

# Permitting Process Improvements for Shared Community Goals and Priorities

In changing times





# Land Acknowledgement

We humbly recognize that we are gathered on Indigenous land, the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the Interior Salish peoples. We thank these caretakers of this land who have lived and continue to live here since time immemorial.

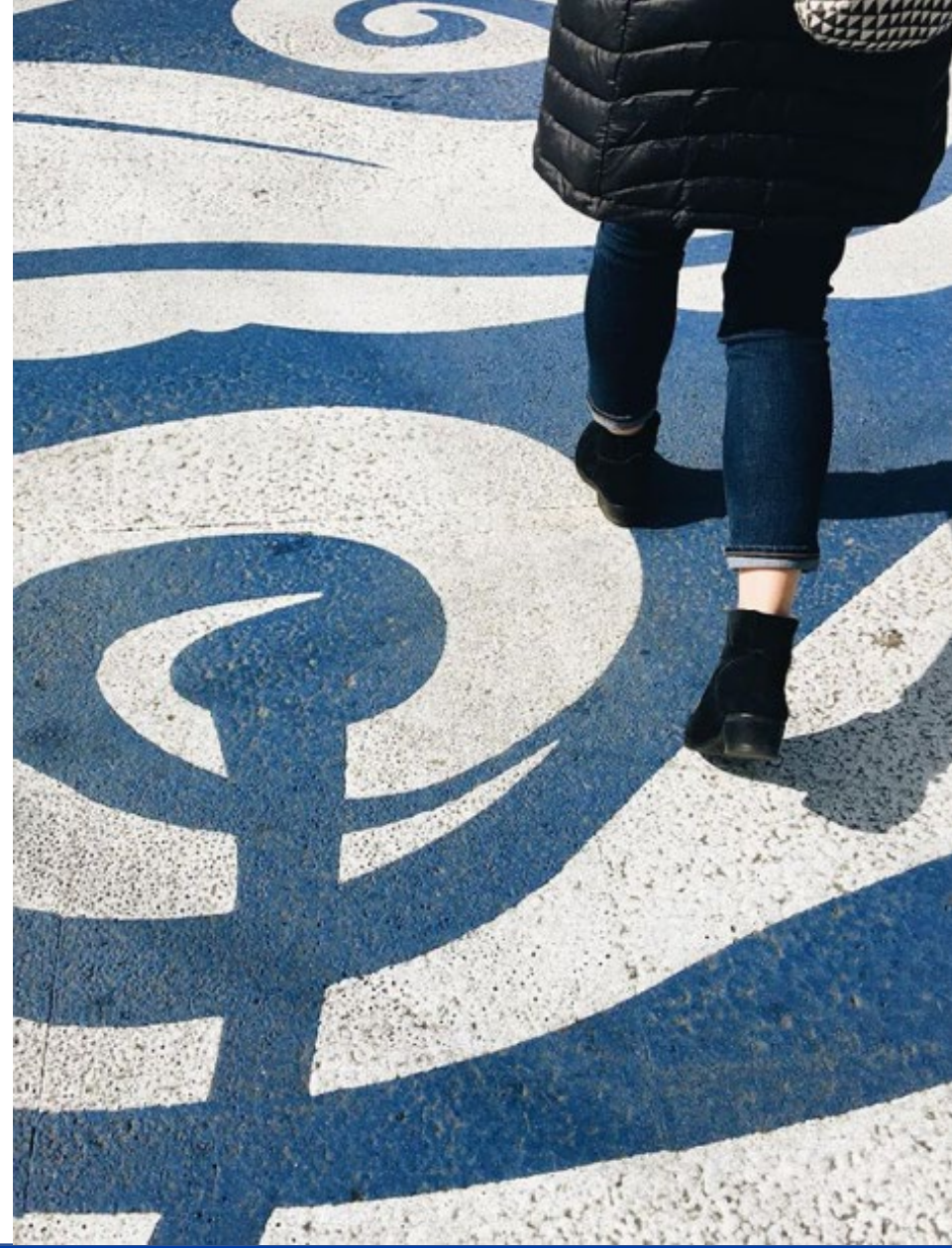
We acknowledge the role that traditional western-centric planning practices have played in harming, displacing, and attempting to erase Native communities and we respect indigenous rights to sovereignty and self-determination.

