



Civic Design Review Overview and Guidelines

Civic Design Review is a Charter-mandated responsibility of the Arts Commission. The Civic Design Review Committee is composed of five Arts Commissioners appointed by the Mayor, including two architects, a landscape architect and two other design professionals and/or laypersons. The Committee reviews new and renovated capital projects to ensure excellence in the design of San Francisco's civic facilities and structures.

The mission of the Civic Design Review is to ensure that any capital improvement project improves the public realm, respects the natural environment and serves the best interest of the public.

Table of Contents

Program Overview	3
<i>About Civic Design Review</i>	
<i>Design goals and objectives</i>	
<i>Fees</i>	
Public Meetings	5
<i>Meeting times and scheduling</i>	
<i>The Civic Design Review meeting</i>	
<i>Public comment and community participation</i>	
Phases of Review	7
<i>Conceptual Design</i>	
<i>Phase 1: Schematic Design Phase</i>	
<i>2: Design Development</i>	
<i>Phase 3: Construction Documents</i>	
<i>Post-Phase 3 Review</i>	
<i>Coordinating Various City Approval Processes</i>	
<i>Informal Work Sessions</i>	
<i>Additional Support</i>	
Art Enrichment and Civic Art Collection	19
Temporary Projects	20
Plaque Review	21
Other Types of Review	23
<i>Administrative Review</i>	
<i>Small Project Review</i>	
<i>Exempt Projects</i>	
Motions and Contingencies	25
<i>Approval with contingencies</i>	
<i>Clarification of comments made at Civic Design Review Meeting Changes to an</i>	
<i>approved design</i>	
<i>Final Approval</i>	
Frequently Asked Questions	26

Program Overview

ABOUT CIVIC DESIGN REVIEW

The San Francisco Arts Commission is mandated by City Charter Section 5.103 to approve the design of all structures placed on city property. The Charter gives authority to the Commission for the review and approval of “the design of all public structures, any private structure which extends over or upon any public property and any yards, courts, setbacks or usable open spaces which are an integral part of any such structure” (San Francisco Charter Section 5.103, 1996 revision).

The Charter thus mandates Arts Commission review of the exterior architecture and design of structures and yards, parks, courts, setbacks or usable open spaces integral to the structure. This responsibility is assigned to the Civic Design Review Committee.

A “structure” has been defined as any new or significantly remodeled building. This definition also incorporates permanent street furnishings, including, but not limited to: streetlights, benches, bollards, railings, water features, news racks, trash containers, way-finding systems and plaques. Plaques are reviewed in conjunction with the SF Public Works. Public Works Code 798.5 requires Arts Commission approval of any plaque design prior to the issuance of an encroachment permit. Plaques are generally reviewed at one meeting and are not necessarily subject to the three- phased Civic Design Review. Plaques may also be reviewed administratively. There is no fee associated with the review of plaques.

City Projects with estimated construction costs under \$1 million, which involve only modifications or additions to street furnishings such as streetlights, benches, and signage, will no longer require review. For projects with estimated costs between \$1 million and \$5 million, encompassing changes to street furnishings or structures smaller than 500 square feet, the Director of Cultural Affairs will determine whether administrative or single-phase review is necessary.

LEGISLATION

[Charter Section 5.103](#)

[Public Works Code Section 798.5](#)

[Administrative Code Section 3.19A](#)

DESIGN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Excellence and originality

Enduring quality

Appropriateness to its architectural context and to its function or purpose

Sustainability

Precision in design

FEES

Effective August 27, 2025, in accordance with the San Francisco Administrative Code, Section 3.19A, each project will be charged a lump-sum fee of \$17,900. This shall be paid as a lump sum payment prior to being scheduled for Conceptual Review. Larger scale, complex projects or those involving a campus with multiple buildings may be assessed a higher fee.

Additionally, the Small Project Review fee is \$8,250 and the Administrative Review fee is \$1,500. All fees are subject to change each new fiscal year.

Interdepartmental electronic fund transfers and journal entries from other City departments should use the below codes for SFAC's chart fields:

Revenue Account ID: **460127**

Department ID: **163649**

Project ID: **10022393**

Fund ID: **11740**

Authority ID: **16577**

Activity ID: **0001**

Payments may be sent by check to:

San Francisco Arts Commission

Attention: Kevin Quan

401 Van Ness, Suite 325, San Francisco, CA 94102

Public Meetings

MEETING TIMES AND SCHEDULING

The Civic Design Review Committee holds a standing meeting the third Monday of each month online. If the regularly scheduled meeting falls on a legal holiday, the meeting will be rescheduled to the Monday immediately preceding or following. Please check the Arts Commission website for accurate schedule information. Agendas are posted 72 hours in advance of the meeting in accordance with the Sunshine Ordinance.

