

# Calgary's Guide to Urban Design Review

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The Municipal Development Plan *Urban Design Elements* express the design principles which successful streets, spaces, and buildings tend to share, and key performance indicators which can deliver high quality outcomes. The current interpretation of these *Elements* are indicated in this Guide.

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Photo: Office of Urban Design



Photo: Office of Urban Design

## Urban Design Matters

**Great urban design** is essential to making a livable, attractive, memorable and functional city. Prioritizing urban design excellence is a critical consideration in overall city-shaping and in building a legacy of quality public and private developments for future generations.

Urban design excellence is a key objective of Calgary City Council and is reflected in the goals of the Municipal Development Plan which influence and inform the development review process. Achieving successful development outcomes depends on all participants having a shared understanding of expectations and processes, enabling them to work more effectively together.

This Guide is intended as a tool to assist in the understanding of the City of Calgary's urban design expectations, and of the design review portion within the overall Development Applications Review Team review process, from project conception to approval.

# Policy Framework

The Calgary Municipal Development Plan defines design expectations through the **Urban Design Elements** which function as key performance indicators to achieving excellent design outcomes. These *Elements* inform city policy and create the framework against which the urban design aspects of all project applications will be measured. The current interpretation of the *Elements* are introduced below and expanded in the section following to include objectives and quality criteria intended to encourage desired outcomes and facilitate consistent review practices.

*“...make Calgary a livable, attractive, memorable and functional city by recognizing its unique setting and dynamic urban character and creating a legacy of quality public and private developments for future generations.”*

*Calgary Municipal Development Plan*

1

## PLACE

Every **place** has a distinctive pattern of built form, landscape, history, culture and activities.

2

## SCALE

The size and scale of sites, buildings and structures impacts one's sense of place and **experience** of the urban environment.

3

## AMENITY

Well-designed architecture and public realm which welcome **all people** with spaces and routes that are attractive, comfortable, and safe is a valuable community amenity.

4

## LEGIBILITY

Attractive, comfortable, and easily navigable routes for all travel modes which **connect** places and neighbourhoods contribute to the livability of cities and the health of citizens.

5

## VIBRANCY

Streets and community environments achieve vibrancy through architecture and urban design which creates active places supporting **uses** which offer variety, choice and fun.

6

## RESILIENCE

Architecture and urban design concepts are resilient and **sustainable** through their durability and adaptability to change in social, technological, economic and climatic conditions.



Photo: Office of Urban Design



Photo: Office of Urban Design

# Place

## Site

1. Does the site planning show innovation in addressing site constraints and challenges?
2. Does the design respect existing topography, landscape, and archaeology?
3. Does the site design accommodate people of all abilities?

## Architecture

1. Is the project visually interesting and unique?
2. Does the architecture respond to landmark and gateway opportunities presented by the site?
3. Does the design reflect any distinctive social, cultural or historical aspects of the site and community?

## Public realm

1. Does the project contribute a high quality and fully accessible public realm and appropriately scaled open space?

*Objective:* Recognize and enhance the unique and emerging identity of a place by responding to context, local policy and community objectives through the contribution of innovative architecture and public realm.



Photo: Office of Urban Design



Photo: Office of Urban Design



# Scale

## Site

1. Does the arrangement of uses and structures on the site address street edges well?
2. Is the scale and placement of buildings and structures appropriate for the street and public space size and type?
3. Are large service and surface parking areas modulated and screened by structures and landscaping?

## Architecture

1. Does the design employ strategies to reduce the impact of the building height and bulk?
2. Is the street wall well defined?
3. Does the design use human scale details to enhance street character?

## Public realm

1. Are public spaces well edged and framed by structures and/or landscaping?
2. Does the design include details to enhance street character and encourage use of the public realm?

*Objective:* Ensure appropriate transitions between building masses and adjacent buildings and spaces; define street and open space edges and bring human scale through articulation, materials, details and landscaping.



Photo: Office of Urban Design



Photo: Office of Urban Design

# Amenity

## Site

1. Are equitable, inviting access and varied movement options provided for all?
2. Does the design work with sun orientation and seasonal climate variation?
3. Does the site plan safely accommodate all travel modes?
4. Are service and utility requirements located appropriately to lessen visual impact?

## Architecture

1. Does the building(s) meet or exceed expectations for universal access design?
2. Does the architecture provide an inviting and inclusive street edge which feels safe to all users?