We commit to being better listeners and to lifting indigenous voices, while centering restorative land stewardship rather than unsustainable and extractive use of the land. We also commit to identifying and stopping racism and all forms of oppression.



# Purpose/Agenda

- Who are we?
- Who are you?
- How do we navigate change during our permitting processes?
- Workshop
- Takeaways





# Who are we?

## Lei Wu

SDOT – Operations Section  
Manager

## Ty Heimerl

SDOT – Permit Reviewer, Public  
Space Management

## Branin Burdette

SDCI – Land Use Planner

## Eric Berglind

SDCI – Operational Excellence  
Manager



# Who are you?





# Activating Right of Way

How SDOT navigated changes to public place during the pandemic



# Pre Covid-19 Programs

## Existing programs

- 420 sidewalk café permits, including 8 curb space cafes
- 115 Vending Permits (both cart and food truck permits)
- 20 Merchandise Display Permits




# Safe Starts

An approachable permit process for businesses during the worst of the pandemic


## EQUIPMENT FOR OUTDOOR TEMPORARY PERMITS

**Traffic Control Equipment and Fencing**  
Expand your business's footprint under our Safe Start Program in a (1) curb space, (2) furniture zone, or (3) frontage zone (see diagram to right). We have provided examples of traffic control equipment and fencing that meet our requirements and are easy to setup and take down daily. We recommend selecting from one of the equipment options provided here to shorten review times. Other equipment options are allowed, but will take longer to review. Businesses are responsible for complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and must offer accommodations that provide an equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities to enjoy the goods and services offered to everyone. See [Director's Rule 02-2019](#) for additional requirements. Cost ranges provided are approximate purchase price estimates.




Locations Diagram


**Pedestrian Diverters**  
Diverters must be between 30 and 42 inches high. See DR 02-2019 Section 6.6.3 for the list of diverter requirements.



**Safety Fencing, Traffic Delineator Posts, and Cane Detectable Element**  
Cost: \$100 - \$150




**Planter with Locking Wheels**  
Cost: \$250 - \$500




**Storage Bench**  
Cost: \$250 - \$500


**Fencing**  
Traffic delineators are required at each corner of curb space areas, they are not required for furniture or frontage zones. Furniture and frontage zone locations must have cane detectable fencing, this is not required in curb space areas. Equipment cost estimates provided below are for a typical 20 feet x 7 feet parallel parking space. Fencing must be exactly 42 inches high for alcohol sales, for all other permitted uses fencing must be between 30 and 42 inches high. See DR 02-2019 Section 6.3.2 for the list of fencing requirements.



**Safety Fencing, Traffic Delineator Posts, and Cane Detectable Element**  
Cost: \$350 - \$450




**Resin / Plastic Temporary Fencing and Traffic Delineator Posts**  
Cost: \$1,750 - \$2,500




**Metal Temporary Fencing and Traffic Delineator Posts**  
Cost: \$3,500 - \$4,500

**Curb Space | Temporary No Parking Easels**  
No parking easels need to be placed in the furniture zone so that Seattle Parking Enforcement can enforce. Visit our [Temporary No Parking Permits](#) web page for more information. Easels are the responsibility of the permittee to obtain.



Cost: \$50-\$60 each  
One per parking stall.

**Curb Space | Temporary Curb Ramps**  
If installing a temporary curb ramp, it must meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility standards. Ramps can be purchased or constructed. See [WSOOT Traffic Control Detail 52](#) for an example ramp that meets ADA standards. Temporary Curb Ramp | Cost: \$100 - \$250



**Seattle Department of Transportation**





# Winter Weather and Overhead Protection

## WEATHER PROTECTION EQUIPMENT FOR OUTDOOR TEMPORARY PERMITS

### Weather Protection Equipment

We allow permitted cafes and merchandise displays to add winter weather equipment within their approved footprint without additional review from SDOT (except for custom structures, see below) for the duration of the Safe Start program. You must, however, follow the guidelines detailed below.

