

# Seattle Permits

— part of a multi-departmental City of Seattle series on getting a permit

## Getting a Multifamily or Commercial Construction Permit from SDCI

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This Tip is designed to help you through the construction permit process to construct a new multifamily or commercial building, or to build an addition and/or make alterations to an existing multifamily or commercial building. This Tip provides general information on:

- How to conduct your project research
- How to apply for your construction permit
- Preparing and submitting your application
- How to track the review process and permit status
- How the permit is issued
- How and when to schedule inspections
- Additional resources

For purposes of Seattle's building code, a multifamily building contains more than two residential dwelling units, such as townhouses or apartment buildings, but does not have any commercial tenants, such as retail or office spaces.

Building code considers any building that contains commercial tenants a commercial building. It also treats mixed-use buildings with both residential and commercial uses as commercial buildings.

### Step 1. Land Use Code Coaching

It is important to find out early whether your project will need a land use permit, referred to as Master Use Permits or MUPs, as this will affect the timing of the overall permitting process. In general, land use permits can take 4-8 months to review, sometimes longer depending on the project's complexity. Typically, SDCI must issue an associated Master Use Permit before issuing

any construction, grading, or demolition permit. See Tip 201, [Master Use Permit \(MUP\) Overview](#).

### Getting Your Land Use Questions Answered

You should have a comprehensive understanding of land use and zoning requirements for your project before submitting your application for the building permit. This includes understanding specific requirements related to zoning and land use regulations, site conditions, and other requirements from related City departments and agencies. If you don't yet understand the zoning and land use requirements for your project, please participate in zoning coaching before you proceed with the construction coaching and building permit application.

You can get virtual coaching and access SDCI's assistance and service via the SDCI [Virtual Applicant Service Center](#) (ASC). Through the Virtual ASC, you can consult with SDCI experts to answer questions about your project and any land use application processes. You can also consult virtually with drainage and geotechnical experts. SDCI now offers all coaching only through our Virtual ASC.

For simple questions, coaching is available via our [online chat](#). Those coaching sessions are generally 20 minutes. If you have a complex situation, or if you have a long list of questions, you may benefit from an online paid zoning coaching session with a land use planner, by appointment. Please submit a [Paid Coaching Appointment Request](#).

### Pre-Submittal Conferences

SDCI requires land use pre-submittal conferences of multifamily or commercial projects that involve the Design Review process. (See Tip 238, [Design Review: General Information, Application Instructions, and Submittal Requirements](#).) You may also schedule a voluntary land use pre-submittal conference by submitting the Land Use Pre-Submittal Conference Application Form.

These are resources about land use permit requirements:

- Tip 201, [Master Use Permit \(MUP\) Overview](#)



- Tip 205, [Street, Alley, and Pedestrian Improvement Exceptions](#)
- Tip 208, [State Environmental Policy Act \(SEPA\) Environmental Review in Seattle](#)
- Tip 209, [Application Requirements for Shoreline Permits](#)
- Tip 211A, [Master Use Permit Requirements for Administrative Conditional Use \(in Neighborhood Residential and Multifamily Zones\)](#)
- Tip 211B, [Master Use Permit Requirements for Administrative Conditional Use \(in Residential Commercial and Commercial Zones\)](#)
- Tip 238, Design Review: General Information, Application Instructions, and Submittal Requirements
- Tip 233, [Sources for Property Information](#)
- Tip 242A, [Tree Requirements Associated with Development](#)
- Tip 257, [Developer Contributions — Mandatory Housing Affordability Tip 327A, Environmentally Critical Areas Exemptions, Relief from Prohibition on Development](#)
- Tip 2200, [SDOT Street Improvement Permitting \(SIP\) Process](#)
- [Environmentally Critical Areas Exemptions](#)
- [Solid Waste Storage and Access for New and Remodeled Buildings](#)
- [Shoreline Exemptions](#)
- [Water Availability Certificate](#)

## Step 2. Building Code Coaching

Our goal is to assist you with your construction permit submittal, so that your application materials are complete and accurate. Complete and accurate applications reduce the need for corrections that often extend review times and delay approval and issuance.