One month prior to the meeting, applicants should contact the Civic Design Review Program Director to request placement on the agenda. The placement of a project on the agenda of the next Civic Design Review Committee meeting is contingent upon the submission of all required materials by the 5 p.m. deadline ten days prior to the meeting. This applies to all phases of review. Exceptions will not be made. Submission requirements are listed in the *Phases of Review* section of this document. Please ensure the project title is consistent throughout all phases of review, and ensure all prior review dates are accurately noted on the Request for Review forms. Any presentations updated after the initial submittal should be accompanied by electronic copies for the Civic Design Review archives. Projects will be scheduled on a first- come, first served basis. If the project review queue has been filled, those seeking review may have their projects reviewed at the next month's meeting.

THE CIVIC DESIGN REVIEW MEETING

Please be prepared to make a brief and succinct presentation to the Civic Design Review Committee about your project. The presentation should include a concise narrative, which describes the conceptual premise of your design. Each presentation is allotted a specific and strictly followed time limit for the presentation.

Following the presentation, the Commissioners may ask questions, make comments, and/or recommendations for design modifications. Prior to the call for a vote by the Committee Chair, public comment will be taken.

The Civic Design Review Committee will either move to approve the project as presented, take no action, or will approve the project with specific recommendations for design modifications to be presented at a future meeting. When the project is next submitted for review, the applicant should clearly indicate how each of the Committee's concerns, comments and/or contingencies have been addressed. If the Committee recommends approval, the motion will be placed on the Consent Calendar for the full Arts Commission at the next regularly scheduled meeting, which

takes place on the first Monday of each month. Applicants are not required to present their project at the full Arts Commission meeting unless specifically requested by the Civic Design Review Committee.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Public participation and access to information is an important part of the public process. The Committee Chair calls for Public Comment prior to any vote on any item. Members of the public will also have the opportunity for Public Comments at the start of the meeting and prior to the meeting's adjournment.

It is the responsibility of the project applicant to inform the community and neighbors in the vicinity of the project about the Civic Design Review Committee's authority. The public should be advised in a timely manner about their opportunity to make public comment to the Civic Design Review Committee prior to a vote being taken on the project.

Applicants should consider using social media, community newsletters or neighborhood newspapers to publicize the schedule for upcoming Civic Design Review of the project. The agenda is posted online, at the Main Public Library and at the Arts Commission office a minimum of 72 hours prior to the meeting.

Phases of Review

The Civic Design Review process typically consists of a four stage review process which includes a Conceptual presentation for projects with budgets over \$5 million and three formal phases of approval that align with the typical design and delivery process for capital improvement projects. City projects with estimated construction costs under \$1 million, which involve only modifications or additions to street furnishings such as streetlights, benches, and signage, will no longer require review. For projects that are under \$1 million and are not modifications or additions to street furnishings will require determination from the Director of Cultural Affairs for Administrative Review or Single Phase Review. For projects with estimated costs between \$1 million and \$5 million, encompassing changes to street furnishings or structures smaller than 500 square feet, the Director of Cultural Affairs will determine whether administrative or single-phase review is necessary. Please review the Decision Tree on the following to change. Smaller projects or simple renovations may be able to request approval for two phases concurrently. Please see the *Other Types of Review* section for more information on variations from the four-stage review process.