**Important:** Be aware, you may need to obtain additional approvals to add winter weather equipment, such as [Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections permits](#), [Seattle Fire Department permits](#) or [Historic/Landmark District approvals](#).

It is your responsibility to secure the winter weather equipment to manufacturer's specifications to prevent movement by wind and weather. We do not allow permanent attachment to the sidewalk or street.

### Options for Protection from Rain and Snow

Allowed weather protection equipment includes umbrellas, canopies with ground support legs, and canopies that are attached to and supported off a building.

### General Requirements

1. Weather protection that does not provide vertical clearance between 30 inches and eight feet (except for narrow support poles), is not allowed within 30 feet of an intersection or 20 feet from a legal crosswalk or driveway (existing fencing up to 42 inches is allowed if already approved by your permit).
2. All parts of weather protection must fit within the approved footprint, with some exceptions as identified in this document.
3. Weather protection located in the furniture zone may not be closer than 18 inches to a curb face, unless there is already a permitted curb space use.
4. For curb space uses, equipment must be a minimum of one foot from the fencing abutting the travel lane.
5. Equipment must not interfere with drainage flow at the curb line.
6. Temporary tents and canopies require Seattle Fire Department permits when they are more than 400 square feet with walls. Roof-only structures and combinations of structures exceeding 700 square feet require a permit from Seattle Fire Department.

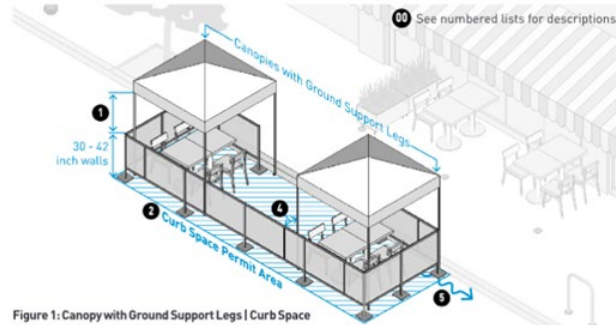


Figure 1: Canopy with Ground Support Legs | Curb Space

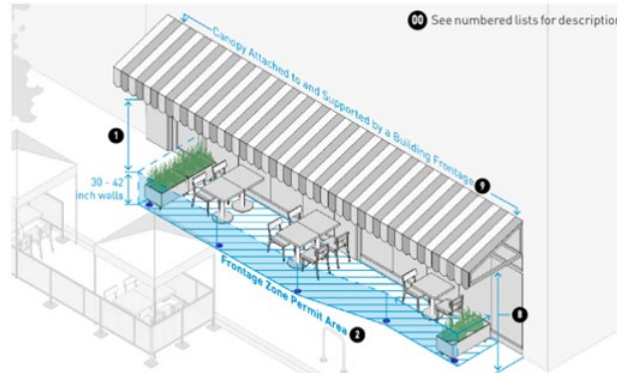


Figure 2: Canopies with Ground Supported Legs | Frontage Zone

### Canopies with Ground Support Legs (Figure 1)

7. Support posts on the sidewalk may extend up to edge of the approved footprint but may not intrude into the pedestrian clear path.

### Canopies Attached to and Supported by a Building Frontage (Figure 2)

8. Canopies may extend into the pedestrian clear zone or other parts of sidewalk if there is eight feet of vertical clearance, including support arms.
9. Check with the [Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections](#) to see if a building permit is required for the building attachment.

### Umbrellas (Figure 3)

10. Umbrellas on the sidewalk may extend outside of the approved footprint if the umbrella is at least eight feet where it is over the sidewalk.