## Public realm

1. Does the public realm design prioritize pedestrians and cyclists over vehicles?
2. Is the public realm visually interesting, comfortable, and safe during all seasons?
3. Are the public spaces designed for people of all abilities and ages?
4. Do the public spaces meet or exceed expectations for universal access design?

*Objective:* Ensure that public sidewalks and gathering spaces are generously proportioned, comfortable, safe, fully accessible, and framed by transparent, permeable facades which allow for activation throughout the year.



Photo: Office of Urban Design



Photo: Office of Urban Design

# Legibility

## Site

1. Does the project provide a permeable, fine-grained and functional urban structure of blocks and streets?
2. Does the project provide legible, accessible, continuous walking and cycling routes within the site that connect to adjacent systems?
3. Does the proposed network consider future expansion into surrounding areas?
4. Are large parking areas designed with clear, safe, direct pedestrian connections?

## Architecture

1. Are buildings designed with clearly marked and differentiated entries to facilitate wayfinding?

## Public realm

1. Are the public routes and spaces configured to facilitate easy and safe navigation with clear paths and appropriately placed wayfinding elements?

*Objective:* Create logical, permeable networks of streets and pathways that connect within and between neighbourhoods and public places; design well-defined community and building entrances with distinctive, memorable attributes.



Photo: Office of Urban Design



Image: S2 Architects



# Vibrancy

## Site

1. Will the building orientation, architecture and finishes contribute to the creation of an animated streetscape and to the success of the proposed uses?
2. Does the project contribute to the economic variety and vibrancy of the neighbourhood?

## Architecture

1. Do the buildings contribute to the vibrancy of the streets and community overall?
2. Is there a variety of residential unit types and sizes provided?
3. Does the design include opportunities for varied commercial and work environments?

## Public realm

1. Are outdoor shared spaces designed for a variety of users and uses?

*Objective:* Ensure that new developments contribute positively through well designed architecture which provides choice for all users and animates the adjacent public realm.



Photo: Office of Urban Design



Image: Dialog

# Resilience

## Site

1. Is the project designed to provide a range of facilities and services?
2. Is the project designed to respond to changes in economic and social conditions over time?
3. Does the site plan respond to climate resilience/sustainable design expectations?
4. Does the site design encourage active lifestyle choices?

## Architecture

1. Does the project show indication of sustainable design practices and materials?
2. Will the building accommodate a range of uses both now and in the future?
3. Is the building designed to endure over time with reasonable maintenance?

## Public realm

1. Is the public space adaptable for multiple uses over short and medium term?
2. Does the public realm design respond to climate resilience / sustainability expectations?

*Objective:* Ensure that projects provide opportunities, through their site layout, spatial configuration, materials, and sustainable design features, for responsible operation and continuous adaptation to change over time.



Photo: Office of Urban Design



Photo: Office of Urban Design





## 3.1 Urban Design Review Participants

**Office of Urban Design (OUD)** is a City of Calgary staff team of urban designers within Community Planning which provides architecture and urban design expertise and guidance in a number of ways, including through the review of development applications as part of Development Applications Review Team (DART). They evaluate how projects address City of Calgary urban design policies and guidelines, particularly with regard to the expectations described by the *Urban Design Elements* and provide comments through the File Manager. The Office of Urban Design is charged with helping applicants achieve the best possible design outcome, beginning with encouraging design review at the earliest possible point in the design process. As such, they are available to work with File Managers and applicants from project conception through the review process to decision.



