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Facilities Design Standard – Variance Request and Decision Process

Background

Intent of the Variance Request and Decision Process

Requests for variances should be made judiciously and, to the greatest extent possible, resolved by the project team and Process Partners. Requests to the FDS Variance Review committee should be seen as the last resort to resolution, not the first step.

Date of FDS to Apply to a Project

The FDS is revised twice annually, and consequently a given project could see several revisions over the course of its schedule. The FDS in effect as of the date the design or design/build contract is initially executed is the version that applies to the project for the duration of its schedule. Project teams should save a copy of that version for reference. When changes to the FDS after contract execution would have no or negligible impact on the project cost or schedule, the project team should endeavor to incorporate them but is not obligated to.

First Cost vs. Lifecycle Cost

The FDS is based on substantial experience with the operation and maintenance of UW facilities and many accumulated lessons learned. They are also based on a ‘total cost of ownership’ approach, sometimes referred to as the lifecycle cost. These costs include the initial installation cost, the direct cost of future repairs and the efficiency cost of maintenance staff operating in the built space. This approach can lead to certain systems or products having a higher first cost than other available options, some of which may be commonly used in the private sector or in situations different from the UW’s long-term ownership and operation of its campuses.

Many capital projects face budget pressures due to unexpected construction cost escalation, supply chain issues, and the like. While it is always tempting to look to substitute less expensive first-cost products and systems to meet the budget, this is more costly to the UW in the long run and should generally be avoided. When a project team can propose solutions which address both first cost and lifecycle cost issues, these solutions may be proposed for review and acceptance on either a project basis or for inclusion into the FDS.

Project Delivery Method

Capital projects are delivered by a variety of methods, in accordance with public works statutes in Washington. Projects which are delivered by more collaborative contracts which bring design and construction professionals together early in the project may result in more proposals which are at variance with the FDS than from projects delivered through Design-Bid-Build. The UW encourages exploration of ideas which better optimize the first costs and lifecycle costs of our facilities regardless of project type or budget. That said, project managers should carefully consider how much effort should be put into options which may not be accepted and should seek guidance as

soon as possible from appropriate Process Partners - particularly Campus Energy Utilities & Operations (CEUO) and Engineering Services (ES) - before pursuing a potential variance.

Systems or Products Not in the FDS

The FDS is silent on many systems and products that are part of our Facilities. This review process shall be used in these situations where project teams and Process Partners may be unable to resolve differences in whether to use a given system or product where there is no FDS requirement.

Design Standards From Other Units

Units outside of UWF, such as EH&S and UW-IT, have their own design standards, and these are included in the FDS. While UWF does not have the authority to unilaterally grant variances to these standards, project teams should still work at the project level with those Process Partners to resolve issues, and any agreed-upon variances should be documented per the process outlined below.

Safety and Access Issues

The FDS often incorporates best practices for a variety of safety and access issues; in some cases, these requirements may be seen as 'beyond code'. Building code requirements should be understood as different from best practices, and the UW may choose to use best practices as the appropriate standard to ensure that our staff working to operate and maintain our facilities are not exposed to undue risk. While project teams may choose to propose alternative safety and access measures, 'meeting code' in and of itself is not a compelling basis for a variance request.

Resolution process

Resolution at the Project Level

Ideally, issues involving variances from the FDS are proposed and resolved at the project level with PDG, design and construction partners, and Process Partners, with the issue(s) fully described and Process Partner agreement documented; this includes a record of the process partners who agreed with the proposed variance.

It is critical to note that if project teams are unable to obtain documented unanimous Process Partner agreement on an issue, that issue is not resolved. Proceeding with FDS variances that lack unanimous Process Partner agreement and simply reporting that those variances are being incorporated is not an acceptable practice. Unresolved issues must be submitted to the FDS Variance Review Committee for a decision per the process below, or they should be dropped and the FDS followed.

Resolution by the FDS Variance Review Committee

The FDS Variance Review Committee consists of the following UWF leaders:

- The AVP of Operations
- The AVP of Asset Management
- The Executive Director of Campus Utilities and Operations

The committee will engage other stakeholders as appropriate given the nature of the variance request. The VP of Facilities will be called on to make a decision only if the committee members are not able to make a unanimous decision.

The committee will have a monthly meeting *or as needed* to review any pending requests and may consider scheduling additional meetings due to volume or urgency of requests.

Decision Process

Decision meeting

The FDS Variance Review Committee will review submitted materials in advance of the scheduled meetings and come prepared to reach a decision. Members should request clarifications or additional information from the project team in advance of the meeting whenever possible. The PDG PM, Director, and appropriate UWF stakeholders will be invited to the meeting to answer questions and may be tasked with providing additional information.

Appeal of Decision

The FDS Variance Review Committee will consult with the VP of Facilities to ensure alignment on decisions, and consequently the decisions of the Committee are final.

Documentation of Decisions

It's important that approved variances be tracked so that decisions can be made about incorporating them into the FDS, or leave them as one-time variances. The FDS Variance Review Committee will submit all approved variance documentation to Engineering Services for incorporation as appropriate in upcoming updates of the FDS.

Step by Step Guide

Step 0 (Feasibility/Predesign/Project Formation)

- As projects are being formed, CAP account and portfolio managers should engage with PDG, Engineering Services and Campus Energy Utilities & Operations to review any potential high-level issues impacting compliance with the FDS. It is not expected that specific variances would be sought or approved at this phase.

Step 1 Evaluate, Submit to Process Partners, and Log the Request

- Design/Construction Team thoroughly evaluates whether a variance to the FDS is needed. Design/Construction Team fills out the [FDS Variance Request Form](#) and submits it to at minimum PDG, ES, Client, Safety, and the Process Partner responsible to maintain the variance request for approval prior to submitting a design and/or construction document (e.g. an RFI, submittal, design) Design Team adds item to the Project FDS [Variance Log](#) (with location of where the log is located) and submits current FDS Variance Log with the request.

Step 2 Work the Issue with Process Partners, submit form for documentation or decision

- Process Partners review the variance request.
 - *If agreement is reached*, PDG notes who approved on the Project FDS Variance Log and sends the approved form with current FDS Variance Log to all internal (i.e. CEUO, EH&S, ES, IT, Operations, Sustainability, etc.) and external (i.e. design contractor, etc) stakeholders.

- *If agreement is **not** reached*, PDG Project Manager sends FDS Variance Request Form to the Variance Review Committee with the reason the Process Partners didn't approve and who approved and didn't approve for review.

Step 3 Variance Committee Decision

- Variance Review Committee reviews the variance request.
 - When variances are approved or rejected, PDG PM notes the outcome on the Project FDS Variance Log and sends the completed form with current FDS Variance Log to all stakeholders.
 - If Variance Review Committee is deadlocked, they will send FDS Variance Request Form to VP of Facilities for a decision.
 - VP of Facilities reviews the variance request and meets with Variance Committee as needed.
 - Upon the VP decision, PDG PM notes the outcome on the Project FDS Variance Log and sends the approved form with current FDS Variance Log to all stakeholders.