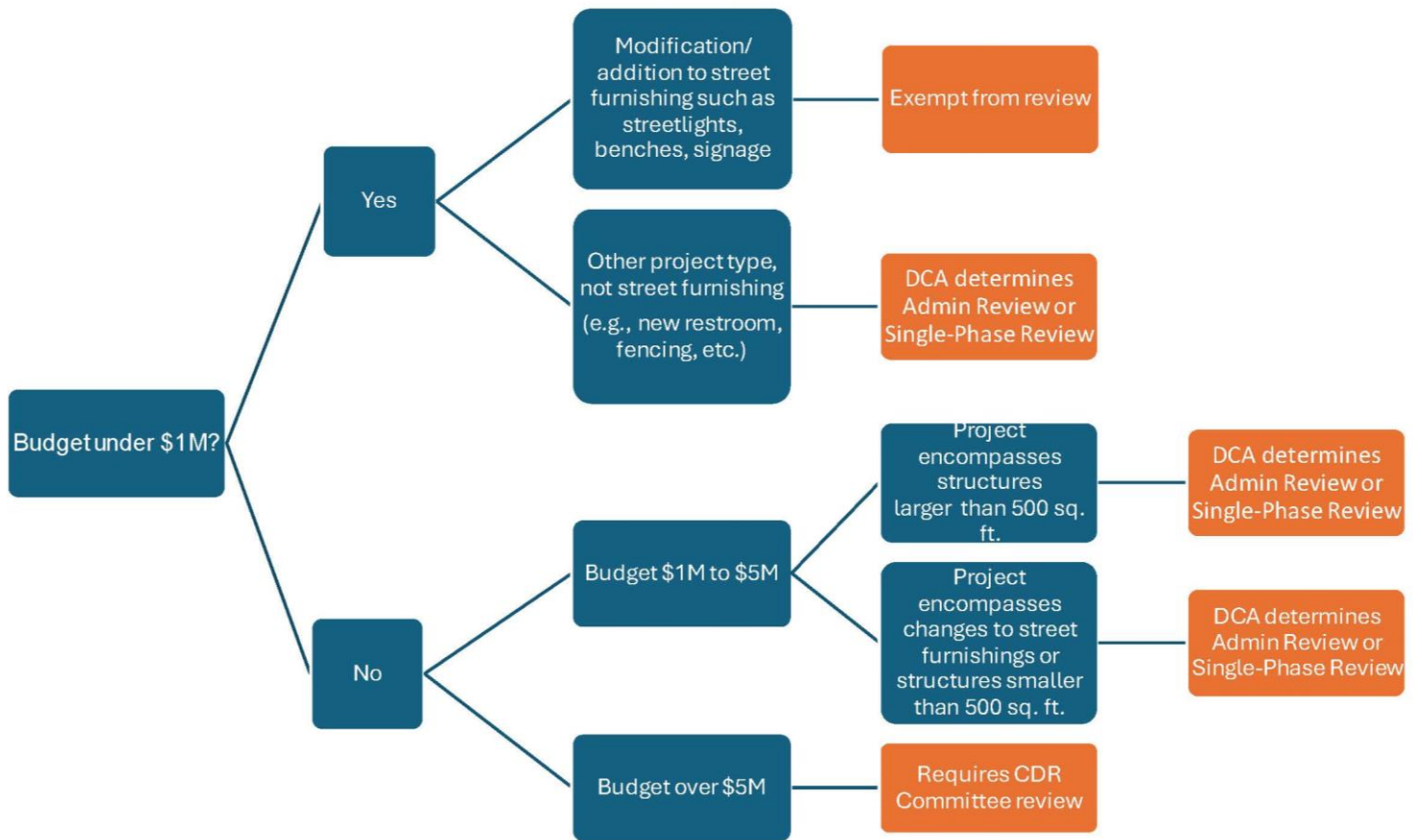
The phases of review are:

Conceptual Presentation

Phase 1: Schematic Design

Phase 2: Design Development

Phase 3: Construction Documents



Conceptual Design

All projects with construction budgets over \$5 million are required to make a Conceptual Design presentation prior to commencing environmental review. However, all designers who have projects to be reviewed by the Commission are welcome to present their Conceptual Design prior to Phase I: Schematic Design.

The Committee is introduced to the project and its purpose at this first meeting. This phase of review is a high level overview of the project goals, vision, conceptual ideas and design strategy. The presentation should include sketches of at least two possible designs and images that inspired or influenced the design. The presentation should be no longer than 15 minutes. While there is no vote, it does allow the Committee to provide comments and suggestions prior to the submission of the Phase 1: Schematic Design presentation.

Submit the following materials by 5 p.m. ten days prior to review:

- One electronic copy of the [Request for Review Form](#)
- One electronic copy of the [Art Enrichment & Civic Art Collection Report](#) signed by both the Client and the Public Art Program Director. *Please note that a meeting with the Public Art Program Director to review the Art Enrichment component is required in order for the form to be signed. Early coordination is recommended.*
- One electronic copy of the written Concept Statement
- Civic Design Review Fee: \$17,900
- One digital presentation

Presentation Requirements

- Site plan, map or aerial photograph identifying the location of the project and its context
- Site photographs or street view images that illustrate the overall context for the project
- Images of applicable references or inspiration for the design
- Conceptual sketches and current design trajectory
- A summary of the large idea that is the theoretical basis for the proposed

design.