Photo: Office of Urban Design

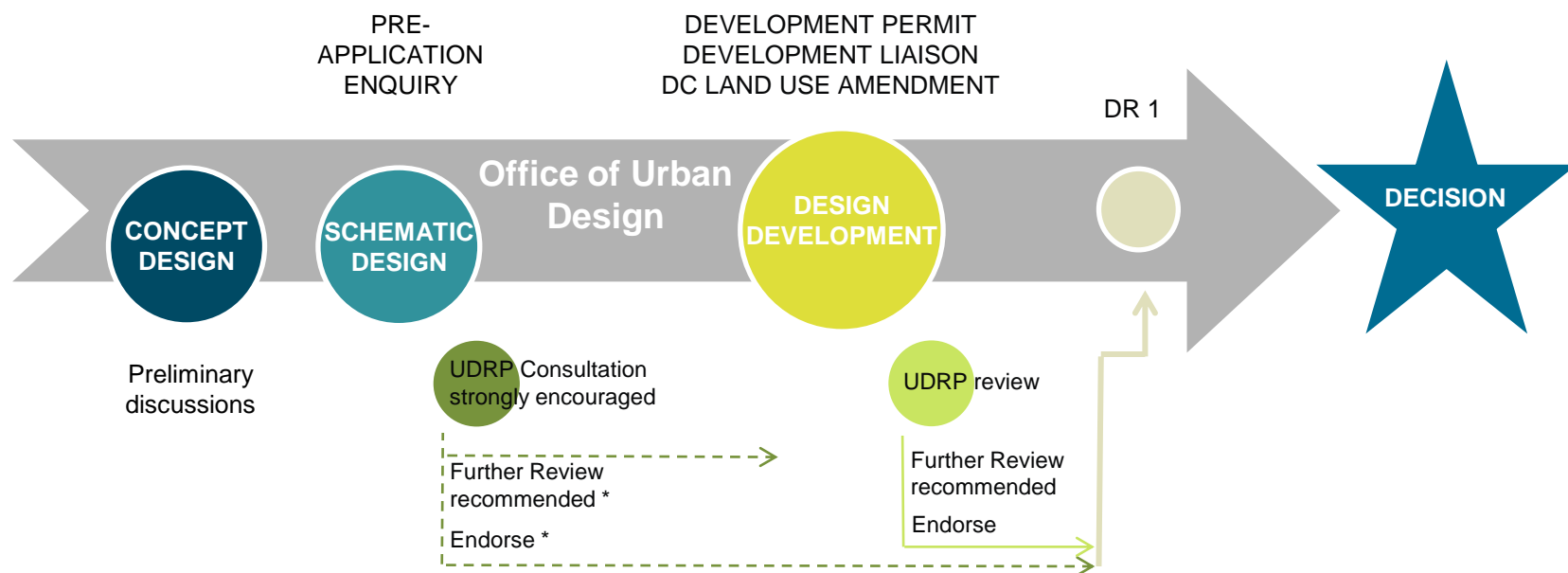
**Urban Design Review Panel (UDRP)** is a Council-appointed peer review group of professional architects, planners, landscape architects, and engineers. Through their varied professional expertise they encourage high design standards by providing independent, “best practice” review and comment on the urban design and architecture of development applications. Urban Design Review Panel may review an application up to two times and may recommend that an applicant continue to work with the Office of Urban Design to resolve any outstanding urban design matters as necessary. Applications are circulated to Urban Design Review Panel according to specific criteria (table following). The Chief Urban Designer, in consultation with the File Manager, will be responsible for the final determination of which applications are referred to the Panel.



Photo: Office of Urban Design



## 3.2 Urban Design Review within DART: Key Project Milestones for Urban Design Input



\* An application that has been discussed with UDRP during pre-application may or may not be requested to return to the Panel for review during subsequent application phases, depending on the merits of the proposal

UDRP = Urban Design Review Panel  
 DART = Development Applications Review Team  
 CPC = Calgary Planning Commission  
 DR1 = Detailed Review 1



