

WHY DESIGN REVIEW MATTERS



the problem

Pressures of suburban growth and economic development can undermine the distinctive character and uniqueness of communities. Such pressure is particularly challenging in historic towns that have been thoughtfully planned over time. Corporate franchise architecture and other financial pressures can also degrade the appearance of a community's character.

the solution

Well structured local government processes—which have been utilized to review architectural design in many of the most attractive towns in the Chicago metropolitan area—can assure that new development projects contribute to the character of the community and create great places of lasting value where people want to live, work and shop.

THE VALUE OF DESIGN REVIEW

Can be measured in:

▶ **PROPERTY VALUE**

Design review can boost property values by introducing certainty into the marketplace and improving the overall economic climate (Clarion Associates 2002).

▶ **QUALITY OF LIFE**

Protects the visual character and preserves the sense of place and pride in a community.

▶ **ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY**

Preserves green space, retains more land in a natural state and encourages sustainable technologies.

▶ **HEALTH & PUBLIC SAFETY**

Creates a walkable and active downtown that has physical and psychological benefits, such as increased safety from “more eyes on the street.”

▶ **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Helps with business recruitment and creates a more pedestrian-friendly, human-scaled atmosphere—a place people want to be!



THE VALUE

ECONOMICS

ELEMENTS

HOW IT WORKS

MORE HELP

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF DESIGN REVIEW

▶ ENHANCES VALUE

Well-recognized public building & landscape improvements increase nearby property values by an average of 25%, as well as provide other benefits (ULI).

▶ BUSINESS & SHOPPING IMPACT

Pedestrian friendly scale in design encourages shoppers to make longer stops and increase their purchases of goods and services.

▶ TOURISM EFFECT

Maintaining community character can attract increased visits and upscale tourism, an increasingly important income generator for many towns. These efforts create places that people want to visit.

▶ LONG TERM INVESTMENT

Various economic studies have demonstrated that local “quality of life” is a most important factor in attracting new businesses, particularly in growing high-tech industries.



THE ELEMENTS OF DESIGN REVIEW



► LANDSCAPE & LIGHTING

Plantings are an effective tool in design. They help to screen problematic conditions, control temperature, manage stormwater, and soften the appearance of hard surfaces. Landscaping has the overall effect of complementing buildings by bringing nature into urban spaces.

Effective guidelines for landscaping and lighting consider the particular preferences of the community and the location of the site.

► ARCHITECTURE & MATERIALS

The quality and durability of construction design and materials has great impact on the success of the project and “fit” with the location. Many corporate franchises provide or allow some range of options when appropriately requested by the community.

However, most successful design guidelines do not prescribe a particular style of architecture or type of materials, but rather consider the overall mass, scale and context of the building.

► SIGNS & AWNINGS

Signs are an important way to attract customers and give businesses a distinct identity, but too much clutter or uncontrolled signage can defeat these purposes. Some communities creatively use sign guidelines and standards as an element in design for their commercial areas.

Regulation of signage (within legal constraints on freedom of expression) is very challenging but can be well worth the efforts in creating an attractive community.



► LOCAL ISSUES

Design review processes and guidelines can also be used to address a wide variety of new and evolving community appearance issues. For example, historic or conservation areas may establish standards to assure that modifications to existing buildings are compatible with the traditional character. Similarly, business and entertainment districts may have special issues, like parking, outdoor dining or special displays which warrant clarification as to what is appropriate for all stakeholders.