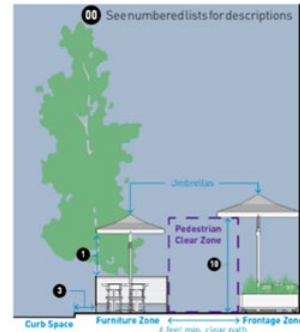


Figure 3: Umbrellas | Frontage and Furniture Zone



*"The community response has been fantastic – folks have genuinely been excited about our outdoor seating and I've heard countless times that we should make it a permanent installation. For business, our sales yesterday were up 84% from the average of the last four Saturdays."*

-Eden Hill Provisions



- The Pandemic really forced us to confront if we as a city viewed outdoor dining and other activation uses as a positive thing for the City of Seattle.
- We conducted outreach with the help of the Office of Economic Development and received 10,000 mostly positive responses.
- In January 2023, we published our new Director's Rules for Outdoor Dining, Vending, and Merchandise Display Permits.

*"As a Columbia City resident, I thoroughly enjoy the open patio concept you provided in Columbia City. I am able to eat from my favorite local restaurants while feeling safe from COVID." - City of Seattle Resident*

# Centering Equity in our decision making

Racial disparities in Covid-19 business recovery underscore the need for significant outreach to BIPOC businesses and underserved communities

We've translated program materials and simplified application requirements

Outreach has included:

- Teaming up with COS Office of Small Business Advocates & Only in Seattle team
- Individualized coaching & phone calls
- In-person, door-to-door outreach in the Central District and Beacon Hill neighborhoods (August & September 2020)

## Temporary Outdoor Café, Merchandise Display, Vending, and Street Closure Permits

Get the scoop on all the permit options for outdoor spaces!

To help business owners identify opportunities to expand their operations safely, we've assembled a guide to relevant permit offerings!

- English
- Español (Spanish)
- 繁體中文 (Chinese)
- Tiếng Việt (Vietnamese)
- Tagalog (Filipino)
- af Soomaali (Somali)
- 한국어 (Korean)
- አማርኛ (Amharic)

## PSM Safe Starts Permit Map

PSM has issued 250 Safe Start permits since its beginning at the start of the COVID-19 permits in 2020.

TOTAL Permit Count	250
Sidewalk Cafes (Curb)	121
Sidewalk Cafes (Sidewalk)	67
Vending	24
Street Closures	20
Merchandise Displays	18

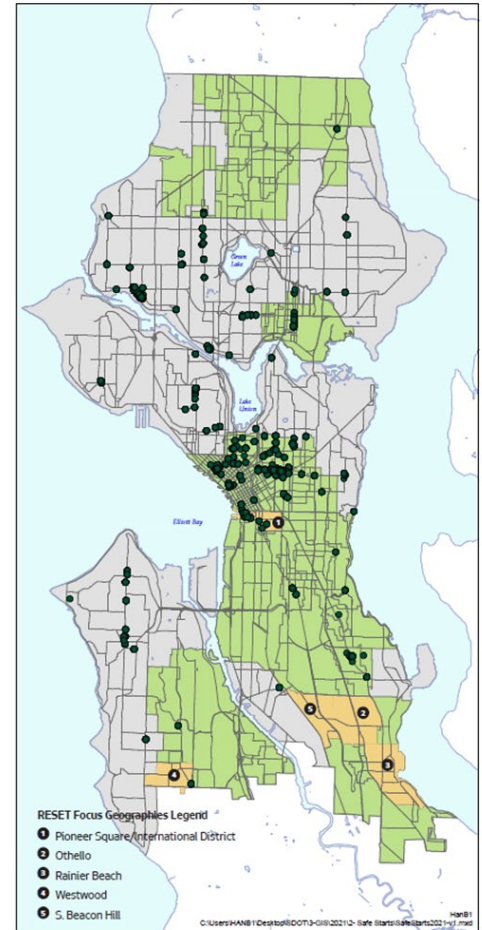
Within the Safe Start Priority Framework*	137 (55%)
Within the RESET Focus Geographies**	10 (4%)