## 3.3 Urban Design Circulation Criteria

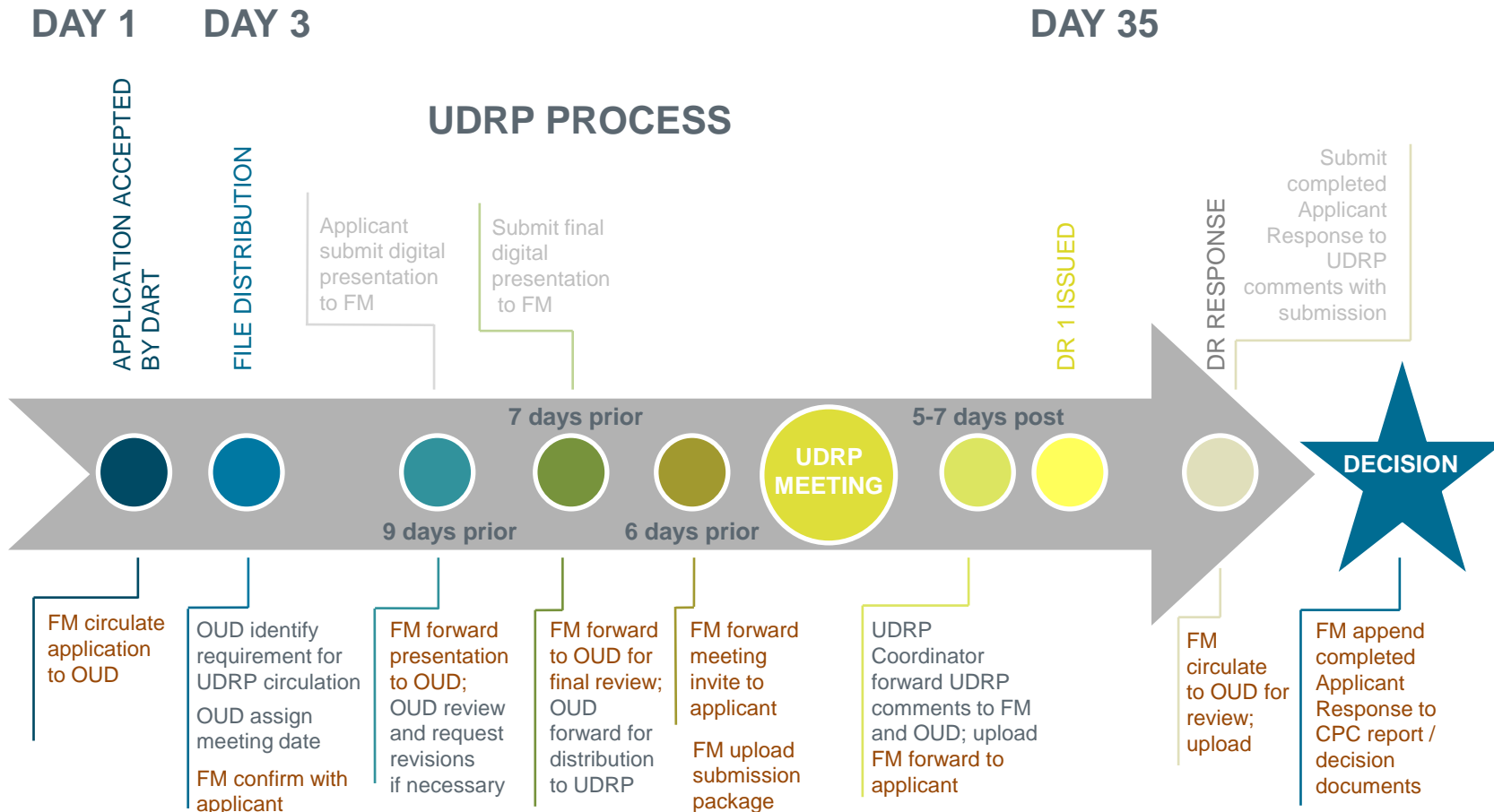
Application Type	Pre-application Enquiry	Land Use Amendment with design content	Development Permit	Outline Plan	Development Liaison, M-item
A development which will be referred to CPC for information or decision, including Design Excellence bonus.	ODU UDRP (recommended)	ODU UDRP	ODU UDRP	ODU	ODU UDRP
Located within a Main Street, TOD area, Centre City, Activity Centre, Entranceway or prominent site	ODU UDRP (recommended)	ODU UDRP (recommended)	ODU UDRP	ODU	ODU UDRP
Alters half or more of the block face / is not anticipated in local area policy	ODU UDRP (recommended)	ODU UDRP (recommended)	ODU UDRP	ODU	-
Has 40 or more dwelling units	ODU UDRP (recommended)	ODU UDRP (recommended)	ODU UDRP	ODU	-
Residential development that increases the current base density by more than 40%	ODU	ODU	ODU	-	-
Includes drive-thru	ODU UDRP (recommended)	ODU UDRP (recommended)	ODU UDRP	ODU	-
City of Calgary capital project (significant / civic building; park or open space; streetscape improvement project; infrastructure project) with urban design impact	ODU UDRP (recommended)	ODU UDRP (recommended)	ODU UDRP	-	ODU UDRP
New / revised urban design guidelines or impacts urban design components of City policies and guidelines	-	-	-	-	ODU UDRP

Additional projects of significant complexity may be referred to the Urban Design Review Panel at the request of the Planning File Manager and the discretion of the Chief Urban Designer, depending on the capacity of the Panel at the time.



