

Submitter:

Chandra Robinson

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

Senate Committee On Housing and Development

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB974

My name is Chandra Robinson and I grew up in Portland. I am currently a member of the Design Commission and the National Organization of Minority Architects. I am providing testimony on my own behalf as well as on behalf of LEVER Architecture, where I am a Principal.

I grew up in Portland and like other commissioners and other architects here, I love this city. I love that it is friendly and walkable and vibrant. The post covid doldrums are not permanent and we all need to look to how we can contribute to the rebound of our central city. The rebound is already happening. New housing is in construction at the Hollywood HUB, new storefronts are in planning at the Alderway building and a new Art and Design school is in construction on the park blocks. All of these projects went through design review.

Design review is the process by which design is evaluated for how it adheres to the design guidelines of the city. These design guidelines are organized into these tenets of design: Context, Public Realm and Quality and Resilience. Design review evaluates whether a project fits within the context of the site it will be built within.

What is the neighborhood like? Is this CONTEXT unimportant? Design review evaluates whether a project improves the public realm. Does it provide a safe and pleasant pedestrian experience? Does it contribute to the vitality of the street and neighborhood? Is our PUBLIC REALM unimportant? Design review evaluates if the materials and design details of a project are of high enough quality to be long lasting and resilient to weathering and wear. Is the QUALITY of our buildings unimportant? Perhaps even more critically, Design review is the place where the public can provide testimony and share their opinions on how a particular project will impact their community. They may share their thoughts whether positive or negative, and be heard by the project team, the developer, city staff and the design commission. They are able to make in person statements or send letters. They may join by video conference or call in. Is accessibility of our city's process not important? Is PUBLIC participation not important?

The process of design review is not what slows development. Inflation, cost of materials, shortages in our construction labor force, taxes etc are all impediments - but a publicly accessible review process that helps to elevate projects to meet our required design guidelines is not an impediment.

Our quality of life is based on the success of our public spaces. The soul of our cities are in our neighborhoods. This is not just about keeping an expectation of good, responsive, relevant design downtown - but making sure that as we grow and developers come to the city who do not know what our cities are about - that they will be able to look to design guidelines and hear from the public and hear from the design commission about the ways that their project can contribute positively to our

vibrant city. Many project teams come to Design Commission with great projects that meet guidelines and don't need design commission to get them there. For these teams the design review is an opportunity to have a conversation about design and refine an idea they are considering. For other design teams, the commission conversation actually helps them find ways to meet guidelines they were struggling with. These conversations are valuable to the design process and invaluable to the city as they help to ensure every building on our streets contributes to the life of the city. Is improving the life of the city unimportant?

This bill is short-sighted and I urge you to consider the impact of removing a public process that is not hindering development.

Chandra Robinson AIA, NOMA

LEVER Architecture