Conceptual Review Project Examples

[Margaret Hayward Playground](#)

[Southeast Community Center](#)

[Treasure Island Ferry Building](#)

Phase 1: Schematic Design

The Phase 1 presentation is critical in defining the schematic form of the project. The introduction should establish the history of the structure, the project sponsor's goals, programming concerns, specific requirements, functions and the services performed within the building. The Civic Design Review Committee will review the building's form and massing and the preliminary design within its context. The presentation should also include the site and landscape design developed to the same level as the building. Specific design features such as the building entry should be articulated. Areas of concern should be highlighted and possible approaches to solutions presented. The applicant should identify any General Plan considerations, environmental review issues, or comments from other reviewing agencies that may affect the design. The presentation should be approximately 15 to 20 minutes in length unless a longer presentation time is agreed upon by the Civic Design Review Program Director.

Submit the following materials by 5 p.m. ten days prior to review:

- Civic Design Review Fee (\$17,900, if not already paid)
- One electronic copy of the [Request for Review Form](#) with dates of all prior reviews
- One electronic copy of the [Art Enrichment & Civic Art Collection Report](#) signed by both the Client and the Public Art Program Director, if not already submitted. *Please note that a meeting with the Public Art Program Director to review the Art Enrichment component is required in order for the form to be signed. Early coordination is recommended.*
- One electronic copy (PDF) of the landscape and architectural drawings, including 3D renderings
- One electronic copy (PDF) of the presentation
- If the presentation includes images that should not be published online for security reasons, please provide an additional PDF suitable for online publication

Presentation Requirements

- Three-dimensional electronic renderings including schematic plans, exterior elevations and renderings, building perspectives and sections. Based on the conceptual design, this should illustrate the architectural solutions to the project

- A digital scaled model is recommended for larger projects
- Exterior material selections or options should be included in the presentation images, to be followed up in Phase 2 with actual samples
- PowerPoint of 5 to 15 slides
- Images of the design progression including references and inspiration
- Information on the community outreach process
- Photographs of the actual building site and the immediately surrounding area
- Site plan
- If outdoor spaces are an integral part of the structure, include schematic landscape strategy including topographical constraints and opportunities along with a preliminary planting list and elevation or photos of plant groupings
- A visual representation of the possible location(s) for public art if it is integrated into the exterior building design or placed on the site, outside of the building

Phase 1 Review Project Examples

[Margaret Hayward Playground](#)

[Southeast Community Center](#)

[Treasure Island Public Restrooms](#)

Phase 2: Design Development

Phase 2 is the review of a substantially designed project. This presentation should be more developed and detailed than the prior Schematic Design approved in Phase 1. The design presentation should reflect the final form and design of the structure of the building, the overall site, and the landscape. The presentation drawings must clearly demonstrate all materials to be used and their corresponding treatments and color, landscape elements, lighting and the signage to be placed on building exterior as developed from Schematic Design. The design development should incorporate any conditions from the Phase 1 approval.

The project applicant must address how areas of concern, comments and contingences from Phase 1 have been addressed and/or resolved, showing before and after drawings. Paper study models as well as a physical Materials Board are essential components of the presentation. The presentation should be approximately 20 minutes in duration unless a longer presentation time is agreed upon by the Civic Design Review Program Director. The project designers may not proceed with construction documents until Phase 2 approval is received from the Civic Design Review Committee *Please be aware that if a project does proceed ahead with construction drawings ahead of receiving Phase 2 approval, that it is highly likely that changes will have to be made resulting in additional work and increased project cost.

Submit the following materials by 5 p.m. ten days prior to review:

- Civic Design Review Fee (\$17,900, if not already paid)
- One electronic copy [Request for Review Form](#) with dates of all prior reviews and updated construction budget
- One electronic copy (PDF) of the presentation.
- If the presentation includes images that should not be published online for security reasons, please provide an additional PDF suitable for online publication

Presentation Requirements

- Three-dimensional study models and renderings for any structure over 5,000 square feet, a landscape model or detailed landscape sections if appropriate to the project
- Developed exterior elevations and exterior renderings with exterior details for key parts of the building.
- Materials and color boards (bring to meeting)
- A paper studies model if needed to clarify the design refinements
- If outdoor spaces are an integral part of the structure, include detailed site plan including any landscape plans with cut sheets of plant materials including size and species with common name and Planting elevations in color Examples of exterior

graphics and signage and their location on building

- Description and cut sheets of any site furnishings in areas that are an integral part of the structure
- Physical Materials board with samples of materials, colors, and finishes (bring to meeting)
- A visual representation of the possible location(s) for public art if it is integrated into the exterior building design or placed on the site, outside of the building

Phase 2 Review Project Examples

Phase 2 Review Project Examples

[Margaret Hayward Playground](#)

[Southeast Community Center](#)

[Treasure Island Public Restrooms](#)

[SFWD Campus at 2000 Marin](#)

Phase 3: Construction Documents

Phase 3 is the final approval of your project's design by the Arts Commission and ensures that the completed project conforms to the previously approved Phase 2 submittal. The Phase 3 presentation must successfully address any contingencies associated with the Phase 2 approval and any proposed or required changes.