## 3.4 Urban Design Review Panel

### 3.4.1 File Manager & Urban Designer Responsibilities



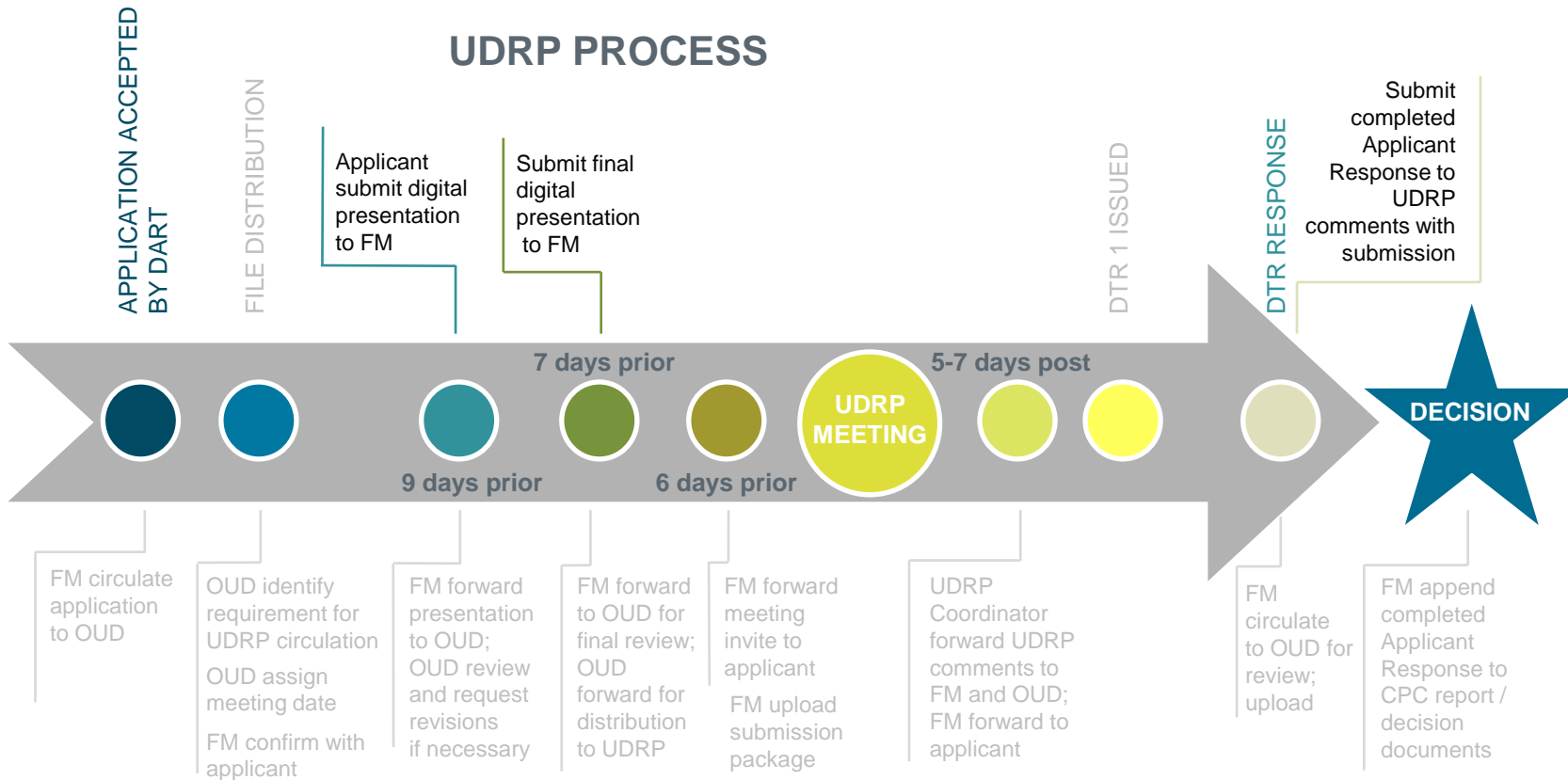
FM = File Manager  
 OUD = Office of Urban Design  
 UDRP = Urban Design Review Panel  
 DART = Development Applications Review Team  
 DR = Detailed Review  
 CPC = Calgary Planning Commission

## 3.4 Urban Design Review Panel

### 3.4.2 Applicant Responsibilities

DAY 1 DAY 3 DAY 35

#### UDRP PROCESS



FM = File Manager  
 OUD = Office of Urban Design  
 UDRP = Urban Design Review Panel  
 DART = Development Applications Review Team  
 DTR = Detailed Team Review  
 CPC = Calgary Planning Commission