For new construction of multifamily or commercial buildings you need to submit a building permit application that undergoes plan review as part of the permit approval process. Your application will be reviewed by many disciplines and departments simultaneously to ensure your project complies with the codes and regulations in effect at the time you submit your application. These include the current edition of the full suite of International Code Council codes with the City of Seattle amend-

ments. These codes are available to view free of charge on our [Codes We Enforce](#) webpage. You can also find other relevant codes, standards, [Director's Rules](#), and [Code Interpretations](#) on [SDCI's website](#).

We typically require plan review when you are proposing additions, alterations, or tenant improvements to multifamily or commercial buildings. If your scope of work is very minor in nature, please refer to Tip 316, [Subject-to-Field Inspection Permits](#), to determine whether your project qualifies for a subject-to-field-inspection (STFI) permit. When you apply for a STFI permit, SDCI will screen your plans and application materials and make the final determination about what type of permit is appropriate for your project. If your application qualifies, we will issue the STFI permit. If the application's scope of work exceeds what is allowed under a STFI permit, we will inform you to apply for a regular building permit that undergoes review. Carefully review Tip 102, [Small Business: Getting Your Use and Building Permit from SDCI](#), as it has useful information about these types of permits.

## Using Professional Designers and Licensed Engineers

The Seattle Building Code and the Seattle Residential Code require you to use Washington state licensed professional designers, such as architects and structural engineers, to prepare your plan documents for all new multifamily and commercial buildings and for any project with a calculated project value of \$75,000 or more. Well-prepared plans have a much higher chance of being efficiently reviewed. SDCI cannot make recommendations for any professional services. We encourage you to research reputable professional organizations such as the American Institute of Architects Washington Council, the Structural Engineers Association of Washington, and others. You can verify their licensing at the Washington State Department of Licensing.

## Getting Your Building Code and Construction Questions Answered

As you prepare your design and permit application you likely will have questions. SDCI is here to help. This can be a complicated task and this Tip, along with online coaching and assistance, can help you assemble a successful submittal package for your construction permit. Our goal is to help you understand the ordinance and structural requirements of the Seattle Building and Fire codes. We can assist you in how to demonstrate code compliance with a prepared architectural and structural design for the building and site, along with the supporting materials, reports, calculations, and legal documents, such as easements and disclosures.

You can get virtual building code coaching and access SDCI's assistance and services via the SDCI [Virtual ASC](#). Through the Virtual ASC, you can consult SDCI experts who can answer questions about your project and the construction application process.

For simple questions, coaching is available via our [online chat](#). Those coaching sessions are generally 20 minutes. If you have a complex situation, or if you have a long list of questions, you may benefit from an online paid coaching session with SDCI staff, by appointment. Please submit a [Construction Pre-Submittal Conference Application Form](#).

### Construction Pre-Submittal Conferences

We require construction pre-submittal conferences for high-rise structures and buildings that include an atrium. See Tip 318, [Construction Pre-Submittal Conference](#).

You may also schedule a voluntary construction pre-submittal conference. The application and instructions for how to apply are found on the [Construction Pre-Submittal Conference Application Form](#).

A voluntary construction pre-submittal conference is your opportunity to ask questions about code issues that figure prominently in the success of your project. At the construction pre-submittal conference, you can ask SDCI and Seattle Fire Department experts questions related to:

- Structural design and ordinance regulations in the Seattle Building Code
- Unusual structural systems
- Projects requiring ECA exemptions
- Additions and alterations that trigger Substantial Alterations provisions of the Seattle Existing Building Code
- Fire protection systems and alarms per the Seattle Fire Code
- Accessibility, energy, and mechanical requirements.

The report generated from this conference is binding. You can use it to proceed with confidence that decisions outlined in the report will not be overturned during the plan review of your application.

### Step 3. Submit a Preliminary Application Package

SDCI's permit application process is done via the [Seattle Services Portal](#). For this you will need to register for an account. See our video, [Seattle Services Portal Overview](#), for information on how to use the Seattle Services Portal.

You can also reference the permit application process for this and other types of permits on the [How Do You Get a Permit](#) webpage.

Once you are logged into your SDCI Seattle Services Portal account you can begin your application for a building permit. The first step is to complete the preliminary application.