The Commission resolution number documenting the Phase 3 final approval may be downloaded from the Arts Commission's website at sfgov.org/arts under Full Commission or you may contact the Civic Design Review Program Director for assistance.

The Phase 3 presentation is generally briefer than the other phases of review and should be no longer than ten (10) minutes in duration unless there are contingencies to address from the Phase 2 approval.

Submit the following materials by 5 p.m. ten days prior to review:

- Civic Design Review Fee (\$17,900, if not already paid). Please note that projects will not be scheduled for Phase 3 if any portion of the Civic Design Review fee has not been paid
- If the Art Enrichment allocation is determined to be pooled, the transfer of these funds to the Arts Commission must take place before you can be scheduled for Phase 3 review.
- One electronic copy [Request for Review Form](#) with final construction budget and final adjusted Art Enrichment budget
- One electronic copy (PDF) of the landscape and architectural construction drawings which include building elevations, sections and perspectives (via USB or email)
- One electronic copy (PDF) of the presentation (via USB or email)
- If the presentation includes images that should not be published online for security reasons, please provide an additional PDF suitable for online publication

Presentation Requirements

- Final construction documents
- Highlighted changes to the Phase 2 approval based on conditions and contingencies

- A visual representation of the public art if it is integrated into the exterior building design or placed on the site, outside of the building

Phase 3 Review Project Examples

[Margaret Hayward Playground](#)

[Southeast Community Center](#)

[Treasure Island Public Restrooms](#)

[Golden Gate Park Tennis Center](#)

Post-Phase 3 Review

Applicable only if there are design changes that affect the exterior and/or overall look of the approved design after the Phase 3 approval.

Should any design changes that affect the exterior and/or overall look of the approved design occur prior to construction but after the Phase 3 review or as a result of the bid process, it is the project applicant's responsibility to inform Arts Commission staff prior to the commencement of construction. This should be done by submitting the changes to staff, who will then determine if the changes are significant enough to warrant a Post-Phase 3 review before the CDR Committee or through a staff review. Any changes that occur during construction or post-construction must also be documented and conveyed to the Civic Design Review Program Director.

Submit the following materials by 5 p.m. ten days prior to review:

- One electronic copy [Request for Review Form](#) with updated construction budget and final adjusted Art Enrichment budget
- One electronic copy (PDF) of the updated landscape and architectural construction drawings which include building elevations, sections, and perspectives
- One electronic copy (PDF) of the presentation
- If the presentation includes images that should not be published online for security reasons, please provide an additional PDF suitable for online publication

Presentation Requirements

- Updated final construction documents
- Highlighted changes to the Phase 3 approval.
- A visual representation, showing modifications if any, of the public art if it is integrated into the exterior building design or placed on the site, outside of the building

Post-Phase 3 Review Project Example

[Castro Station Elevator](#)

[Japantown Peace Plaza Renovations](#)

[Southeast Water Treatment Plant](#)

Coordinating Various City Approval Processes

Most projects are required to obtain other regulatory approvals in addition to that of the Arts Commission. Below is a guide to where Civic Design Review fits into some possible requirements. Please make certain that you work with staff associated with the following departments and commissions:

DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING/HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

If your project is considered a historic landmark or resource and/or is located in a historic district, approval from the Historic Preservation Commission may be required. If Historic Preservation approval is required, in general, it is recommended to seek this approval between Phase 1 and Phase 2 of Civic Design Review.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The environmental review process may often span several phases of Civic Design Review but scheduling depends greatly on the specifics of each project. In general, the projects should present their preliminary design concepts to Civic Design prior to entering into the environmental review process and submit final Phase 3 documents after completing environmental review. Please submit copies of any draft or final environmental review documents that are available at the time of any design submittals.

OTHER REVIEWS

Other review processes that may affect design must be resolved before a final Phase 3 approval from the Arts Commission can be granted.

Informal Work Sessions

From time to time Civic Design Review (CDR) Commissioners make themselves available to project teams that need additional design guidance before advancing to the next phase review. During the review process, the CDR Committee may suggest such a meeting to the team, or a team may request a meeting of the Committee. In no case will these meetings be guaranteed to the design team but CDR Commissioners will make an effort to accommodate teams who need them.