## 3.5 Urban Design Review Panel

### Submission Requirements

In order to ensure that Urban Design Review Panel meetings are effective and add value to the process, it is important that a complete and focused project presentation package be prepared and submitted by the applicant to the File Manager as a single PDF or via a link to an exchange site. The content can be drawn from overall Land Use Amendment, Pre-application Enquiry and Development Permit application materials. Application requirement lists are available at [Building and Development lists and forms \(CARLs\) \(calgary.ca\)](http://calgary.ca/building-and-development). Applicants should be prepared to present the urban design aspects of their project, accompanied by the project package, to the Panel.

#### 3.5.1 Pre-application/Schematic Design Review

Application materials for Pre-application review are not required to exceed what is required on the Pre-application Enquiry Checklist. The applicant is welcome to provide additional materials in support of their design rationale.

- ☐ **Description of the proposal:** includes explanation of the proposal/project and how it fits with the surrounding context
  - ☐ addresses all *Urban Design Elements* represented in this Guide in describing the urban design approach
- ☐ **Context plan:** includes planned and/or built project surroundings; indicates nearby transit stations, pedestrian and cycle paths and street networks, parks and open spaces, landmark buildings, nearby destinations, etc.
- ☐ **Site plan** (conceptual): as developed

#### 3.5.2 Land Use Amendment (Direct Control, with significant urban design content)

Application materials for Land Use Amendment review are the significant elements of the Land Use Amendment application requirement list, including:

- ☐ **Description of the proposal:** includes explanation of the proposal/project and how it fits with the surrounding context
  - ☐ addresses all *Urban Design Elements* in describing the urban design approach
- ☐ **Colour photographs:** illustrates existing site conditions and surrounding context (min 4)
- ☐ **Context plan:** includes project surroundings; indicates nearby transit stations, pedestrian and cycle paths and street networks, parks and open spaces, landmark buildings, etc.
- ☐ **Site plan or master plan:** conceptual, as developed
  - ☐ demonstrates pedestrian and vehicular circulation through the site and connecting to surrounding networks
- ☐ **Massing diagrams / coloured renderings:** illustrates the building in context with adjacent massing





## 3.5 Urban Design Review Panel

### Submission Requirements

#### 3.5.3 Development Permit/Design Development Review

- ❑ **Planning and urban design analysis:** includes explanation of the proposal/project and how it fits with the surrounding context; describes the urban design approach
  - ❑ addresses all *Urban Design Elements* as represented in this Guide
- ❑ **Colour photographs:** illustrates existing site conditions and surrounding context (min 4)
- ❑ **Context plan:** includes planned and/or built project surroundings; indicates nearby transit stations, pedestrian and cycle paths and street networks, parks and open spaces, landmark buildings, nearby destinations, etc.
- ❑ **Site plan:** includes bike parking and project data; demonstrates connectivity to the physical elements above
- ❑ **Detailed Landscaping plan:** indicates planting, paving materials, street furniture, lighting, proposed public art locations.
  - ❑ Relevant cross-sections as required to identify the landscape relationship through the site.
  - ❑ Includes dimensioned plan, elevations and relevant sections of site structures and amenities.
- ❑ **Floor plans:** as relevant to public realm
- ❑ **Elevations:** includes detailed description, images and samples of the proposed cladding materials and colours; notes all glazing types
- ❑ **Massing diagrams / coloured renderings:** illustrates the building in context with adjacent massing to demonstrate building bulk, height and setbacks, with an **emphasis on street level views**
- ❑ **Shadow study:** if required as part of specific development permit application requirements
- ❑ **Applicant response:** clearly indicates revisions that have been made as a result of UDRP commentary and/or rationale for not responding, included directly in the Urban Design Review Panel comments



