

# Seattle Permits

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

## Getting a Multifamily or Commercial Construction Permit from SDCI

Updated July 13, 2020

This Tip is designed to help you through the construction permit process when you want to construct a new multifamily or commercial building, or when you want to add an addition to an existing multifamily or commercial building. It provides general information on:

- How to apply for your construction permit
- What resources and assistance are available at SDCI and other City departments
- How long the process is likely to take
- How to track permit status
- How the permit is issued
- How and when to schedule inspections

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.

Any building that contains commercial tenants is considered a commercial building. Mixed-use buildings with both residential and commercial uses will also be treated as commercial buildings.

### CONSTRUCTION PERMITS

New construction and most alterations of multifamily and commercial buildings will require plan review as part of the construction permit approval process. If your project is 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.

### Applying for a Construction Permit

Our goal is to provide you with assistance in advance of your application submittal, so that your application materials are complete and accurate, reducing the need for correction cycles that will delay approval.

#### Step 1. Coaching

Coaching for land use and construction is not required, but is available in-person at our Applicant Services Center. For a fee, additional zoning coaching with a senior land use planner is available by appointment. Appointments are available in one-hour increments and you must pay the fee before your appointment. The cost of this coaching appointment may be found in our Permit Fee Subtitle: [www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-\(a-z\)/fees](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-(a-z)/fees). Sometimes we can answer simple building permit or land use questions through our on-line Q & A: <http://web6.seattle.gov/dpd/LUQnA/>.

Coaching sessions can help you identify unique or particular issues with your proposed project. It is important to receive coaching from a land use planner to determine what is allowed on your property, what development standards apply, whether your project will require a land use permit, and what the permit process will entail.

During coaching, you can explain your project to a planner, who will then help you identify whether any land use permits will be required for your project. The number of dwelling units, the total square footage of the proposed building(s), the amount of parking, and the zoning of the property are primary factors in determining whether SEPA review, shoreline review, design review, and other discretionary reviews will be required. Except for unit lot subdivision permits, most land use permit approvals must be obtained before a construction permit can be approved for your project.

#### Pre-Submittal Conferences

Pre-submittal conferences, for both land use and construction are required for multifamily or commercial projects that trigger the design review process (see Tip 238, *Design Review: General Information, Application*



*Instructions, and Submittal Requirements*). Pre-submittal conferences are also required for highrise structures and buildings that include an atrium (see Tip 318, *Building Code Pre-design/Code Interpretation Conferences*).

Information on how to schedule a pre-submittal conference can be obtained during coaching in the ASC. Please note that you need to submit a preliminary application package (see Steps 3 and 4) prior to or at the time of requesting a pre-submittal conference.

## Step 2. Land Use

It is important to find out early whether your project will need a land use permit, 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 complexity.

Related information to assist you in determining whether your project requires a land use permit are:

- Tip 208, *When Environmental Review is Required in Seattle*
- Tip 209, *Master Use Permit Application Requirements for Shoreline Permits*
- Tip 210, *Master Use Permit Requirements for Variances*
- Tip 211A, *Master Use Permit Requirements for Administrative Conditional Use (in Single Family 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 242, *Tree Protection Regulations in Seattle*
- Tip 327a, *Environmentally Critical Areas Exemptions and Modifications to Submittal Requirements*
- Tip 331, *Environmentally Critical Areas—Tree and Vegetation Overview*

## Step 3. Research and Prepare a Preliminary Site Plan for Your Proposed Project

Your preliminary site plan should be prepared according to the standards outlined in Tips 103, *Site Plan Requirements* and 103A, *Site Plan Guidelines*. Be sure to show:

- Where your structure(s) will be located,

- The amount of other impervious surfaces, such as walkways or asphalt paving the general topography of your site
- The existing level of street and alley improvements in the right-of-ways bordering your site

If there is an existing buried oil tank on the site that must be removed, you need a permit. For more information, read the Seattle Fire Department's Administrative Rule 34.02.07, *Decommissioning Residential Heating Oil Tanks*, available at [www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/Fire/Business/AdRule34.02.07.pdf](http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/Fire/Business/AdRule34.02.07.pdf).

One copy of the preliminary site plan will be needed for Step 4.

## Step 4. Submit a Preliminary Application Package

Once you know for sure that you are going to build a multifamily or commercial project in Seattle, you should submit a preliminary application package using the Seattle Services Portal at <https://cosaccela.seattle.gov/Portal/welcome.aspx>. A separate package is required for any required land use permits, in addition to the construction permit.