Such a meeting is intended to facilitate the successful design of a project in an informal and interactive work environment. Two to three CDR Commissioners are generally available to review projects in progress. Time will be set aside when possible at a regularly scheduled time each month. The presence of Commissioners is based on availability; specific Commissioners may not be requested.

This 30-minute meeting is reserved for projects that have already been presented to the CDR Committee and is not intended to be used as a forum for the presentation of a new project or for projects to be “pre-reviewed” prior to presentation at an upcoming Committee meeting in order to expedite a project through the regular design approval process. Presentations (no more than 10 minutes) should focus on specific design issues and offer proposed solutions, responding to Commissioner comments from the prior Committee meeting or to present design issues the design team is encountering for an informal discussion. The meeting will allow for informal discussion and possible work session. No formal presentation of the material is necessary in order to allow the team and commissioners to make the best use of their time. Project teams may only request one Informal Work Session; additional Informal Work Sessions for larger complex projects are subject to the approval of the CDR Chair or designated CDR Commissioner.

The Informal Work Sessions may take place at the SFAC office or virtually, as designated by the Commissioners. Request for an informal work session by project teams may be made to CDR staff and will be approved by the CDR Chair or another designated CDR

Commissioner for this purpose. If an informal meeting is cancelled by the project team within a week of the scheduled date, it will not be rescheduled without approval of the Chair.

Additional Support

Should you need clarification of information or directions conveyed by the Committee during a Civic Design Review meeting, please contact the Civic Design Review Program Director. Audio recordings of each Civic Design Review meeting are available the day after the hearing and may be found on the Arts Commission's website. To further facilitate communication and expedite approvals, drawings-in-progress may be informally submitted to staff for transmittal to the Committee between meetings.

Project Sponsors should avail themselves of this opportunity for feedback from the Civic Design Commissioners provided during the informal work session.

Art Enrichment

Public Art can humanize the built environment, create an emotional, intellectual, or spiritual connection with the viewer, and create a sense of pride and belonging in a civic space. Art Enrichment provides a unique opportunity to integrate public art within the larger context of the project.

In accordance with Section 3.19 of the San Francisco Administrative Code, two percent (2%) of the final estimated construction costs must be allocated for art enrichment. This includes both aboveground and underground costs unless specifically exempted by the Art Enrichment Ordinance.

Civic Design Review applicants are required to contact the Public Art Program Director prior to their first phase of review. It is important for the Client to meet with the Public Art Program Director as early as possible to allow for a meaningful integration of the public art within the site. Early coordination also maximizes the opportunities for public art to be incorporated into the project's design documents.

The Phase 3 Request for Review form requires an updated construction cost estimate and a corresponding updated art enrichment allocation if applicable.

Contact Public Art Program Director Mary Chou for further information:
mary.chou@sfgov.org, 415-252-2233

Learn more about Public Art: [Public Art Program Overview](#)

Civic Art Collection

All Civic Design Review applicants must submit a form stating whether there are existing artworks installed at the site. A site inspection must be performed to ensure that all existing artworks are identified. This will allow the Arts Commission to ensure that the artwork is protected during construction and/or removed and reinstalled. All costs related to the protection of the artwork, its removal, storage, and reinstallation shall be borne by the capital project apart from the project's art enrichment allocation.

Art Enrichment and Civic Design Review

The location and final design of a public art project is reviewed and approved by the Visual Arts Committee prior to going to Full Commission. To the extent that the art enrichment is integrated into the exterior design of the building or the landscape, a joint meeting of the Civic Design Review Committee and the Visual Arts Committee may be convened to review the artwork relative to its integration within the site. There will always be a commissioner liaison that sits on both committees to connect projects and communications. Please also remember to meet with Director of Public Art and Civic Art Collection in order to complete Art Enrichment and Civic Art Collection forms prior to presenting at Conceptual Review.

Temporary Projects and Structures

Per resolution of the Arts Commission, projects or structures placed on public property with duration of up to two years are not subject to Civic Design Review. This does not refer to the placement of artworks on public property.

Plaque Review

WHICH PLAQUES REQUIRE APPROVAL?

Commemorative plaques to be placed on City-owned property or sidewalks require review by the Civic Design Review Committee. The Committee reviews the design, siting, orientation, and context. Some plaques are exempt or eligible for administrative review based on certain conditions explained below. There is no charge for the review of plaques.

Submit the following materials by 5 p.m. one week prior to review:

- Request for Review Form
- One electronic copy (PDF) of the presentation

Presentation Requirements

- Photographs of the site and the immediate surrounding area
- Images of the proposed plaque design
- Rendering of the plaque in its proposed location
- For multiple plaques, provide a map or site plan of all of the proposed locations

Plaque Project Example

[Leather District Commemorative Plaque Project](#)

EXEMPT PROJECTS WHICH PLAQUES REQUIRE APPROVAL?