\* The Safe Start Priority Framework identified geographic areas to focus outreach. It uses data from the OPCD Race and Social Equity Index and Outside Citywide Initiative  
\*\* The RESET focus geographies identifies census tracts most impacted by COVID-19, looking at public health, and equity considerations

- LEGEND**
- PSM Safe Starts Permits (2020-2021)
  - RESET Focus Geographies
  - Safe Start Priority Framework
  - Streets
  - City of Seattle
  - Waterbodies

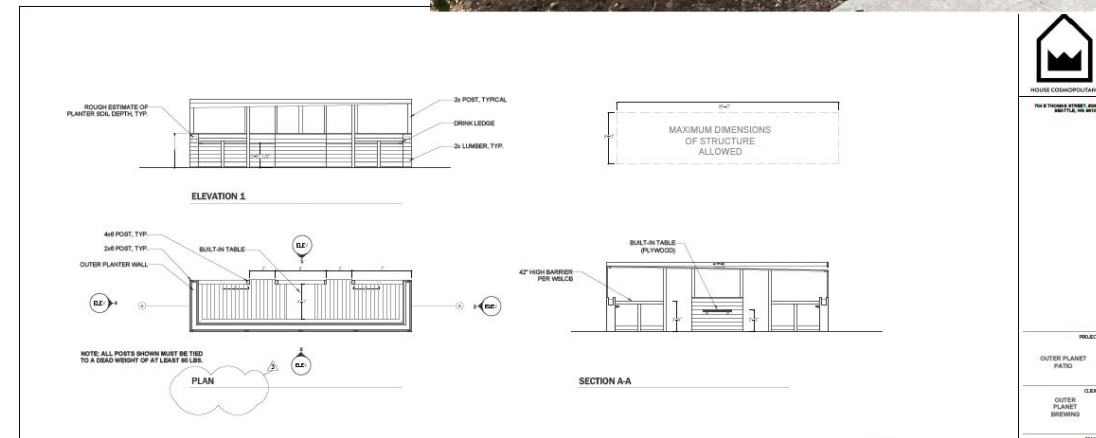
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# Transitioning for the long-term

- In 2023 we have been transitioning 275-300 safe start cafes into long-term use permits
- SDOT has created a list of prescriptive criteria for overhead weather protection structures which helps reduce the cost of hiring a licensed engineer or architect
- Working with Department of Neighborhoods to help transition and work with businesses through the nuances of the Historic Landmark District process.





# 1-2-4-All Activity

**Prompt:** We face constant change in our work, what are your best practices to address unforeseen change?

## **Activity:**

1. For 1 minute, think about an answer to this question.
2. For 2 minutes, turn to the person to your left and build upon your ideas from question 1.
3. For 4 minutes, as a pair turn to the pair to your right and build upon your ideas from question 2.
4. For 5 minutes, Establish a spokesperson to share out the top idea from the group of 4 out to the whole room.

*Source: <https://www.liberatingstructures.com/1-1-2-4-all/>*





# Land Use Development and Street Improvement Permitting



# R.O.W Improvement Challenges During Covid and After



## Adaptation of SDCI With the Onset of Covid Restrictions and Other Challenges



- Need to digitize plans, documents, drawings and data.
  - City of Seattle and King County scanned most documents and created online databases for public use.
- Allocation of funds to improve software, hardware and infrastructure.
  - The City of Seattle budgeted sufficient funds that allowed for the purchase of laptops for all employees that allowed staff to begin having remote meetings.
- SDCI ceased the expiration of permits.
  - Those projects that were affected by Covid restrictions were given the time to acquire needed funding and documents that allowed the proposal to continue.
- Created a virtual Q&A portal and live chat program.
  - Allowed for more rapid response to questions and expanded the ability of the many different divisions to work through issues prior to permit submittal.
- Increased SDOT collaboration in a virtual environment.
  - Allowed SDCI staff the ability to rapidly reach out to SDOT staff to ask questions regarding specifics concerning the Consent Decree, SIP Lite process and how they interpret the many codes that related to strete improvemetns.