When you are submitting a **new multifamily or commercial construction** project, reference your existing MUP application and your completed Preliminary Application Report (PAR) in your building permit application project description. This PAR identifies requirements and regulations by SDCI and other City departments. For example, there may be required right-of-way and utility improvements (SDOT), high voltage lines requiring building clearance (SCL), or mapped Environmentally Critical Area (ECA) that requires an exemption. Hopefully these findings are simply confirming information gleaned during previous land use code coaching sessions. The PAR is valid for either 18 or 24 months, depending on the type of project, and does not need to be repeated for the building permit unless it has expired. (See Tip 213A, [Application Requirements for Short Subdivisions and Unit Lot Subdivisions](#), Tip 213B, [Application Requirements for Lot Boundary Adjustments](#), Tip 213C, [Subdivision Process and Requirements](#)).

If you are submitting an application for **alterations or additions** to an existing building or if you are applying for tenant improvements, you need to schedule a PASV inspection if you are proposing site or foundation work. You also need to schedule a PASV inspection if the site is mapped as an ECA, or you will be creating ground disturbance that is greater than 750 square feet in area.

If you are applying for a **demolition** permit, there are specific requirements and a separate application process. See the [demolition permits](#) webpage for more information.

Our land use code has special rules for [demolition of housing](#). In some cases, we won't issue your demolition permit until we have first issued a master use permit or accepted your building permit application. If you'd like to deconstruct your building instead of demolishing it, you may be able to get a [deconstruction permit](#) before we issue the building permit.

## How to Submit a Construction Pre-Application

See [How to Submit a Construction or Land Use Pre-Application](#) for step-by-step instructions for submitting your pre-application.

You will need to upload a PDF copy of your site plan. The site plan is an accurate drawing or map of a property that shows its size and shape and the size, shape, and location of man-made and natural features (such as buildings, structures, driveways, and trees) on the property. Site plans show both what currently exists on the site and what physical changes you wish to make to the site. New multifamily and commercial buildings require an Enhanced Site Plan – you can use the same site plan you used for the MUP application as long as it accurately portrays the scope of new construction work. Alterations and additions to these types of buildings may only require a Basic Site Plan. Directions for what is required for these types of site plans are listed in Tip 103, [Site Plan Guidelines](#).

SDCI will evaluate the site plan and site inspection results to ensure that it meets the minimum standards for acceptance. If there are items that need to be added or corrected, you will be notified by email. Once you complete the necessary changes/corrections you can resubmit your application per the instructions. After we accept your pre-application you will receive a construction (-CN) record number.

We strongly recommend that begin your pre-application two to three months before your project will be ready to submit to SDCI for intake. This will give you the necessary time to incorporate any requirements identified by other City departments into your project design before you submit your application.

## Step 4. Prepare Detailed Plans, Forms and Calculations for Submittal

### Plan Requirements

See the following Checklists and Screening Standards for detailed information about you must include in your plan sets and supporting documents.

#### New development:

- [New Large Multi-Family Project Checklist](#)
- [New Large Multi-Family Screening Standards](#)
- [New Small Multi-Family Project Checklist](#)
- [New Small Multi-Family Screening Standards](#)

- [New Commercial or Multi-Use Project Checklist](#)

- [New Commercial Screening Standards](#)

#### Alterations/additions to an existing buildings:

- [Commercial Tenant Improvement Checklist](#)
- [Commercial Tenant Improvement Screening Standards](#)

#### Additional application forms:

SDCI forms are available on our [forms webpage](#).

Below are common SDCI forms needed in your application or plan set:

- [Energy code forms](#) - This web page has information and web links to required forms needed to demonstrate compliance with the current energy code for multifamily and commercial buildings.
- [Stormwater Control Plan \(CSC\)](#) - soil stabilization over winter months, sediment retention on-site, prevention of pollution, and construction vehicle access.
- [Drainage and Waste Water Control Plan](#) - required for projects causing site disturbance of less than 5,000 square feet of new or replaced impervious surface.

## Step 5. Submit Your Application for Optional Screening

We offer optional application screening for construction projects (-CN records) only. Upload your application materials to the [Seattle Services Portal](#) and we will help ensure you have what you need for us to accept (intake) your permit application package. For instructions, read [How to Submit a Construction \(-CN\) Application for Screening](#).

## Step 6. Schedule an Intake Appointment

The next step in submitting your application to SDCI is to schedule an intake appointment. Read [How to Schedule an Inspection or Appointment](#) for more detailed instructions.

SDCI's [Next Available Intake Appointment Times](#) document shows how far in the future we're scheduling intake appointments.

