

Seattle Permits

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

Small Business: Getting Your Use and Building Permit from SDCI

Updated July 25, 2022

Small business is important to Seattle and to the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI). If your business is moving into a new space or expanding in your current location, you are likely to need a use and building permit from SDCI. “Use” is the activity and occupation within a building or portion of building, such as retail or auto repair. We can process some small business permits where an established use is staying the same as a subject-to-field-inspection (STFI) permit – see Tip 316, [Subject-to-Field-Inspection Permits](#). Projects that establish or change use and/or occupancy are not eligible for a STFI permit. These projects always require plan review regardless of whether there is any proposed construction in the scope of work. See Director's Rule 10-2020, [Requirement for a Master Use Permit when there is an establishment](#), expansion or change of use, for guidance on when a change of use requires a master use permit.

Tip 102 is designed to guide small business owners through SDCI's permit process. **We strongly urge you to contact SDCI early in your planning. If at all possible, discuss your business plans with our coaching staff before you lease or buy new space.** Researching your project with SDCI may uncover issues that will require special attention. Most use and building permits will take a month or more to process, review and issue; complicated projects can take longer.

RESEARCH

Microfilm Library

For most small businesses, you will begin to research and prepare for your permit application with information from SDCI's Microfilm Library. Email your information request to sci_microfilm@seattle.gov. You should investigate and get

records of the building's type of construction, use(s) and occupancy history. In some cases, current uses and construction for a space were never permitted or approved. In rare cases, you will not be able to continue non-permitted uses or occupy illegal construction. Be sure to research permit history early in your preparations to confirm the legally-established use and occupancy record for the building and tenant space. You should also obtain copies of the permit history for the building, the last approved site plan with associated parking, any parking calculations, and any floor plans for the floor and tenant space. Our staff will use this information to determine the legally-established use, occupancy and related requirements for the building and tenant space.

Applicant Service Center

We offer free 20-minute basic coaching sessions regarding the Land Use Code and the Building Code through the Applicant Service Center (ASC) at www.seattle.gov/sdci/about-us/who-we-are/applicant-services-center. These brief coaching sessions are intended to help customers who are in the feasibility stage of project planning and need specific input before deciding whether to move forward with a project. We will provide zoning (land use), building code, and permit application process information. We recommend you start with Land Use coaching. It is best to begin your research there as the use or change of use must be allowed in the intended location. Once you have determined that the use is allowed, you can discuss your plans with a permit specialist to address any building code items that will need your attention. Some buildings in Seattle are designated as historically significant by the Department of Neighborhoods (DON). If that's the case, your project might need DON's approval as well. Finally, you can discuss the permit application process. Much of this information is also available on the SDCI Home Page, www.seattle.gov/sdci. Free online Land Use and Building Code Q&A is available for simple questions at https://sdci.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/requests/new?ticket_form_id=1500003356822.

www.seattle.gov/sdci



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IMPORTANT ITEMS TO CONSIDER

Discretionary Land Use Approvals

If the scale and scope of your project triggers environmental review (SEPA), a variance, conditional use, or shoreline permit, you should plan for an extended review period needed for public comment and appeal periods. We can help you determine if these elements apply to your project. For environmental review thresholds, see Director's Rule DR 29-2015, [State Environmental Policy Act \(SEPA\) Exemptions From Environmental Review Requirements When Establishing, Changing, Or Expanding a Use](#).

Required Parking

If you are expanding your floor area or changing use, such as from retail to a restaurant, an increased parking requirement may apply. It is important to research this issue very early in the process to determine what is required for your project and what is available on the site to meet those requirements. There may be waivers, exceptions and off-site parking solutions available. If you are one tenant in a building with other tenants, you may need to provide some information on the other uses (often available in the microfilm library). This will allow us to calculate parking requirements.

Accessibility Improvements in Existing Buildings

The Seattle Existing Building Code requires accessibility improvements in existing buildings. The dollar amount you will be required to spend on these improvements is based on a percentage of your overall project costs. All new construction must be fully accessible. We can help you identify required accessibility improvements for your project at an online coaching session through the ASC.

Pre-Submittal Conferences

Complex projects may benefit from a pre-submittal conference. We highly recommend these conferences when there are Land Use and/or Building Code issues that require interpretation and could significantly affect the feasibility of a project. The fees for these conferences are listed on the application form. We record the results and notes from the conference(s) with your project; this information is sent with your plan set to the reviewers. See Tip 318, [Construction Pre-Submittal Conferences](#). Applications for a Land Use conference or a Construction conference are available at the ASC counter or on the SDCI's forms page, www.seattle.gov/dpd/permits/forms.

Using Professional Designers and Licensed Builders

Small business owners are welcome to obtain their own permits, and if you choose to prepare your own application materials, our staff will assist you as much as possible. However, we strongly recommend enlisting the services of a professional designer, architect, engineer or licensed contractor. Well-prepared, fully researched applications typically have fewer correction requests and potentially reduced overall time for plan review. When the valuation of your project exceeds \$75,000, you must have your construction documents prepared and stamped by an architect or engineer licensed in the State of Washington. We cannot recommend designers or builders and suggest you consult the internet and design and construction associations.