The types of plaques listed below do not need review by the Arts Commission.

- Replacement plaques with an identical design to the previous plaque
- Any plaque not on property owned by the City and County of San Francisco

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

Administrative Review (see page 25) is conducted by the Civic Design Review Program Director and does not require a presentation to the Civic Design Review Committee.

The following types of plaque projects are eligible for Administrative Review:

- A plaque that is added to an existing series of plaques following a previously approved design
- A plaque using a previously approved design

- A single stand-alone plaque

CITY APPROVAL PROCESS

Board of Supervisors

- Each plaque project must receive a resolution from the Board of Supervisors endorsing the project. A copy of this resolution should be included with submission materials to the Civic Design Review Committee.

SF Public Works - Street Use and Mapping

- Projects must be reviewed by SF Public Works to ensure they comply with all requirements regarding the slip coefficient and other Building Code and safety concerns.

Mayor's Office on Disability

- Check with the Mayor's Office on Disability to ensure that the plaque complies with accessibility requirements.

Arts Commission – Civic Design Review Committee

- After receiving a resolution from the Board of Supervisors and approval by the SF Public Works, the design of the plaque must be reviewed by the Arts Commission per the requirements listed above.

Other Types of Review

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

Staff may review certain projects administratively. These types of projects are small in scope and can range from installation of standard street furnishings to modifications of a previously approved project. Installation of a single plaque, bench, bicycle racks and signage; and replacement of existing street and park furnishings; ADA improvements reviewed by the Mayor's Office of Disability or the Department of Public Works Disability Access Coordinator can usually be reviewed administratively while a series of plaques or a streetscape will generally need to be presented to the Civic Design Review Committee. City projects with estimated construction costs under \$1 million, which involve only modifications or additions to street furnishings such as streetlights, benches, and signage, will no longer require review. For projects with estimated costs between \$1 million and \$5 million, encompassing changes to street furnishings or structures smaller than 500 square feet, the Director of Cultural Affairs will determine whether administrative or single-phase review is necessary. The Civic Design Review Program Director will make a determination at the time of the request in consultation with the Civic Design Review Committee Chair or designee. If the project is reviewed administratively, staff shall consider color, scale and style compatibility, and ADA issues (and consult with the Mayor's Office of Disability as appropriate).

A \$1,500 fee will be charged for administrative review. Based on the project complexity, the fee may be reduced or waived. The Program Director will provide a verbal report on all administrative reviews to the Civic Design Review Committee and issue an approval letter to the project sponsor. To request an Administrative Review, contact the Program Director and briefly describe the project and provide images or drawings of the existing condition and the modification.

SMALL PROJECT REVIEW

Many small projects are eligible to have a modified review process. This review process will combine the review of one or two phases into one meeting. Examples of projects that may be eligible for a modified review process include minor renovation projects, projects that only have open space components (no building component) such as playground equipment, park/street furnishings (benches, tables, light fixtures, fixed planters), entrance improvements, and pathway improvements (if they are not part of a larger project).

Before requesting a Small Project Review, please speak with the Civic Design Review

Program Director to determine if this is an appropriate approach and to determine the timeline for the design review. The Program Director will confer with the Chair or designated Commissioner regarding appropriateness for a Small Project Review.

The fee for Small Project Review is \$8,250.

If a project is granted a Small Project Review, the CDR Committee can require the project return for additional review if the project is not approved.

Small Project Review Project Examples

Merced Heights Playground Lower Lawn ([single phase](#))

San Francisco Public Library Mission Branch Expansion ([PH1](#) and [PH2](#))

EXEMPT PROJECTS

The following projects are exempt from Civic Design Review:

- Temporary projects and structures placed on public property with duration of up to two years (temporary art projects are reviewed by the Visual Arts Committee of the SFAC)
- Infrastructure and utility upgrades including but not limited to stormwater/drainage improvements, marina dock repairs, roof and building envelope repairs, fencing repairs, irrigation upgrades, electrical and gas improvements, phone and data installations, security upgrades, re-paving of roads/parking lots/pathways
- Interior and/or subterranean improvements
- Playfields, sports courts, park trails renewals
- Small utility enclosures (boxes, cages to provide secure protective coverings for items like backflow preventers and utility meters) that are not part of a larger project
- “In-Kind” repairs and replacements that are routine and/or deferred maintenance items
- Emergency work to address life safety issues, vandalism, disaster responses (such as tree failures, acts of god, and other similar urgent matters)

Motions and Contingencies

APPROVAL WITH CONTINGENCIES

The Committee may add contingencies or conditions to the motion approving a particular phase. This allows the project to move forward to meet its schedule, but also ensures that specific items will be addressed and resolved in the next phase of review.