During the intake appointment, SDCI staff review and evaluate your building permit application to ensure that you have provided and completed all required forms, documents, and procedures. Staff will determine which reviews are required for your application and will assign any additional requirements. Most intake appointments are completed on the date they are scheduled.

- You do not need to come to our office or be onsite during your appointment.
- You need to be available for questions. We may call or email you on your appointment day for more information.

**Tip: Submit your completed application early** to be eligible for an earlier appointment in case of a cancellation. Once you submit your application, we'll add your project to the Intake Express Lane. This means your application will likely be taken in well ahead of your scheduled appointment. We can usually take in your application within 2-3 weeks after you upload your complete application. For more information, read [How Can I Get in the Intake Express Lane?](#)

If your application is deemed unprepared—meaning you are missing documents and forms to the extent that we cannot evaluate the scope of work nor determine the required reviews—SDCI will reject your application and you will need to schedule a new intake appointment. If you find you are not going to be prepared at the time of your appointment, you should cancel the intake. To avoid a cancellation fee, cancel at least 24 hours before your intake appointment. You can cancel your intake appointment by through the [Seattle Services Portal](#). If you need assistance cancelling your appointment, please request help through our [Virtual ASC](#).

### Submit Your Permit Application

- Review the checklists and standards on our [forms webpage](#) and gather all the necessary documentation for your application.
- You must upload all application documents by 7:00 a.m. on the day of your appointment. We may contact you by phone or email that day for more information.
- You must pay all fees once we determine your application is complete. If you don't pay your fees within 48 hours, we will reject your intake appointment and you will need to reschedule.
- If a Street Improvement Plan (SIP) is required, you must submit a 60% complete SIP to the Seattle Department of Transportation, and it must be screened and accepted 5 days before your SDCI construction intake appointment.
- See [How to Submit Materials for Intake](#) for more information.

### Permit Reviews and Estimated Turn-around Times

We always require land use code and zoning, drainage, building code, fire code, energy code, and accessibility reviews for multifamily and commercial plan review projects. Depending on your specific proposal, you may need additional reviews such as conveyance, mechanical, geotechnical, shoring, revegetation, or Finance and Administrative Services ADA compliance, among others.

#### Initial Review

Turnaround times for initial plan reviews vary throughout the year. The following estimates are general guides only. During heavy volume, these time frames can double; please plan your projects accordingly.

- Minor additions or alterations to multifamily or commercial buildings: 2 weeks
- Complex addition/alteration review: 8 weeks
- New multifamily or commercial buildings: 8 weeks or more.

SDCI expedites review times for projects participating in the Priority Green Incentive Program. To be eligible for Priority Green Expedited, your project must be approved by the SDCI Green Team a minimum of 2 weeks before your construction intake appointment. For more information, please visit [Priority Green Expedited Review](#).

#### Plan Review

Plan review is simultaneously performed by a team of professional examiners, engineers, specialists, and planners. Each reviewer assigned to your project evaluates the plan set and supporting documents to determine whether the project complies with the relevant codes in effect at the time that your project is submitted.

All of the codes that Seattle enforces are available free of charge on our web site at our [Codes webpage](#). If you wish to purchase Seattle codes see [How to Purchase Seattle Code Books From SDCI](#).

When you have non-project-specific code questions, you can chat with technical experts via the SDCI virtual Applicant Service Center. For more information see [Chat with an SDCI Staff Expert](#). When you have questions about a specific code-related correction, you should contact the individual reviewer via their email listed on the correction letter.

When corrections and clarifications are required, a reviewer writes a list that you will receive in the form of a digital correction letter—one from each individual reviewer. Once all of the reviewers have completed their reviews, you will be able to respond to all of the correction letters and upload your responses and a revised plan set. See our [video demonstration of this plan review process](#).

Multifamily or commercial projects often have more than one round of corrections from reviewers. To keep your project on time, you should plan for more than one round of reviews when you create a schedule for your project.

### Tracking Your Permit During Review

You can get information about your permit as it is being processed by checking the status through the Seattle Services Portal. See [Frequently Asked Questions About SDCI Review Status and Target Due Dates](#) for more information.

### Step 7. Make Corrections and Resubmit Your Plans

After you submit your permit application, we will review your plans. If we need additional information or changes to your plans, you will receive an email telling you that corrected and/or additional documents can be uploaded into your portal.

