

**HALIFAX**

**Design Review  
Committee:  
Orientation**

**March 2021**

# DRC Purpose

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To administer the Site Plan Approval Process by deciding on applications for Substantial Site Plan Approval through their evaluation and assessment against criteria within the Design Manual.



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# Charter Authority

Halifax Charter – Section 246 A(2):

*“...the Design Review Committee shall exercise the powers of the Development Officer ... for the area and under the conditions set out in the by-law...”*



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# Land Use By-law Authority

Halifax Downtown Land Use By-Law – Section 4(13): (paraphrased)

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The Committee shall:

- Consider applications for substantive site plan approval consistent with the requirements of the Design Manual;
- Consider the advice of the Heritage Advisory Committee on site plan applications on registered heritage properties or abutting registered heritage properties, and on applications within heritage conservation districts;
- Advise the Development Officer on matters pertaining to bonus zoning
- Advise Council on potential amendments to regulation and policy to carry out the role and responsibilities of the Committee as may be required from time to time.

# What is Site Plan Approval?

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- Currently, applicable only in Downtown Halifax
- A shorter, streamlined process compared to Development Agreements or rezoning's
- Specific, quantifiable rules with qualitative criteria as to how the requirements can be varied
- Not all requirements can be varied; the By-law is specific about what can and cannot be varied





# Site Plan Approval Process

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## 1. Preliminary Committee Presentation

Applicants have the optional opportunity to present proposals to the Committee for their early feedback prior to going through the Pre-Application process with staff.

## 2. Pre-Application

Proposals are reviewed by planner and development officer for conformance to the use and built form requirements of the Land Use By-law and to identify any required variances.

## 3. Public Consultation

Applicants are required to advertise their development within the newspaper, through the creation of their own webpage, and through display boards erected in select HRM office locations.

## 4. Formal Application

A staff report is written, materials compiled, and a recommendation is provided to the Committee for their decision.

# Application Review

Under Site Plan Approval, there are two components of review and approval:

- 1. Quantitative (LUB)** – Parameters relating to land use and building envelope  
(*height, massing, scale, streetwall setbacks and stepbacks*) ➔ **Development Officer**
- 2. Qualitative (Design Manual)** – Guidelines relating to building design  
(*architectural design, streetscape details, materials, public realm contribution, etc.*)  
➔ **Design Review Committee**



# Downtown Land Use By-Law

1. Provides the Use and Built Form Requirements for properties within the Downtown Plan Area;
2. Explicit about what aspects of the By-law can and cannot be varied by the Committee in applying the Design Manual; and
3. Administered by the Development Officer prior to the Committee formally considering an application.



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# Schedule S-1: Design Manual

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The Design Manual is to be the primary reference used during the design review component of the Site Plan Approval process for Downtown Halifax development applications.

## The Design Manual

1. Provides the qualitative elements an application within the Downtown should possess; and
2. Provides criteria by which modest modifications to the Quantitative Elements of the Land Use By-law may be made

# Linking Variances to the Design Manual

- Section 3.6 of the Design Manual provides specific criteria that must be met for a Variance to be approved by the Committee.
- The Committee must consider these criteria in making their decisions.
- Decisions of the Committee are appealable to Regional Council.



