

# Seattle Permits

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

## Getting a Residential Dwelling Unit Permit from SDCI

Updated February 24, 2025

This Tip is designed to help you through the permit process to construct a new single-family residence, two-family dwelling, or a combination of both, including new attached and detached accessory dwelling units. This Tip also covers permits for adding accessory dwelling units and large-scale alterations and/or additions to an existing dwelling where the scope of work is too large or complicated to qualify for a [Subject-to-Field-Inspection Permit](#) (STFI). (See pages 5 – 6 for projects that do not qualify for an STFI).

This Tip provides general information on how to:

- Conduct your project research
- Apply for your construction permit
- Prepare and submit your application
- Track the review process and permit status
- Schedule inspections

This Tip also provides information on:

- How the permit is issued
- Additional resources

Under Seattle's residential code, a single-family residence can be the primary home or a detached accessory dwelling unit. A two-family dwelling is a single-family residence with an attached accessory dwelling unit. A single-family residence with two attached accessory dwelling units, commonly referred to as a triplex, is a multifamily building (see Tip 100, [Getting a Multifamily or Commercial Construction Permit from SDCI](#)).

The City requires plan review for building permit applications for single-family residences (SFR), attached

accessory dwelling units (AADU) and detached accessory dwelling units (DADU). We also require plan review for major renovations, alterations, and additions to those types of dwellings.

### Step 1. Zoning Coaching

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 the building permit application.

You can get virtual coaching and access SDCI's assistance and services 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 such as exemptions, variances, and easements. You can also consult virtually with drainage and geotechnical experts. SDCI now offers all coaching 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 land use questions, you may benefit from an online paid zoning coaching session with a land use planner, by appointment. Please submit a [Land Use Pre-Submittal Conference Application Form](#).

These are resources about land use permit requirements:

- Tip 103, [Site Plan Requirements](#)
- Tip 209, [Application Requirements for Shoreline Permits](#)
- Tip 220, [Lot Coverage, Height, Yard, and Garage Standards for Homes in Neighborhood Residential Zones](#)
- Tip 221, [Side Yard Easements and Accessory Structure Agreements for Neighborhood Residential Zones](#)

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Seattle Department of  
Construction & Inspections

- Tip 233, [Sources for Property Information](#)
- Tip 242A, [Tree Requirements Associated with Development](#)
- Tip 257, [Developer Contributions — Mandatory Housing Affordability](#)
- Tip 328, [Environmentally Critical Areas Exemptions](#)
- Tip 337, [Demolition and Deconstruction](#)
- Tip 2204, [Driveways and Curb Cuts](#)
- [Seattle's Tenant Relocation Assistance Ordinance](#)
- [Water Availability Certificate](#)

## Step 2. Residential Code Coaching

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

### Standard Building Permits

For new construction of single-family and two-family residences 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 amendments. 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 [Construction Code Interpretations](#) on SDCI's website.

The Seattle Residential Code typically does not require you to use Washington state licensed professional designers, such as architects and structural engineers, to prepare your plan documents for single-family and duplex structures. (For townhouses see Tip 100, [Getting a Multifamily or Commercial Construction Permit from SDCI](#).) However, well-prepared plans have a much higher chance of being efficiently reviewed. Complex architectural and structural designs for new buildings and alterations to existing homes are developed by an engineer using the Seattle Building Code's performance design. You can use the Seattle Residential Code's prescriptive design (a pre-determined design based on specific project criteria) but that can be cumbersome except for very simple, straightforward structures. 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.

### Subject-to-Field-Inspection Permits

If you plan to remodel your home and the scope of work is very minor, refer to Tip 316, [Subject-to-Field Inspection Permits](#), to determine whether your project qualifies for a subject-to-field-inspection (STFI) permit. An STFI permit is quicker and easier to get than a permit that requires plan review. AADUs and DADUs **always require plan review** and do not qualify for a STFI permit.

When you apply for an STFI permit, SDCI will screen your plans and application materials to determine whether it qualifies as an STFI permit. If so, we will issue the STFI permit and our building inspectors will ensure you are meeting code requirements during their inspections. If your project does not qualify as an STFI, we will tell you to apply for a regular building permit.

### Demolition Permits

We have specific requirements and a separate application process for a demolition permit. See the [Demolition Permit](#) webpage for more information. Our land use code has special rules for demolition of housing. In some cases, we must issue a master use permit or accept your building permit application before we issue your demolition permit. If you deconstruct your building instead of demolishing it, you may be able to get a deconstruction permit before we issue the building permit. When you demolish portions of an existing building to remodel you do not need a separate demolition permit. That type of "soft demolition" is included in the issued building permit. You also do not need a separate demolition permit to demolish accessory structures such as detached garages and sheds. You may include the work in your construction permit.

### Getting Your Residential 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, structural, mechanical, energy compliance, drainage, and stormwater requirements of the Seattle Residential Code and the Seattle Energy Code and the Seattle

Stormwater Code. We can coach 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 residential 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 construction and residential code questions, coaching is available via our [online chat](#). These coaching sessions are generally 20 minutes.

These are resources about building permit requirements:

- Tip 116A, [Establishing an Attached Accessory Dwelling Unit \(AADU\)](#)
- Tip 116B, [Establishing a Detached Accessory Dwelling Unit \(DADU\)](#)
- Tip 132, [Installation of Electric Vehicle \(EV\) Charger for Single-Family and Multifamily homes](#)
- Tip 303A, [Common Residential Code Requirements](#)
- Tip 312, [Decks, Fences and Arbors for Single-Family Homes in Seattle](#)
- Tip 317, [Smoke and Carbon Monoxide alarms, Heat Detectors and Heat Alarms in Residences and Family Home Daycare](#)

### Step 3. Submit a Preliminary Application Package

You apply for an SDCI permit 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. For information on the permit application process, see our [How Do You Get a Permit](#) webpage. Log into your Seattle Services Portal account to begin your building permit application.

The first step to apply for a permit is to complete the preliminary application. See [How to Submit a Construction or Land Use Pre-Application](#) for step-by-step instructions to submit 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. All new construction requires an enhanced site plan. Alterations and additions to existing homes may only require a basic site plan. Carefully review Tip 103, [Site Plan Requirements](#), for directions for what is required on these plans.

For a new single-family and/or duplex construction project, you need a Pre-Application Site Visit (PASV) to understand any special conditions that apply to your site or project. You'll then receive a Preliminary Application Report (PAR), which you should reference in your project description when you submit your application for a new single-family and/or duplex construction project. The 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 areas (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](#)).

When you submit an application for alterations and/or additions to an existing single-family or duplex that includes site or foundation work, you need to schedule a PASV inspection if you will disturb more than 750 square feet of land or disturb any land on a site with an environmentally critical area.

If the property has any steep slope ECAs you will need to apply for an ECA exemption to be allowed to do work within the steep slope area or its 15-foot buffer. To determine if you need an ECA exemption, enter your address on [Seattle's GIS mapping system](#) to see your site characteristics. To apply for the exemption, see [How to Apply for Most Exceptions or Exemptions](#) from SDCI. If we approve your exemption, you need to include all required plans and reports in your plan set and permit application. Attached and detached accessory dwelling units, and new single-family residences with an attached accessory dwelling unit can be in a single application. When your permit application is for two separate buildings such as a new primary dwelling and a detached accessory dwelling unit (or similar combination), SDCI will create a separate application for the accessory building. Both buildings will undergo the intake, review, issuance, and fee payment simultaneously. After the

permits are issued, they are treated as separate permits for inspection purposes.

When you add an attached and/or detached accessory dwelling unit to an existing house, you must include basic floor plans for the existing dwelling even if you aren't proposing improvements or alterations to the existing house. Show all levels of the building and label the rooms and spaces for the functions they serve.

If the existing dwelling has a “mini bar” or “kitchenette” in addition to the main kitchen, the floor plans need to clearly label the surrounding rooms as “Not to be used as a separate dwelling unit.” Otherwise, we will consider the space to be an accessory dwelling unit and it will need to meet those requirements. See Tip 606, [Illegal Dwelling Units](#), for laws and regulations about what is and is not allowed.

### Site Plan Screening

SDCI will evaluate your site plan and site inspection results to ensure that they meet minimum acceptance standards. We will notify you by email if you need to add or correct information on your site plan. Once you complete the necessary changes or corrections, you can resubmit your application based on the instructions in the email you received. After we accept your pre-application, we will assign you a preliminary record number. We strongly recommend that you begin the pre-application process two or three months before you will be ready to submit permit application. This will give you time to incorporate any requirements identified by other City departments into your project before you submit your application. After you have submitted your complete permit application, SDCI will assign your project a construction record number. This number will be the building permit number for the life of the permit.

## Step 4. Prepare to Submit Detailed Plans, Forms, and Calculations

### Architectural and Structural Plan Requirements

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

- [New Single-Family or Duplex Checklist](#)
- [Single-Family Additions and/or Alterations Checklist](#)

### Additional application forms:

SDCI forms are available on our Forms webpage. The following forms are the most commonly required.

- [Energy Code forms](#) - a list of forms required to demonstrate energy code compliance for multifamily and commercial buildings
- [Standard Drainage and Waste Control Plan](#) - required for projects causing site disturbance of less than 5,000 square feet of new or replaced impervious surface
- [Standard Construction Stormwater Control and Soil Amendment Plan](#) - soil stabilization over winter months, sediment retention on-site, prevention of pollution, and construction vehicle access

### Submittal requirements for environmentally critical area sites:

A topographic survey is required when you propose work on a site with a steep slope, potential slide, or known slide area. A geotechnical report is required when you propose work on a site with a steep slope, potential slide, known slide, liquefaction, landfill, or peat settlement prone area. There are a few exceptions. You do not need a topographic survey or geotechnical report if all work is interior with no foundation alterations proposed, and exterior work is limited to window, siding, and roofing replacement. You may request a modification to submittal requirements, to ask for the topographic survey and/or geotechnical report requirement to be waived, if you think they are not needed for your project. See Tip 327A, [Environmentally Critical Areas Exemptions, Relief from Prohibition on Steep Slope Development, and Modifications to Submittal Requirements](#), and our [Environmentally Critical Areas Exemptions](#) website.

## Step 5. Submit Your Application for Optional Screening

We offer optional application screening for construction projects (-CN) 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 Application for Screening](#).

## Step 6. Schedule an Intake Appointment

The next step to submit your application to SDCI is to schedule an intake appointment. Read [How to Schedule an Inspection or Appointment](#) for detailed instructions. SDCI's [Available Permit Appointment Times](#) shows how far in the future we're scheduling intake appointments.

To prepare for your intake appointment, review the checklists and standards on our forms webpage and



gather all the necessary documentation for your application. You must submit your completed application by 7:00 a.m. the day of your intake appointment.

You must pay the permit fees due within 48 hours of the approval of your intake appointment. Please note: we will reject your intake appointment, and you will need to reschedule, if you do not promptly pay the intake fees due. During the intake appointment, SDCI staff evaluate your building permit application to confirm that you have provided all required forms and documents, and that you have completed all required procedures. Staff will determine which reviews are required for your application and will let you know of 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 do need to be available for questions. We may contact you on your appointment day for more information.

We recommend submitting your completed application early to be eligible for an earlier appointment in case of a cancellation. We add all completed applications to the Intake Express Lane. 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 missing documents and forms or if your plan set is not complete, SDCI will reject your application. In that case, you will need to schedule a new intake appointment. If you will not be prepared for 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 through the [Seattle Services Portal](#). If you need assistance cancelling your appointment, please request help through our [Virtual ASC](#).

### **Permit Reviews and Estimated Turn-Around Times**

We always require zoning and addressing reviews for plan review projects. Depending on your specific proposal, you will need additional reviews such as ordinance, structural, geotechnical, shoring, fire, energy, and tree, 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.

- Additions and/or alterations to single-family or duplex buildings including basement attached accessory dwelling units (AADU): 2 – 4 weeks.
- New single-family dwellings or new detached accessory dwelling units (DADU): 4 weeks.
- New combinations of single-family residences attached and/or detached accessory dwelling units (SFR/AADU/DADU) or multiple single-family residences: 8 weeks or more.

#### **Plan Review**

Plan review is conducted simultaneously 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. All Seattle codes are available on our [Codes We Enforce](#) webpage. If you wish to purchase Seattle codes, see [How to Purchase Seattle Code Books From SDCI](#).

When you have project-specific questions about a correction or the relevant code, you should always email the assigned reviewer. You can find the reviewer and their email at the top of each correction letter.

When you have non-project-specific code questions or process and fee questions, you can chat with technical experts via the SDCI [Virtual Applicant Service Center](#). For more information see our [Contact Us](#) webpage.

It can take a few weeks to complete a round of corrections. To keep your project on time, you should plan for multiple rounds of reviews when you create a schedule for your project.

#### **Tracking Your Permit During Review**

You can check the status of your permit 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**

If we need corrections and clarifications to your plans each reviewer will send you a digital correction letter. Once all of the reviewers have completed their reviews, you can respond to all the correction letters by uploading your responses and a revised plan set.

For more information, see:

- [How to View and Respond to Comments](#)
- [How to Respond to Corrections](#)
- [How to Upload a Document to an Existing SDCI Permit](#)

### Permit Issuance

Once your project is approved, we will stamp the digital plans and calculate final fees. This process can take us several days, depending on the project's complexity. We will notify you by email when we are ready to issue your permit and plans.

## Step 8. Pay Fees

You must pay any remaining fee before we issue your permit. You may pay fees online through the [Seattle Services Portal](#). We accept Visa and Mastercard. 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). If you need to pay in person, you can come to the [Seattle Municipal Tower](#) (see the [Virtual ASC](#) webpage for hours.)

For additional information, see:

- [How Much Will Your Permit Cost?](#)
- [How to Pay Fees](#)
- [How Do I Pay by Check?](#)

## Step 9. Print Permit and Plans

Print out the permit, cover sheet, 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.

## Step 10. Inspections

Once you start building your project, we inspect your work to make sure it is done according to the approved plans and the applicable building codes. You will be required to apply for revisions if the completed work does not match the approved plans. See [Building Permit Revisions](#) for more information. It is your responsibility to schedule each inspection. See our [Construction Inspections](#) webpage for more information.

Common inspections are:

- [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 and inspections from [King County Permits](#))
- Framing inspection (before insulating or covering framing of interior and exterior walls)
- 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)

Residential projects such as single-family dwellings, two-family dwellings, AADUs and DADUs, and combinations thereof are not issued certificates of occupancy. The approved final inspection report of the building permit is completed with the statement "OK to Occupy" by the SDCI Building Inspector. This digital record allows the building to be occupied and used as a legal dwelling unit(s) per the approved plans.

### Waste Diversion Report

You are required to submit a waste diversion report directly to Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) within 60 days of our final inspection approval for all new building projects and larger home additions. 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 are on SPU's [Construction and Demolition Waste Management](#) website.

## Access to Information

Links to SDCI Tips, Director's Rules, and the Seattle Land Use Code are available on [SDCI's website](#).