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HOW DESIGN REVIEW WORKS

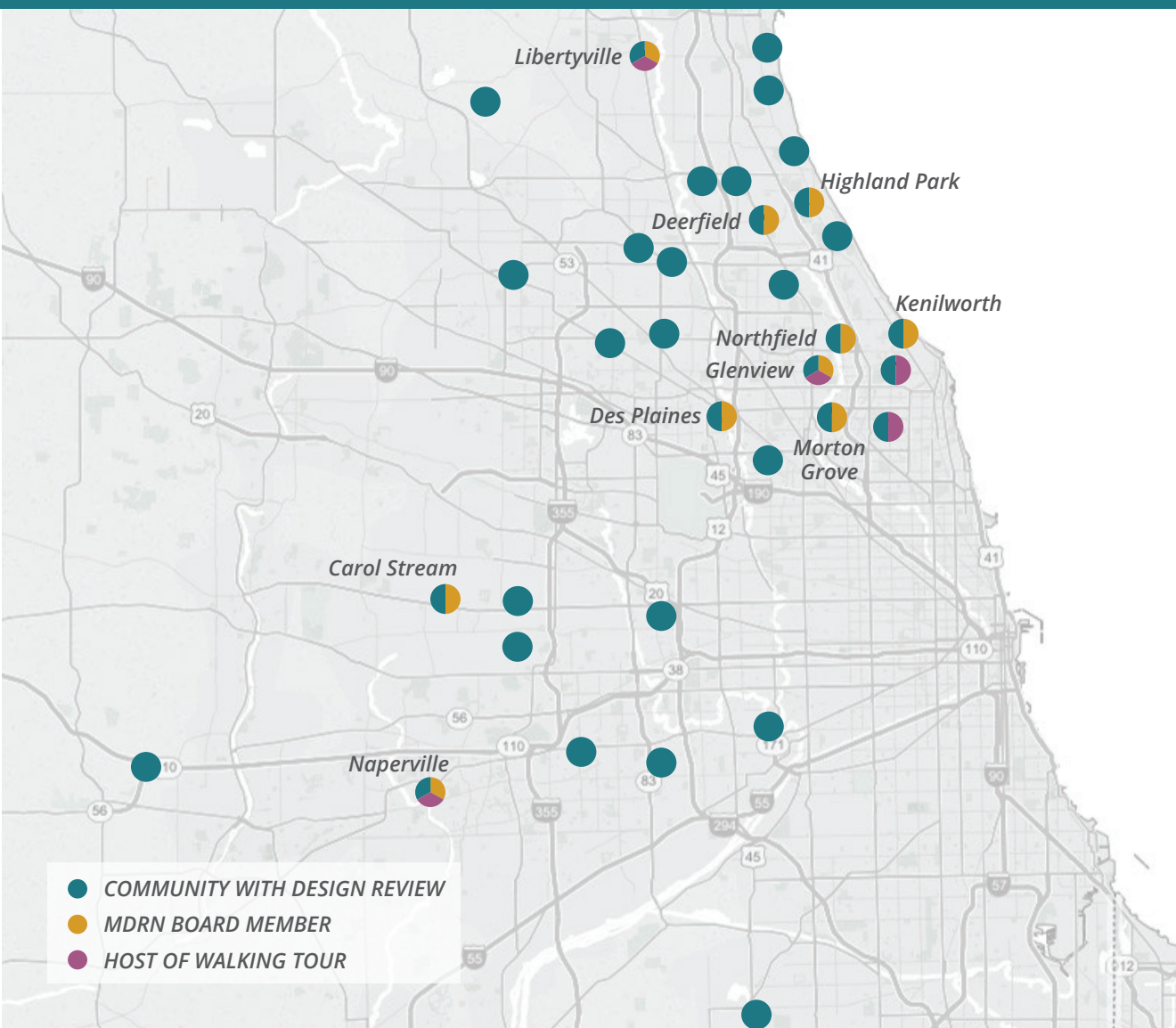
In the Chicago metropolitan area, several different models of design review are utilized—each with various advantages and limitations—which can be tailored to the local needs. In some communities, specialized Historic Preservation or overlay “District” approaches may also be used.

All approaches involve initial, informal preparation and discussion, followed by a formal meeting or hearing (usually with a designated committee or Commission). The most common models and combinations are summarized below:

REVIEW TYPE	INITIAL REVIEW	DECISION MAKER*
ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW COMMISSION	<i>Design Staff or Consultants</i>	<i>Architectural Review Commission</i>
PLAN COMMISSION	<i>Planning Staff or Consultants</i>	<i>Plan Commission</i>
STAFF AND ADMINISTRATION	<i>Development Staff or Consultants</i>	<i>Local Legislative Body</i>

*Technical Note: for political viability and legal defensibility, any “final” decision should be subject to the right of appeal to the ultimate legislative body (council) or Court.

FOR FURTHER HELP



► GENERAL DESIGN REVIEW

[Municipal Design Review Network's special publication on appearance regulation](#)

► ARCHITECTURAL/DESIGN RESOURCES

[MDRN General Architectural Guidelines](#)

► RESOURCES

[MDRN Governance](#)

► LOCAL CONTACTS

Contact either your local Planning or Community Development Department or the Municipal Design Review Network at: chaddick@depaul.edu