# Example of Variance Criteria

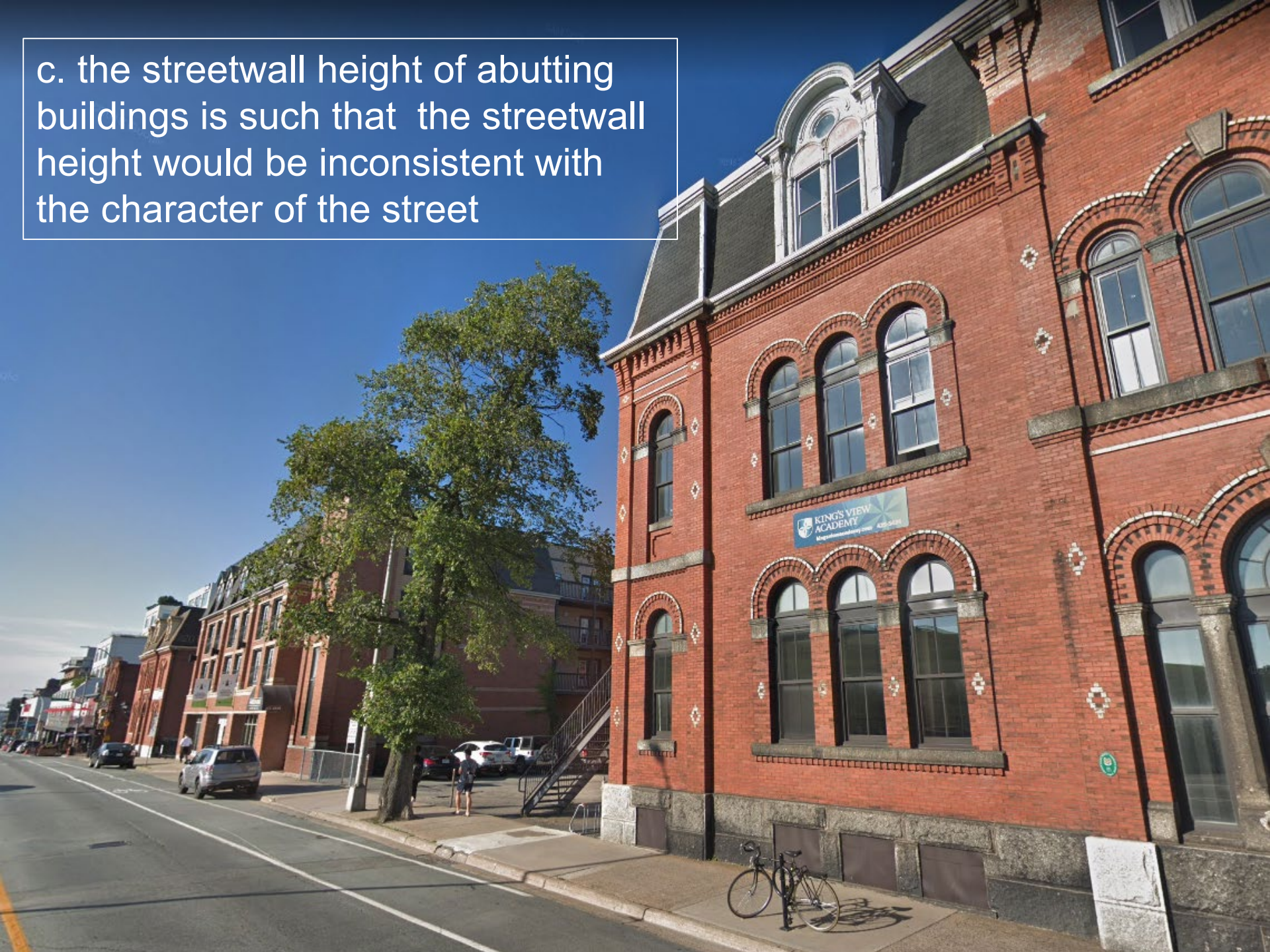
## 3.6.3 Streetwall Height Variance

Streetwall heights may be varied by Site Plan Approval where:

- a. the streetwall height is consistent with the objectives and guidelines of the Design Manual; and
- b. the modification is for a corner element that is used to join streetwalls of differing heights; or
- c. the streetwall height of abutting buildings is such that the streetwall height would be inconsistent with the character of the street; or
- d. where a landmark building element is called for pursuant to the Design Manual.