## What Policies Worked



- The virtual Q&A and live assistance software has been continued.
  - A new public counter that will be shared by SDOT and SDCI will open at the end of 2023.
- The continued scanning of most documents.
  - Now available for easy access online or via contacting our Microfilm staff.
- All internal training is still done virtually.
  - Has allowed those who may not normally ask questions in an in-person meeting the comfort to be more involved and outspoken.
- The virtual system to review plans, projects and diagrams.
  - Has allowed SDCI zoning staff the ability to reduce our review times considerably and meet most target dates; which was rare prior to COVID.

## What are the Upcoming Challenges for SDCI and Our Permit Review Processes?

- How will HB 1110, and its allowance for more density, affect the need for future right-of-way improvements? Will there be a continued need for the SIP Lite process?
- With the Council and Mayoral direction to allow for more residential development, how can we balance that need with the increase in time and cost in street improvement supporting more dense development?
- In 2024, the City of Seattle will adopt a new Comprehensive Plan with Land Use Code amendments that has the potential of requiring additional right-of-way improvements for all forms of development.
- Balancing the ability to waive R.O.W improvements in certain cases versus the Consent Decree mandate.





Process Improvement Project

# Street Improvement Permit Lite





# Background

- SIP Lite Implemented Rapidly -
  - Provide a permitting path for small scale street improvements
  - Timed with second phase of our transition to Accela in 2020
  - Launched during a period of uncertainty and the height of COVID
- Time to recalibrate, measure and provide continuous process improvement.