You can get the forms for the preliminary application package during coaching or on our website at [www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/forms](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/forms). The package includes the following:

- Preliminary application form
- One copy of the preliminary site plan, meeting the standards of Tips 103 & 103A, as prepared in Step 3.

The preliminary permit application package does not constitute a permit application, but informs City departments that you intend to apply for a permit in the near future. Submit your package through the Seattle Services Portal at <https://cosaccela.seattle.gov/Portal/welcome.aspx>.

The forms ask that you provide owner and applicant information, a project description and project characteristics, and property related information, including the legal description and the King County Assessor's Parcel Number (APN). After screening the preliminary application to make sure it is complete, our staff will provide you with a project number you can use to track your project throughout the permitting process.

Most Land Use applications or projects involving ground disturbance will typically require us to conduct a site visit. If you have a new construction project, we will share

this information from the site visit with other City departments. They will then have the opportunity to inform you of other important requirements. For example, required right-of-way and utility improvements or whether the site is in an Environmentally Critical Area. It will typically take up to 12 days for us to identify the City requirements.

Once we have determined if there are other requirements for your project, we will mail, email, or fax our findings to you. For this reason, we strongly recommend that you submit the Preliminary Permit Application package a minimum of 8 weeks prior to your desired date for project submittal. Submitting the application form early will provide the time necessary to incorporate any requirements identified by other City departments into your project design prior to submittal.

### Step 5. Prepare Detailed Plans for Submittal

The City requirements that we send you in Step 3 should be incorporated into your project design and plan documentation, and you should finalize your detailed plans for the proposed development.

### Plan Requirements

- Each plan set should include the items on the appropriate screening checklist. You can find these checklists at [www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/forms](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/forms). Usually, the plan set includes a site plan; floor, roof, and foundation/basement plans; elevation drawings; and all related structural plans and details. Also include landscaping plans, grading or drainage plans, and street and alley improvement plans.
- Detailed information about the specific information required on the plan sheets is outlined in the screening standard documents for multifamily and commercial projects. These documents are available online at [www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/forms](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/forms) or you can get them during a coaching visit in the ASC.

We require a minimum of four full plan sets. We may require up to nine full sets depending on the project scope and the number of distinct reviews involved. During coaching sessions, we will specify the number of plan sets required based on your project scope.

### Using Professional Designers and Licensed Engineers

We require you to use a professional designer or licensed engineer to prepare your plan documentation for multifamily and commercial projects for any project with a value of \$75,000 or more. Well-prepared plans have a much higher chance of being efficiently reviewed. Our

staff cannot recommend designers and builders, but suggest consulting the Yellow Pages and design and construction associations for information about their services.

### Additional Application Forms

You can pick up your application forms at the Applicant Services Center (ASC). Most forms are also available at [www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/forms](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/forms). For projects requiring plan review, your plan sets with supporting documents constitute your application.

- Financial responsibility form — required in order to identify who will be held responsible for the permitting project fees and costs.
- Contractor disclosure information — required for all construction projects with a value of more than \$5,000, and requires information under Washington State law that must be posted at the job site (e.g., owner, prime contractor, lending institution, etc.).
- Construction Stormwater Control (CSC) and Drainage Standard Plans — usually required for projects causing site disturbance of less than 5,000 square feet of new or replaced impervious surface. The issues addressed by the CSC plan include soil stabilization over winter months, sediment retention on-site, prevention of pollution, and construction vehicle access.
- Equipment sizing form — deals with Seattle Energy Code requirements, and is needed if your project contains over 500 square feet of new heated space.
- Target UA calculation form — required if you are not using the Prescriptive Energy Code compliance standards.
- Salvage Assessment - required when either the area of work is greater than 750 square feet or project value exceeds \$75,000, and involves some or total demolition. The assessment helps determine which waste materials from your project can possibly be salvaged and reused. You can find the salvage assessment form on our forms page at: [www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/forms](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/forms).

### Step 6. Screening

We require screening prior to submitting your application unless you are on our list of consistently prepared applicants. This review is to verify that your plans, forms and other documents are complete before you submit them. You must complete steps 3 and 4 before screening. We provide screening in the ASC on a walk-in basis; expect some wait time as there is often a line for these services. We do not charge a fee for your screening. In

some instances, your screening can be requested and completed through the Seattle Services Portal at: <https://cosaccela.seattle.gov/Portal/welcome.aspx>.

## Step 7. Submit Your Street Improvement Engineering Plans

For multifamily and commercial projects that require street or alley improvements, you need to submit the right-of-way (ROW) plans to the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT). Your ROW plans need to be accepted for review before you submit your construction permit plans to us. **We will not accept Construction permit applications for new buildings until the SDOT plan has been accepted.** Street improvement plans must be submitted to SDOT five days in advance for review. SDOT sends us the date on which your plans are accepted for review, which must be prior to your construction permit intake appointment.

## Step 8. Schedule an Intake Appointment

You must schedule an intake appointment to submit your application. Visit the ASC or call (206) 684-8850 to schedule an appointment. Intake appointment wait times vary seasonally, from three working days to several weeks.

You will be required to pay a minimum of 75 percent of the permit fee at your intake appointment. Permit fees are established by the Seattle Permit Fee Subtitle available from the PRC, (206) 684-8467, or on our fees page at [www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-\(a-z\)/fees](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-(a-z)/fees).

## PERMIT REVIEWS AND ESTIMATED TURNAROUND TIMES

We always require zoning and building code reviews for multifamily and commercial plan review projects. Depending on your specific proposal, you may need additional reviews, including: energy/mechanical, geotechnical, shoring, ECA, grading/drainage, health, and fire.

### Initial Review

Turnaround times for initial plan reviews vary throughout the year. The following estimates are useful as 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: 48 hrs-2 weeks
- Complex addition/alteration review: 8 weeks

- Standard plans — initial review of standard plan projects: 8 weeks
- Standard plans — subsequent submittals: 1 week
- New multifamily or commercial buildings: 8 weeks

We may reduce some review times for projects participating in the Priority Green Incentive Program. For more information, please visit: [www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/green-building](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/green-building).

## Correction Review

It is common for reviewers to identify corrections on multifamily or commercial projects. Many “corrections,” however, are actually requests for more information—another good reason for taking advantage of our coaching services.

We send correction notices by mail, email, or through our online Project Portal, along with the reviewer’s name and phone number. Contact your reviewer directly if you have questions about the requested corrections. We will notify you when all sets are available for correction. Plans needing correction can be either mailed directly to you, accessed through the Seattle Services Portal at <https://cosaccela.seattle.gov/Portal/welcome.aspx>, or picked up at SDCI Plans Routing, located on the 20th floor of the Seattle Municipal Tower at 700 Fifth Ave. To learn more about how to respond to corrections, please visit: [www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits).

It usually takes us 2-3 weeks to re-review a project after you make the requested corrections and re-submit your plans. 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 looking online at <https://cosaccela.seattle.gov/Portal/welcome.aspx> or by checking our online Project Portal. You can also get construction project status by calling 684-8850 and land use project status by calling 684-8467.

## PERMIT ISSUANCE

Once we have completed all review approvals for your project, we will compile the plans and documentation, check to ensure consistency among plan sets, and

calculate final fees. This process can take us several days, depending on the project complexity. You will be notified by phone or mail when your plans are ready for issuance, and including whether you need to pay any remaining fees.

After you have been notified, we will issue your approved plans at the Plans Routing desk in the ASC. You can pick them up on a walk-in basis during normal business hours. However, the process of retrieving an issued permit can take an hour or more, so we recommend arriving at least an hour prior to close of business to ensure the process can be completed on a single business day.

## INSPECTIONS

Our required inspections for your project are identified on the back of the issued construction permit. To request a building inspection, call the 24-hour inspection request line at (206) 684-8950.

We provide same-day inspections for requests made by 7:00 a.m. Please call (206) 684-8950.

## WASTE DIVERSION REPORT

Most projects 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: [www.seattle.gov/utilities/businesses-and-key-accounts/construction/construction-waste/recycling-requirements/waste-diversion-report](http://www.seattle.gov/utilities/businesses-and-key-accounts/construction/construction-waste/recycling-requirements/waste-diversion-report).

## GENERAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

The Public Resource Center is our general information center, and provides informational documents and codes, and access to current master use permit files. The PRC is also the home of the Microfilm Library, where property plan and permit history may be available for your property.

The Applicant Services Center provides application assistance and intake for all applications, including land use permits, construction permits, and associated permits such as electrical, furnace, boiler, and sign permits. The ASC includes the drainage and site development desks, as well as an SDOT representative available for questions. ASC staff also review subject-to-field-inspection and 48-hour permits.

The PRC and ASC are located on the 20th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower:

SDCI Applicant Services Center  
700 Fifth Ave., Suite 2000  
P.O. Box 34019  
Seattle, WA 98124-34019

- ASC main phone number: (206) 684-8850
- PRC main phone number: (206) 684-8467
- SDCI Online: [www.seattle.gov/sdci](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci)

## Other City Departments

- Seattle Fire Department  
301 2nd Ave. South  
Seattle, WA 98104  
(206) 386-1400
- Seattle Department of Transportation  
700 5th Ave., Suite 3900  
P.O. Box 34996  
Seattle, WA 98124-4996  
(206) 684-ROAD (7623)
- Seattle Public Utilities  
700 5th Ave., Suite 4900  
P.O. Box 34018  
Seattle, WA 98124-4018  
(206) 684-3000
- Seattle City Light  
700 5th Ave., Suite 3300  
P.O. Box 34023  
Seattle, WA 98104-5031  
(206) 684-3000
- Seattle Department of Neighborhoods  
(historic districts, landmark structures)  
700 5th Ave., Suite 1700  
P.O. Box 94649  
Seattle, WA 98124-4649  
(206) 684-0464

## Codes to Help with Multifamily and Commercial Applications

The PRC sells copies of all codes SDCI administers. You can find most of the codes online at [www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes).

- Seattle Land Use Code (Seattle Municipal Code [SMC] Ch. 23)
- Seattle Building Code (2015 International Building Code and Seattle amendments)

- Seattle Residential Code (2015 International Residential Code) for townhouses not more than three stories in height
- Seattle Existing Building Code (2015 International Existing Building Code and Seattle amendments)
- Seattle Energy Code (Seattle supplement to Washington Administrative Code Ch. 51-11)
- Stormwater, Grading and Drainage Control (SGDC) Ordinance (SMC Ch. 22.800-22.808)
- Environmentally Critical Areas (ECA) Ordinance (SMC Ch. 25.09)

## TIPS TO HELP WITH MULTIFAMILY AND COMMERCIAL APPLICATIONS

### Plan Standards

- Tip 103, *Site Plan Requirements* — describes and illustrates the information required on plot plans; sources of further information are also provided. The purpose of a plot plan is to show, to scale, property lines, the location and dimensions of all existing structures, and the location of the proposed work.
- Tip 103A, *Site Plan Guidelines* — provides tips on how to prepare a site plan.
- Tip 106, *General Standards for Plans and Drawings* — provides drawing standards, including quality, scale and size.

### Code and General Information

- Tip 116A, *Establishing an Attached Accessory Dwelling Unit*
- Tip 116B, *Establishing a Backyard Cottage*
- Tip 117, *Parking Waivers for Accessory Dwelling Units*
- Tips 120, *Getting a Certificate of Occupancy*
- Tip 208, *When Environmental Review is Required in Seattle*
- Tip 238, *Design Review: General Information, Application Instructions and Submittal Requirements*
- Tip 241, *Calculating Required Parking for Commercial Projects*
- Tip 242, *Tree Protection Regulations in Seattle*
- Tip 313, *Required Pre-Design Conferences for High-*

*rise Structures and Buildings with an Atrium*

- Tip 314, *Seattle Building Code Requirements for Existing Buildings that Undergo Substantial Alterations*
- Tip 336, *Sustainable Building and Reuse of Building Materials*
- Tip 337, *Demolition Permits*

## Related Permitting Information From Other City Departments

Seattle Public Utilities

- CAM 1101, *Drainage and Wastewater: Regulation of Development*
- CAM 1201, *Water Availability Certificate*
- CAM 1202, *Water Service Application*
- CAM 1301, *Solid Waste: Information for Developers*

Seattle Department of Neighborhoods

- CAM 2206, *Interdepartmental Permit Coordination for New Construction Projects*
- CAM 3000, *Historic Preservation and SEPA Review*

You can get Tips listed here in person at the PRC, by mail, or on our website at [web6.seattle.gov/dpd/cams/CamList.aspx](http://web6.seattle.gov/dpd/cams/CamList.aspx). SDCI's website, [www.seattle.gov/sdci](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci), includes a complete listing of publications available to assist you in the permitting process.

## Access to Information

Links to electronic versions of SDCI **Tips**, **Director's Rules**, and the **Seattle Municipal Code** are available on the "Tools and Resources" page of our website at [www.seattle.gov/sdci](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci). Paper copies of these documents, as well as additional regulations mentioned in this Tip, are available from our Public Resource Center, located on the 20th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower at 700 Fifth Ave. in downtown Seattle, (206) 684-8467.