Image: McKinley Burkart

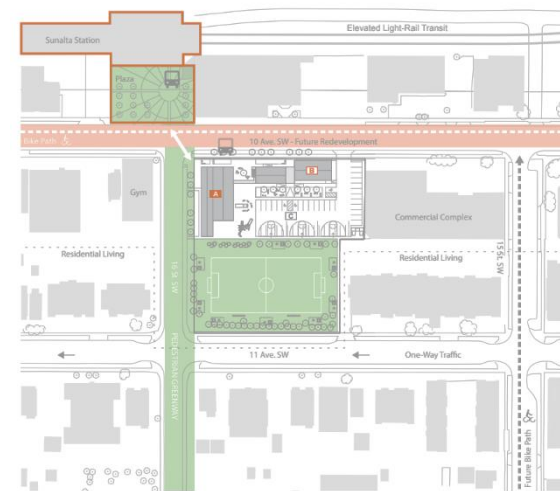


Image: MBAC



## 3.6 Urban Design Review Panel

### Meeting Format and Procedures

A project's eligibility for UDRP advice or review will be determined within 5 days of the application being received, along with an assigned meeting date and time. Panel meetings are held in person in the Municipal Building on alternate Wednesdays from 1:00-4:00 pm. A remote link will be provided via MSTeams for those not able to attend in person. The Applicant is requested to bring their own computer to screenshare their presentation, as submitted for distribution, as one is not provided in the meeting room.

Digital presentation materials are required to be submitted to the File Manager no later than 1:30 pm Monday of the week prior to the identified Panel meeting. Should additional information be required for completeness, final packages are required no later than 1:30 pm Wednesday of the week prior to the meeting to allow adequate opportunity for Panel members to preview the project in advance of the meeting.

Note: incomplete packages may be refused by either Office of Urban Design or Urban Design Review Panel.

#### 3.6.1 Meeting Conduct

- For each item to be discussed, the Chair will initiate the meeting at the scheduled time and introduce the parties involved.
- The File Manager and/or Urban Designer will introduce the project's history, the planning context, brief policy context, and relevant process considerations. They may also highlight any specific areas of focus or comments previously given to the applicant. Visual materials should be used to support the project introduction. This should be no longer than five minutes each.
- The applicant will be given fifteen minutes to present the design intent of the project and how the proposal responds to design opportunities and constraints of the surrounding context, with particular emphasis on how the *Elements of Urban Design* have been addressed, supported by the submitted digital presentation materials. The applicant will screenshare the presentation as submitted.
- For items returning to the Panel, the applicant will illustrate the response to previously identified design issues.
- Following the presentations, the Panel may ask questions for clarification before discussing the proposal with the applicant and Administration.
- The Panel will meet separately to craft a clear and coordinated written response.

## 3.6 Urban Design Review Panel

### Meeting Format and Procedures

#### 3.6.2 Panel Recommendation

Panel positions include:

- *Endorse*
- *Further Review Recommended.* The applicant may be requested to return to a future Panel meeting or work with Office of Urban Design to resolve the recommended revisions.

Note: From time to time, based on the information provided, other meeting formats may be appropriate. In this case the Chair will seek agreement from the applicant to vary the meeting procedures.

#### 3.6.3 Meeting Follow up

- Final recommendation and comments for the project will be sent to the Chief Urban Designer, File Manager, and Urban Designer and forwarded to the applicant within approximately five working days.
- The applicant's response to Urban Design Review Panel advice, clearly indicating revisions that have been made as a result of UDRP commentary and/or rationale for not responding, is to be included directly in the Urban Design Review Panel comments as part of the Detailed Review response. This response will be evaluated at the time of decision and appended to the staff report to Calgary Planning Commission if applicable.



Photo: Office of Urban Design

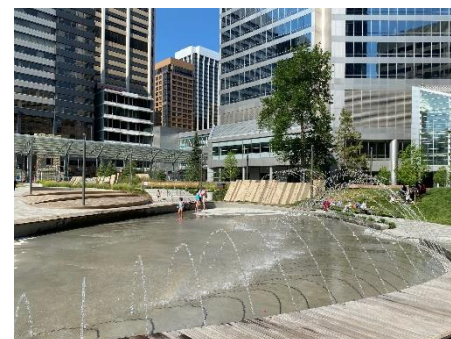


Photo: Office of Urban Design

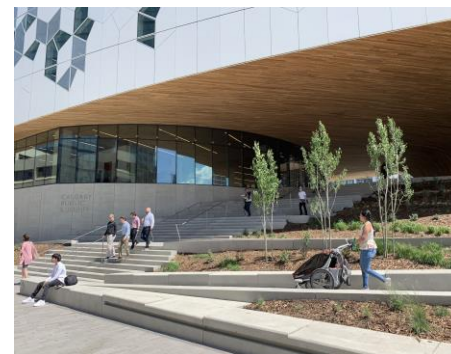


Photo: Office of Urban Design