CLARIFICATION OF COMMENTS FROM THE CIVIC DESIGN REVIEW MEETING

The official minutes of each Committee meeting will be published within ten working days of the meeting. The audio recording of the meeting is available the following day. Please contact the Civic Design Review Program Director should you have need for further clarification.

CHANGES TO AN APPROVED DESIGN

You are obliged to report any changes made to a previously approved design, including those changes made during and post-construction, to the Civic Design Review Program Director after Phase 3 approval is voted upon by the Arts Commission. Staff will determine whether the changes require a return to the Civic Design Review Committee or if the modifications may be reviewed administratively. It is important for the project team to carefully coordinate other mandated approvals and reviews prior to Phase 3.

FINAL APPROVAL

Phase 3 is the final approval of your project's design by the Arts Commission. The resolution number documenting the vote may be downloaded from the Arts Commission's website at sfgov.org/art under Public Meetings/Minutes or you may contact the Civic Design Review Program Director for assistance.

Frequently Asked Questions

CAN I GET FEEDBACK ON MY DESIGN BEFORE THE NEXT MEETING?

Yes! Informal Work Sessions with up to two Civic Design Review Commissioners are scheduled on the first Wednesday of each month from 4:00 – 5:00 p.m. . The Civic Design Review Program Director will assist you with the scheduling of reviews for designed projects designed by private architects and landscape architects.

WHICH PROJECTS NEED TO BE REVIEWED?

City Charter Section 5.103 stipulates that any project that is on or over City-owned property must be reviewed by the Civic Design Review Committee regardless of its funding source. Projects undertaken by the War Memorial, the Asian Art Museum, the Fine Arts Museums, the Port of San Francisco and projects under state or federal jurisdiction are not subject to Civic Design Review. Projects with a duration of two years or less are considered temporary by the Civic Design Review Committee and do not require Civic Design Review approval.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED A STRUCTURE?

A “structure” has been identified as any new or significantly remodeled building. This definition also includes permanent street furnishings, including, but not limited to: streetlights, benches, bollards, railings, water features, news racks, trash containers, way-finding systems and plaques.

HOW MUCH IS THE CIVIC DESIGN REVIEW FEE?

Effective August 27, 2025, in accordance with the San Francisco Administrative Code, Section 3.19A, each project will be charged a lump-sum fee of \$17,900. Larger, more complex projects or those involving a campus of several buildings or facilities may be assessed a higher fee at the discretion of the Director of Cultural Affairs. The Small Project Review fee is \$8,250 and the Administrative Review fee is \$1,500. All fees are subject to change each new fiscal year.

HOW DO I PAY THE FEES?

Interdepartmental electronic fund transfers and journal entries from other City departments should use the below codes for SFAC’s chart fields:

Revenue Account ID: 460127
Department ID: 163649
Project ID: 10022393

Fund ID: 11740
Authority ID: 16577
Activity ID: 0001

Payments may also be sent by check to the “San Francisco Arts Commission”
Attention: Kevin Quan at 401 Van Ness, Suite 325, San Francisco, CA 94102

IS THE CONCEPTUAL DESIGN PHASE MANDATORY?

The Conceptual Design presentation is mandatory for all projects with budgets in excess of \$5 million. The design should be at a very preliminary stage of development. The goal of reviewing projects at the Conceptual Design Phase is to avoid unnecessary costs and delays that may be associated with subsequent Civic Design recommendations if they occur later in the design process.

WHO CAN I CONTACT WITH OTHER QUESTIONS?

Please contact the Civic Design Review Program Director Sarah Hollenbeck at sarah.hollenbeck@sfgov.org with any additional questions you may have.

WHY DOES CIVIC DESIGN MATTER?

Well-considered quality design can beautify our neighborhoods, build pride in communities, promote access to facilities, and improve the quality of the built environment in our city. The Civic Design Review Committee ensures that projects consider their impact on the community and the context in which they will be located throughout the design process. The mission of the Civic Design Review is to ensure that any capital improvement project improves the public realm, respects the natural environment and serves the best interest of the public.

For any additional questions, please contact:

Civic Design Review Program Director
San Francisco Arts Commission
401 Van Ness Avenue, Suite 325
San Francisco, CA 94102
Phone: 415-252-2266
Website: sfartscommission.org