

Rio Nuevo Area Design Review Process

What is the Rio Nuevo Area (RNA)?

The Rio Nuevo Area (RNA) is a subdistrict of the Infill Incentive District (IID)*. The Rio Nuevo Area generally covers the downtown core and establishes design standards that must be met by all new development in this district. Projects that do not opt in to the IID zoning option must still meet Rio Nuevo design standards and go through a design and historic review process.

The purpose of the RNA is enhance the Downtown pedestrian environment to celebrate Tucson's rich historic, cultural, and artistic heritage. Diversity, design in context, and accessibility are the design principles that form the basis for the specific design standards to be applied to new projects in the Rio Nuevo Area.

**Refer to the [IID handout](#) for more information about the IID zoning option.*

Who is involved in the RNA Design Review?

The [Design Review Board](#) (DRB) reviews for RNA design standards.

The Tucson-Pima County Historical Commission (TPCHC) [Plans Review Subcommittee](#) (PRS) reviews for compatibility with eligible or listed structures and the US Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

How long does the process take and is there a fee?

Time: It typically takes 6-8 weeks to process an RNA application if there are no issues or complications.

- The first step is to submit a building permit application. You will then be instructed to submit a [Special District application](#) for the RNA design review.
- Once the applicant submits a complete RNA application and fees are paid, the RNA Design Review begins. The steps and timeframe for this review is detailed on the next page.
- The building permit will not be issued until the RNA application has been approved by the PDSD director and the appeal period is over.

Fee: PDSD staff calculates applicable fees based on the square footage of the project.

How do I get started?

Email PDSD at specialdistricts@tucsonaz.gov or call the PDSD main line with any questions. PDSD staff will confirm if an RNA review is needed.

Request a [pre-application conference](#) to get feedback on your project.

Courtesy pre-application reviews by the DRB and/or PRS are available by request

More information about the RNA design standards and process can be found in on the [Special Districts webpage](#) and in [Section 5.12.7](#) of the Unified Development Code (UDC).

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Pre-Application Conference

- Applicant submits a [pre-application conference request](#).
- PDSD staff schedule a pre-application conference with the applicant
- PDSD staff provide feedback on the project's compliance with applicable historic and RNA design standards and share an overview of the review process.
- Projects may require either major or minor historic review, or no historic review, depending on the historic status of the property and adjacent sites.

Application Submittal and Review

- Applicant submits complete RNA application according to [instructions](#).
- PDSD staff reviews the application for completeness within five working days of the submittal.
- If complete, PDSD staff accepts the application for processing and posts it online on [Property Research Online \(PRO\)](#)
- Applicant pays applicable fees.
- PDSD staff forwards the application for review and comment to City departments and outside agencies if needed.
- PDSD staff schedule the item with the relevant review bodies.

Design Review

Historic Review

If a Major Historic Review:

- Applicant presents proposal at a meeting of the Tucson-Pima County Historical Commission (TPCHC) Plans Review Subcommittee (PRS)*
- The PRS makes recommendation on the project

If a Minor Historic Review:

- Review is conducted on-site with PDSD staff, a member of the PRS and the applicant present

RNA Design Review

- The Design Review Board (DRB)* reviews the project for compliance with RNA design standards and makes a recommendation
- The recommendations of the TPCHC Plans Review Subcommittee and Design Review Board are sent to the PDSD Director.

**These boards typically meet once or twice a month*

PDSD Director's Decision

- PDSD Director reviews the application and recommendations.
- PDSD Director will either approve, approve with conditions, or deny the application.
- PDSD Staff mail a Decision Notice to property owners within 50 feet of the project site and the applicable registered neighborhood association within 3 working days. The decision is also posted on PRO.
- A party of record may make an appeal of the decision to the Design Review Board within 14 calendar days of the PDSD Director's Decision.
- The building permit review may be completed, and permits issued.

All applications are submitted via [Tucson Development Center Online](#)