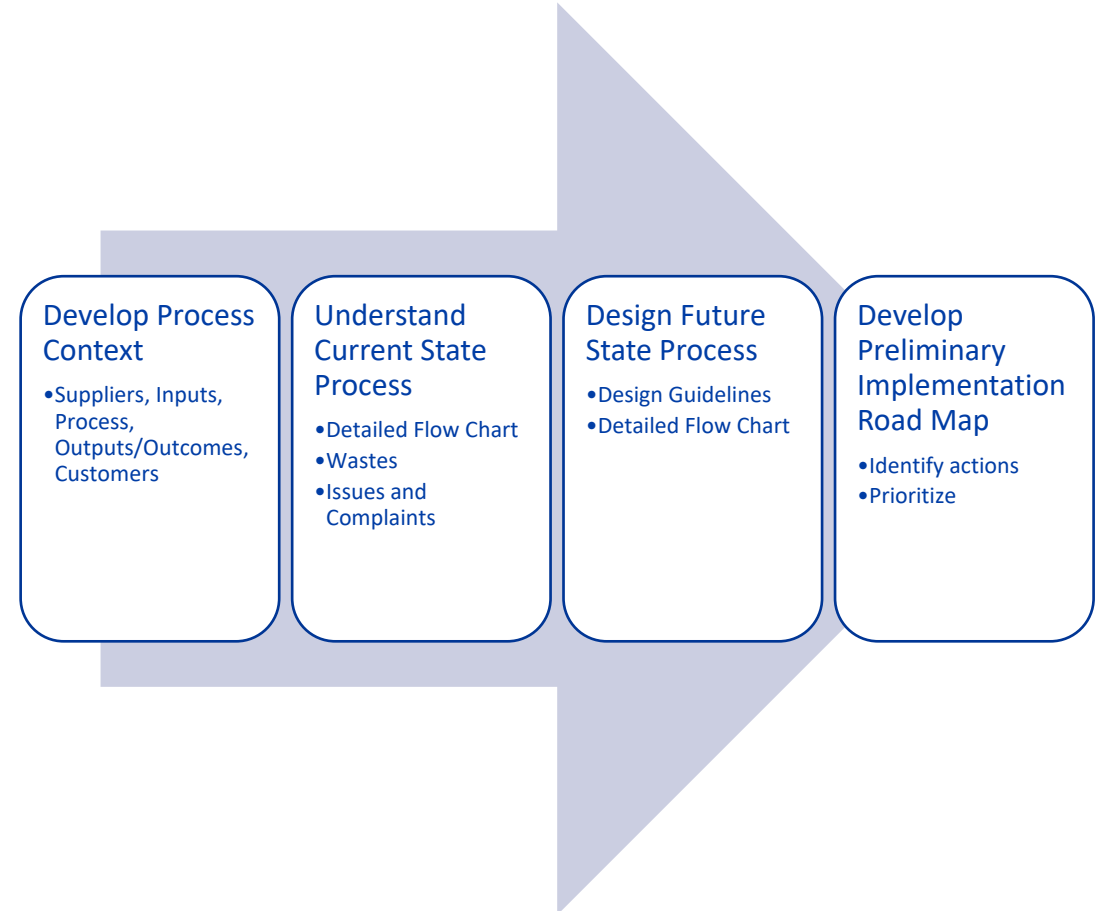
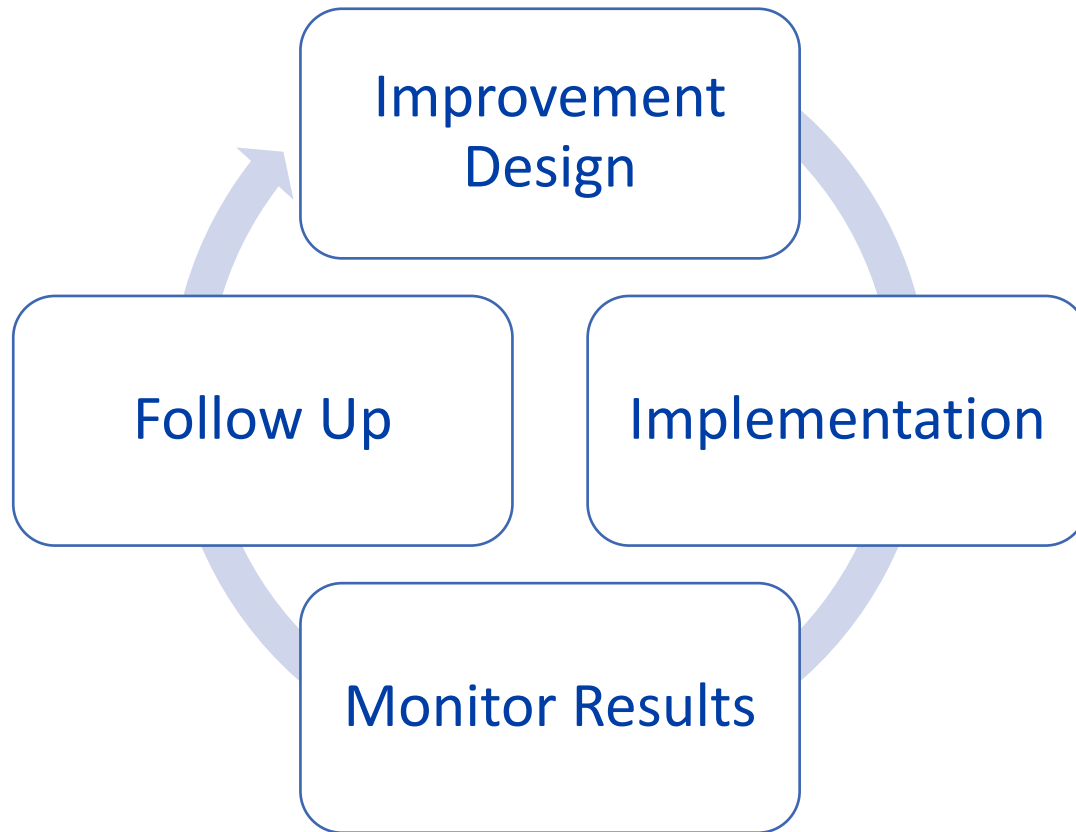
Total # of SIP LITE Applications	
Year	No of Records
2020	22
2021	82
2022	54
2023	20
Total	178