- See [How to Respond to Review Comments](#) for more information.
- Watch our video on [How to Respond to Corrections](#) for more information.
- Read [How to Upload a Document to an Existing SDCI Permit](#) for additional instructions.

### Permit Issuance

Once the reviewers have approved your project, we will stamp the plans, and calculate final fees. This process can take us several days, depending on the project's complexity. You will be notified by email when your permit and plans are ready to be issued. You must pay any remaining fee before we issue your permit.

### Step 8. Pay Fees

You must pay a minimum of 75 percent of the permit fee at your intake appointment. You will pay the remaining fees before we issue your permit.

- You may pay fees online through the [Seattle Services Portal](#). We accept Visa and Mastercard. If you need to pay in person, you can come to the Seattle Municipal Tower (see the [Virtual ASC](#) webpage for hours.)
- If you have questions about fees, see [How Much Will Your Permit Cost?](#)
- For help paying fees, see [How to Pay Fees](#).
- If you need to pay by check, see [How Do I Pay by Check](#).
- You will get a confirmation page when you have successfully submitted your payment. If you don't, contact our cashier to check payment status at [SClaccounting@seattle.gov](mailto:SClaccounting@seattle.gov).

### Step 9. Print Permit and Plans

Print out the permit and the approved plan set. You should always have a clean and legible paper copy of the building permit and the **SDCI stamped approved plans** available at the construction site for the SDCI building inspectors. You cannot use digital media or devices to display the permit and plan set.

### Inspections

After your building permit is issued, we inspect your work to make sure it is done according to the approved plans and the applicable building codes. As a permit holder, it is your responsibility to schedule each inspection. See our [Construction Inspections webpage](#) for more information. Common inspections are listed below.

- **Site inspection** (before first ground disturbance - erosion control requirement)
- **Preconstruction meeting** (held before any ground disturbances or beginning of construction)
- **Foundation** inspections (before placing any structural concrete)
- **Sub floor** inspections (before covering the floor framing)
- **Structural** inspections (before covering any structural element/systems or sheathing)
- **Mechanical/refrigeration** inspections (requires separate SDCI mechanical permits)
- **Electrical** inspections (requires separate electrical permits)

- **Plumbing/gas piping** inspections (requires separate permits from [King County Permits](#))
- **Fire** inspections (requires separate fire and mechanical permits)
- **Conveyance** inspections (before equipment becomes operational)
- **Framing** inspection (before insulating or covering framing of interior and exterior walls)
- **Ceiling** inspection (after ceiling grid, bracing, and MEP is installed but before placing ACT)
- **Insulation** inspection (after insulation is installed and before installing any permanent finishes)
- **Final** inspection (after all construction is complete and all related permits have received a final inspection approval)

### Certificates of Occupancy

**A Temporary Certificate of Occupancy (TCO)** allows partial and/or phased occupancy of buildings being newly constructed, and to continue partial occupancy in existing buildings undergoing a remodel. The basic requirement for obtaining a Temporary Certificate of Occupancy is that all required fire and life safety systems must be complete and functioning throughout the building. Both SDCI and the Seattle Fire Department must approve requests for TCO's before they are issued. Each department will inspect and approve different portions of the building for a TCO. See our Joint Rule [Partial/Phased Occupancy, Occupancy During Construction and Temporary Certificates of Occupancy](#) for more information.

**A Certificate of Occupancy (C of O)** indicates that the project complies with the regulations for occupancy and activity required by the Seattle Building Code (Section 109). A C of O is typically for an entire building, exterior and interior (called "shell and core"), and all occupancies proposed within the building (e.g., offices and retail). However, assembly occupancies (e.g., theatres or restaurants) require separate certificates. Tenant improvements do not require a C of O unless there is a change in occupancy per the Building Code. See Tip 120, [Getting a Certificate of Occupancy](#), for more information.

### Waste Diversion Report

All new building projects and large tenant improvements require you to submit a waste diversion report directly to Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) within 60 days of our final inspection approval. Your waste diversion report should show the quantity and types of materials that were salvaged, recycled, or taken to a landfill. A copy of the waste diversion report and directions for how to submit it to SPU are found here: [Construction and Demolition Waste Management](#).

### Access to Information

Links to electronic versions of SDCI Tips, Director's Rules, and the Seattle Municipal Code are available on our website at [www.seattle.gov/sdci](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci).