Permit cycle time agreements with applicants for high priority projects (104)**

*The Commission is not in favor of any process that would grant special privileges to certain applicants over others which, in the any way, could be construed as discriminating against any particular class of applicants.*

**Rotating staff between Zoning, Design and Historic Preservation and Community Planning (217)**

Pasadena has a legacy of great buildings, from all periods of its history, requiring knowledgeable Design and Historic Preservation staff who can work with applicants to foster innovative, high-quality architecture while protecting historic resources. Individuals of such caliber possess advanced degrees and professional recognition and would likely show little interest in work outside their area of expertise. Plus, Pasadena cannot afford a learning curve in this area! Institution of such musical chair policies in the past has led to the loss of irreplaceable talent with national recognition in the field. *The Commission does not support interdepartmental rotation of principal planners.*

**Eliminate other commission's representation on the Design Commission (257, 258)**

The charge of the Commission is not just the review of architectural projects and master plans, but also includes recommendations to the City Council and the City Manager regarding specific plans, amendments to the master street tree plan, general plan updates, etc. It is the opinion of the Commission that having representation from the other commissions – arts, planning, transportation and historic preservation – is particularly useful in informing both other Commissioners and applicants about overall processes and goals within our City. Such representation is also an acknowledgement of the importance of having informed commissioners, especially given our City's level of community participation.

Contrary to assertions found within the Study, the Commission has found no proffering of ill-informed expertise by any of the other Commission's representatives. Nonetheless,

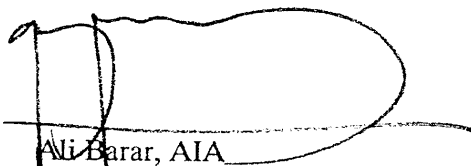
having architects present is important for the Commission's work. The requisite travel of practicing professionals necessitates some absenteeism; therefore, any diminution in the current number of architects would put added strain on those who are already volunteers, and may discourage the recruitment of quality candidates in the future. *The Commission finds the current representation necessary, ingenious, particularly useful, and reflective of our unique participatory community, and we would not concur with the recommendation to change the composition and number of its current membership.*

**Facilitated retreats between various commissions and between the Commission and City Council (247, 249, 250, 254)**

An understanding of citywide goals and objectives is useful in administering the specific business of each commission and also provides important feedback. Again, it appears the authors of the Study missed the beauty of the Commission's current composition, where the interaction of representatives from various commissions occurs on at least a bi-monthly basis at the Commission hearing. Furthermore, in a community as small and as closely connected as Pasadena some fraternization already occurs, providing additional opportunities for such cross-pollination of ideas, etc., among commissions. In an era of tight resources, perhaps formalizing these interactions should really be optional based on current budgets. *The Commission would not be opposed to the implementation of such retreats.*

Again, I would like to convey on behalf of the Commission our thanks for your time in presenting the Study to us and for affording us this opportunity to comment on these issues that are so important to our City.

Sincerely,

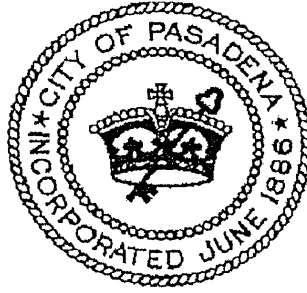
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ali Barar', written over a horizontal line.

Ali Barar, AIA  
Chair, City of Pasadena Design Commission

xc. Mayor  
Council Members  
City Manager  
Design Commissioners

**ATTACHMENT B**

**LETTER FROM THE DESIGN COMMISSION DATED DECEMBER 26, 2013**



## DESIGN COMMISSION

December 26, 2013

David Reyes, Deputy Director of Planning  
Department of Planning & Community Development  
City of Pasadena  
175 North Garfield Avenue  
Pasadena, CA 91101

RE: Staff Memorandum, December 17, 2013:  
Design Commission / Historic Preservation Commission Compositions as a Result  
of the Settlement in the Case of Pasadenans for a Livable City & Pasadena Heritage  
vs. City of Pasadena.

Dear Mr. Reyes:

The City of Pasadena Design Commission ("DC") is appreciative of the staff's time and effort in preparing the memorandum.

We generally concur with the analysis of responsibilities for both DC and the Historic Preservation Commission ("HPC") and share the opinion about the problems posed by having both commissions reviewing the same project. The DC agrees that HPC's expertise in Pasadena's residential architectural history and unique neighborhood development patterns is a critical strength of the HPC and should be maintained.

It should be noted that when the Playhouse Plaza project was heard, several DC members--with historic preservation experience--were forced to recuse themselves for conflictive interest or pre-disclosed bias.

At our December 17, 2013 hearing, a suggestion was made to revise the makeup of the DC to include a member with specific historic preservation expertise. This position would be in addition to the representative from HPC. Establishing proper qualifications for such a position proved elusive, running the gamut from having an appreciation for historic resources to possessing distinctive education, training and professional membership in a nationally recognized preservation organization.

Given the type of projects that come before the DC, possessing an understanding of how complex buildings can be manipulated to be sympathetic with their context is already an overarching requirement. Design professionals are unique in having this understanding, while simultaneously, at least being conversant in historic preservation issues. The HPC representative, owing to the requirements of that Commission, may or may not have a professional background in the subject. That being the case, any modification to DC membership that replaces an architect, and his or her attendant expertise, in order to seat a non-architect with supposedly greater historical "sensitivity" would not be supportive of the DC's primary charge.

*Nevertheless, we still believe that the DC could benefit from modifying the current composition to reserve one position for an architect or other professional (such as an urban designer, planner or historian) with relevant degrees and demonstrable experience (as opposed to mere interest) in historic preservation.*

We are cognizant of the special nature of Pasadena's review process and appreciate this opportunity to assist in establishing the best composition for the City's commissions.

Please contact me if you require any clarification or have further requests.

Sincerely,

Ali Barar, Chair  
Pasadena Design Commission

Xc: Design Commission



**ATTACHMENT C**

**SUMMARY OF COMMISSION COMMENTS ON VARIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS**

**ATTACHMENT C**  
**SUMMARY OF COMMISSION COMMENTS ON VARIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Study Recommendation #58, #62-68:**

**The City should authorize the preparation of citywide design guidelines using a consulting architectural/planning firm. Upon adoption of the design guidelines and training of staff, the Design Review process should be streamlined to consist of two steps, conceptual and final design. Eventually this could be reduced to only Final Design Review. Further the design review thresholds in certain areas and for certain uses should be adjusted.**

The focus group had more comments on the Design Commission and the design review process than other decision making body. The focus group comments related to the process included that applicants are required to develop site plan and architectural drawings too early in the process, the amount of time to process applications was too long, the design guidelines do not provide for clear direction, the Design Commission was perceived as being too involved in redesigning the project rather than ensuring compliance with design guidelines, and staff of the Design and Historic Preservation section were perceived as advocates for projects and not necessarily for good design.

The study looked at the design review process in Glendale, Santa Monica and Burbank and found that Pasadena's design review process was less convoluted in comparison with the exception that an applicant may need to meet four times with the Commission if a project goes through Preliminary, Concept, 50% review and Final design review. The types of projects that require design review are less extensive when compared to other cities as some areas and/or project types are exempt from a mandatory review.

The study recommends that Citywide Design Guidelines could assist in reducing the amount of time projects spend in design review and adjusting the thresholds for design review within some specific areas of the City. Further, there should be two types of review- conceptual and final and multiple reviews within these phases should be eliminated. Eventually, upon development and adoption of Citywide Design Guidelines and training of staff in their application, if a project is consistent with the guidelines only one submittal should be made to the Design Commission- for final review.

**Commenting commissions: Planning Commission and Design Commission**

The Planning Commission:

- Expressed support for the preparation of Citywide Design Guidelines.
- Recommended that this idea be explored more fully as part of the future updates of the City's Specific Plan areas occurring after the General Plan update is adopted.

The Design Commission commented that:

- Given the diverse and differentiated neighborhoods in Pasadena applying catch-all type guidelines citywide would be inappropriate. Instead, detailed

requirements are better addressed to the particular needs of each neighborhood through the specific plans and those areas outside of specific plans can utilize existing typological focused guidelines (i.e. the City of Gardens Standards).

- The commission does not favor the creation of comprehensive guidelines nor the recommendation that Concept Design be replaced by any such guidelines.
- With regard to the multi-step process and in particular the 50% review, the commission believes that this step is utilized in perhaps only 15% of the cases. The commission also believes there is confusion as to whether the 50% review is mandatory or not and that in the interest of creating a greater level of certainty and the appearance of fewer steps to achieving approval, it would not be a detriment to eliminate 50% review from the process. (Note: based on research by staff, since 2012 the 50% review has occurred in 26% of the Concept Review cases).
- With regard to streamlining the process further to two-steps, a conceptual and final design review, the commission commented on the value and importance of the preliminary review. This step provides an applicant an opportunity to hear how their project meets or doesn't meet adopted guidelines and regulations prior to receiving entitlements. It is the commission position that this reduces the overall amount of time spent in the design review process as the other reviews benefit from the feedback provided in preliminary review.

The Design Commission recommended that:

- The design review process should remain as three steps Preliminary Consultation, Concept Design Review and Final Design Review.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff supports the development of Citywide Design Guidelines and initiating this work in conjunction with implementation of the General Plan.

With regard to the design review process staff recommends:

- The design review process remains with three primary phases (Preliminary Consultation, Concept Design Review and Final Design Review).
- Preliminary Consultation continues as presently implemented. This phase is an important first step in the process to identify potential issues early on and provide direction for applicants on key issues. This results in a more effective Concept and Final Design Review as clear and concise direction is provided as early as possible.
- Eliminate the 50% review phase that is part of Concept Review. With focused and clear recommendations provided during Preliminary Consultation, 50% review is no longer needed. Concept Review will focus on any refinement needed for the project in preparation for Final Design Review (rather than identifying major issues during this phase that require the 50% review).
- Staff present these recommendations to the Planning Commission and Design Commission and return back to the City Council with any necessary changes required to the Municipal Code.

- Staff continue to evaluate the design review process and make changes as necessary to ensure all phases of review provide the applicant with thorough and clear direction. This includes providing a consistent and predictable process for applicants.
- Staff study further the existing application submittal process to assist applicants in providing the information needed for the specific Design Review phases.

**Study Recommendations #257-258 and Study of Review Authority for Historic Buildings and Historic Districts within the Central District:**

**The membership of the Design Review Commission should be reduced from its current nine members to five members. The Commission should be modified so that it consists of not less than three members who are licensed architects. The other two members should be persons who are qualified to interpret architectural and site planning information including but not limited to licensed landscape architects, urban planners, or engineers.**

During the focus group meetings conducted for the study several comments were discussed related to the Design Commission including reducing the number of commissioners and questions as to what the most effective professional make-up should be (how many architects vs. non-architects and what the non-architect composition should be).

The study looked at four other cities that have an active commission: Beverly Hills, Glendale, Palo Alto and Santa Monica and compared these to Pasadena. The study recommends the membership of the Design Commission should be reduced to five members. The membership should be modified so that it consists of not less than three members who are licensed architects. The remaining two members should be persons who are qualified to analyze and interpret architectural and site planning information, including but not limited licensed architects, urban planners or engineers.

City	Number of Commissioners	Composition
Beverly Hills	5	At least one from each discipline: building construction, architecture, landscape architecture and visual/graphic design, plus three laypersons.
Glendale	5	One member who is a licensed architect. Other four members required have experience and ability analyze architectural information and site plans- including but not limited to licensed landscape architect, urban planner, engineer and builder/developer.
Palo Alto	5	At least three members must be architects, landscape architects, building designers or other design professionals.
Santa Monica	7	Two members must be required to be professional licensed architects. Remaining members must have training and qualifications to analyze and interpret architectural and environmental trends and information.
Pasadena	9	Five members appointed at large by the Mayor from nominations of other councilmembers. One additional member from each from the Arts and Culture, Transportation Advisory, Historic Preservation and Planning Commissions. Commissioners must have a demonstrated interest in the community and professional expertise in a design related field such as: architecture, landscape architecture, city planning, historic preservation, artist, urban design, engineering and transportation planning.

*Commenting commissions: Planning Commission, Design Commission and Historic Preservation Commission.*

The Planning Commission and Design Commission considered study recommendations 257 and 258. In addition, while not part of the development review study, the IDS Side Letter Agreement did require that certain processes currently in place related to the review of historic resources within the Central District be examined to determine if changes should be made. These processes occur within the development review process, so staff as part of this effort, asked the Historic Preservation, Design Commission and Planning Commission to review this specific request and make a formal recommendation to the City Council.

The Side Letter requested the following:

*Study the current role of the Design Commission as the review authority for historic buildings and historic districts in the Central District and changing this to the Historic Preservation Commission.*

The Planning Commission recommended the following related to the Commission make-up and the Side Letter Agreement:

- The commission shall remain as nine members.
- The Design Commission make-up be modified to substitute the current Arts and Culture representative with a member appointed at large by the Mayor (and having expertise in historic preservation). This increases the Mayor at-large appointees from the current five to six.
- In addition to the former Arts and Culture Commission representative, a second member (from those appointed at large by the Mayor) must have background or expertise in Historic Preservation.
- The commission could benefit from modifying the current composition to reserve one position for an architect or other professional with relevant degrees in and demonstrable experience in historic preservation (such as an urban designer, planner, or historian).
- The Design Commission noted that any modification to the commission membership that replaces an architect and their expertise, in order to seat a non-architect with greater historical “sensitivity” would not be supportive of the commission’s primary charge.
- The review authority for historic buildings and historic districts within the Central District remain with the Design Commission.

The Design Commission recommended the following related to the Commission make-up and the Side Letter Agreement:

- There shall be no change in the number of commissioners.
- The Design Commission could benefit from modifying the current composition to reserve one position for an architect or other professional with relevant degrees in and demonstrable experience in historic preservation (such as an urban designer, planner, or historian).
- The Design Commission noted that any modification to the commission membership that replaces an architect and their expertise, in order to seat a non-architect with greater historical “sensitivity” would not be supportive of the commission’s primary charge.
- The review authority for historic buildings and historic districts within the Central District remain with the Design Commission.

The Historic Preservation Commission recommended the following related to the Side Letter Agreement:

- The current practice does not need to be modified and the review authority for historic buildings and historic districts within the Central District remain with the Design Commission.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends the make-up of the Design Commission be modified as follows:

- The total number of members be reduced from nine to seven.
- The existing Arts and Culture Commission and Transportation Advisory Commission representatives be replaced with commissioners that are appointed at large by the Mayor.
- The composition of the commission be changed to the following:
  - Two commissioners with a background in Architecture (Mayor appointed).
  - One commissioner with a background in Historic Preservation (Mayor Appointed).
  - One commissioner with a background in Landscape Architecture (Mayor Appointed).
  - One commissioner that is a community member at-large (Mayor Appointed).
  - One commissioner that is a representative of the Planning Commission
  - One commissioner that is a representative of the Historic Preservation Commission.
- Staff presents these recommendations to the Planning Commission and Design Commission and return back to the City Council with any necessary changes required to the Municipal Code.
- Staff concurs with the Planning, Design and Historic Preservation Commissions and recommends that the review authority for historic buildings and historic districts in the Central District remain with the Design Commission.