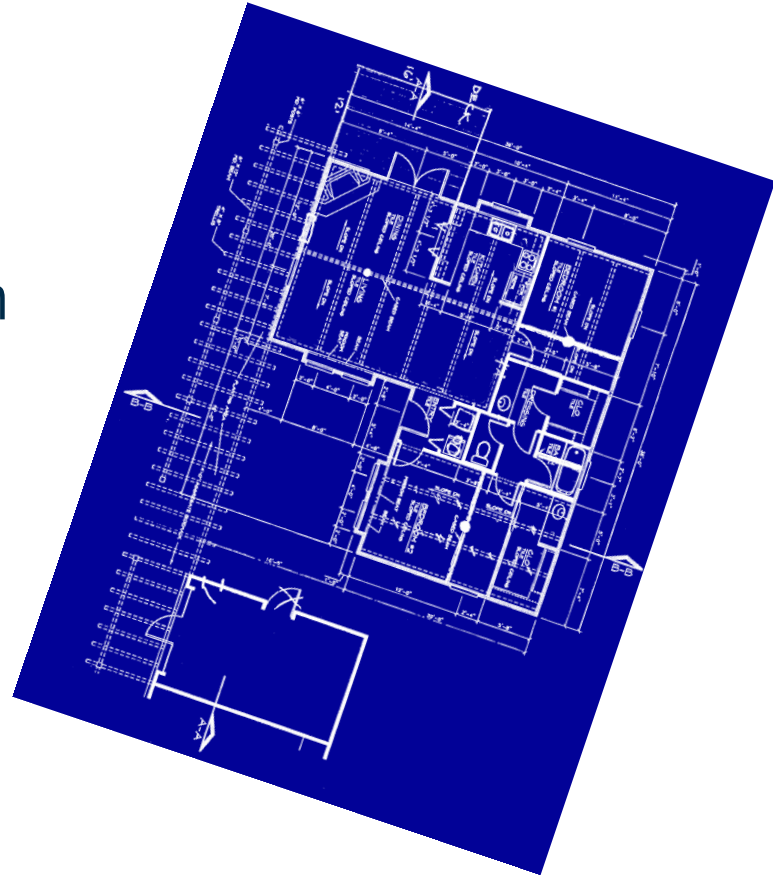
c. the streetwall height of abutting buildings is such that the streetwall height would be inconsistent with the character of the street



# Options DRC Has in Issuing a Decision

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1. Refuse the Application;
2. Approve the Application;
3. Approve the Application with Conditions.



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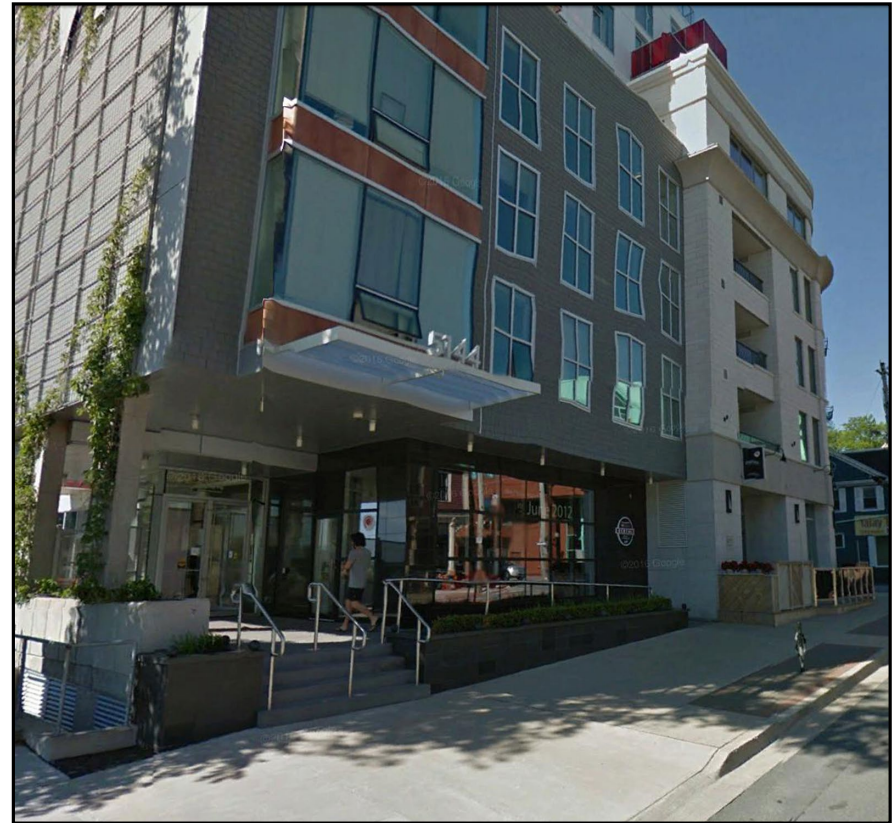


# Updates to the Documents

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The Centre Plan and Downtown By-law Reviews are currently underway. Changes to where Site Plan Approval can be applied, and the process by which decisions are made are likely.

The Committee recently received a presentation on these amendments, and the final draft of the documents will be moving forward to Council over the course of 2021.



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# Typical DRC Agenda Item

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1. Presentation from the Planner
2. Presentation from the Applicant as Desired by the Committee
3. Questions from the Committee
4. Put the Report Motion on the Floor
5. Debate
6. Decision

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**Questions?**