# Curb Ramps

- All those curb ramps
  - Land use code update - pedestrian circulation in Urban Villages
  - 2017 Consent Decree
    - 18-year agreement
    - 1,250 curb ramps installed or improved annually



# Approach - Process



# Stakeholder Interview Questions

- When you think about the SIP Lite process, what images come to mind?
- What complaints or problems do you have with the SIP Lite process?
- What needs or expectations do you have when using SIP Lite?
- How would you change SIP Lite to better serve your needs and expectations?
- Do you have any other input that you think would help the project improvement team?



# Project Development - Initial Perceptions

- Incomplete permit submittal plans by developers' teams
- Permitting longer, more costly than desired
- ADA Review is late
- Inconsistent guidance and feedback
- Incorrect plan information, ongoing design issues





# Project Development - Problem Statement

**The SIP Lite process is more complicated, costly, and lengthy than expected given the scope of work.**

## Likely Causes:

- Receiving key feedback on curb ramp designs late in the process
- Incomplete plan submittals by applicants
- Rush to get to the SDCI building permit intake
- Unclear requirements and priorities in design
- Inconsistent guidance during permitting

## Focus:

- Most SIP Lite permits are for ADA curb ramps.

# Project Development - Goals

- Providing safe mobility options for traveling public
- Provide predictable and equitable process
- Remove 'waste' in permitting process
- Reduce permitting review cycles and time
- Provide quality reviews at the right time





# Improve Ideas/Guidelines

- The initial permit submittal by applicants has details acceptable for 90%
- Limit permit submittals to 90% and 100%
- Clear ADA guidelines and priorities
- ADA review happens during the first cycle
- Break the tie between building permit intake and SIP Lite 90% approval while maintaining the dependency



## Future State Design Improvements

Characteristic	Current State	Future State
Number of Steps	29	9
Number of Review Cycles	4	2 (Ideal)

### Outcomes:

- Submittal of high-quality permit applications
- Build a better Applicant with more design guidelines, with a focus on ADA requirements
- Provide applicant coaching
- Ensure complete plan sets with all relevant information
- Create performance measures for continuous process improvement
- Eliminate waste and low value activities
- Reduce rework
- Create a process that is faster and less expensive

# Improvement Areas

## Timing

- Decouple SIP Lite 90% approval and Building Permit intake
- Be aware of, and sensitive to, applicant project schedule
- Accept an 90% formal review submittal as the first SIP Lite review

## Permit Management

- Work is assigned when individuals have capacity – rather than wait in individual work queues
- Work aging (time in queue) will be a key management measure from Accela
- Measure processing (work) time for each step and total elapsed time to completed application
- Secondary reviewers are identified in Accela and will be assigned work through Accela

## ADA Improvements

- Design process to handle curb ramps and other street improvements
- Develop clear ADA guidelines and priorities
- ADA review happens during the first review

## Plan Improvements

- Limit permit submittals to 90% and 100%, allowing for optional coaching and design guidance when requested
- All plans submitted for permits on a project are components of one plan set and internally consistent
- Build better applicants that can submit higher quality plans



# TRIZ - Workshop

**Prompt:** What is your approach in providing street improvements to accommodate higher density residential development?

## Activity:

1. Make a list of all you can do to make sure that you achieve the worst result imaginable with respect to your top strategy or objective.
2. Go down this list item by item and ask yourselves, ‘Is there anything that we are currently doing that in any way, shape, or form resembles this item?’ Be brutally honest to make a second list of all your counterproductive activities/programs/procedures.”
3. through the items on your second list and decide what first steps will help you stop what you know creates undesirable results?”

Source: <https://www.liberatingstructures.com/6-making-space-with-triz/>



# Stay in Touch

Feel free to reach out to us!

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# From the Team: Thank you!