APPLYING FOR YOUR USE AND BUILDING PERMIT

Begin Your Permit Application

You can apply for your use and building permit electronically through the Seattle Services Portal, <https://cosaccela.seattle.gov/>.

1. Begin the permit process by creating a Seattle Services Portal Account with your email and contact information.
2. Login to your Seattle Services Portal account.
3. On the Seattle Services Portal home page, under +Create, select Permits - Trade, Construction & Land Use.
4. Choose Building & Land Use Pre-Application
5. Enter your project's site address and click search. Select the correct address if multiple addresses are returned. Then click Continue Application.
6. Provide the applicant and owner contact information. (First try to Look Up a contact, then use Create New to add a new contact if necessary). The applicant and owner can be the same person. You can contact us during the permit application process if these need to be changed later. Choose Continue Application.
7. Name your application something appropriate and provide a simple project description. Leave all the below questions checked NO. Choose Continue Application
8. Complete the remaining 4 items including a project value and then select Continue Application.

9. Create and provide a Basic Site Plan per Tip 103, *Site Plan Requirements* (www.seattle.gov/DPD/Publications/CAM/cam103.pdf).

The King County Assessors website has information needed to create your Site Plan. Google Maps and similar sites can provide a bird's eye image to use as an underlay. When complete, your site plan should have all the information required for a Basic Site Plan per Tip 103, *Site Plan Requirements*, on a sheet size no greater than 11" x 17" and in PDF form. Upload the document. Then choose Continue.

10. Set the Type: Site Plan and enter a Description that portrays the project. Choose Save and then choose Continue Application.
11. Upload the required application forms (see below). Set the Type and Description for each one. Chose Save and then Continue Application.
12. Review all information for accuracy. Select Edit to make changes. Once you have confirmed everything is correct, select Continue Application.

Once you have submitted your application, your project will be assigned a preliminary application record number. SDCI will review your application and assign you a related construction record number. Use the construction record number to schedule your intake appointment for your permit application. See our help article for directions. <https://seattle.gov.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/115004984887-How-to-Schedule-an-Inspection>

Prepare Your Plan Set

For your small business project, you need to provide a floor plan of the tenant space, a key plan (if there is more than one tenant in the building), and a site plan with parking details. At the back of this Tip you will find sample drawings of retail and restaurant tenant spaces, a key plan, and a site plan with parking details. Your plan set should portray and represent how your space and site will be configured at the time your business opens and operates. It is important that all plan sheets conform to Tip 106, [General Standards for Plans and Drawings](#).

Required Application Forms

You should complete the following documents and upload them with your plan set as part of your permit application package. These forms are available at SDCI's forms page, www.seattle.gov/dpd/permits/forms.

- [Statement of Financial Responsibility Agent Authorization](#)

- [Waste Diversion Plan](#) (for projects greater than 750 square feet in area)

Fees

Permit fees are based upon the value of the work to be performed as established in the current [Seattle Fee Subtitle](#). Interior alteration projects have an associated project value. You are required to give us a "fair market value" for your proposed project, including all labor and materials at current market rates, whether paid for or not. You will pay approximately 80 percent of the estimated permit fees at your intake appointment. You can pay by mailing a check to SDCI or pay online through your Seattle Services Portal account at cosaccella.seattle.gov/Portal/welcome.aspx

Reviews

At the time of intake, your project will be assigned to the appropriate reviewers for your project's proposed scope of work. Most simple projects undergo zoning and ordinance review. More complex projects require review by the Fire Department, structural, energy/mechanical, and/or others depending on your project. You can get information about your project as it is being reviewed by visiting our website, www.seattle.gov/sdci. You will need either the site address or the project/permit number to track our review. If you receive a correction notice(s), carefully review the accompanying letter for how to make the corrections, revise your plan set to address and incorporate the correction items, and upload a complete new set into the portal. Note that all reviews must be complete (approved or failed) on a cycle before you can upload your revised set into the portal.

Permit Issuance

You will be notified by e-mail when your plans have been approved by SDCI and other relevant city agencies. Once you have been notified, pay the remaining permit fees online. After you pay your fees, you will be notified that we have issued your permit. It is your responsibility to print out the approved plans and permit document. We do not allow occupancy until all permitted work has been completed, all inspections have been approved and, if needed, a certificate of occupancy has been issued by SDCI.

INSPECTIONS

To request a building inspection, schedule online through the Seattle Services Portal at cosaccella.seattle.gov/Portal/welcome.aspx, or call the 24-hour inspections line at (206) 684-8900. Same-day inspections are provided

for requests made by 7:00 a.m. If you have questions for your inspector, call (206) 684-8950. The timing and type of required inspections are described on the flip side of your official building permit document and on our web page.

OTHER PERMITS AND DEPARTMENTS

Sign permits – are required for business signs larger than 5 square feet or connected to an electrical power source, including outline and border tube lighting. SDCI issues these permits, which require plan review. Some signs may also need an Urban Conservation certificate of approval or SDOT annual permit approval before we can issue a sign permit. Visit our sign permit page: www.seattle.gov/dpd/permits/permittypes/signawningbillboard/default.htm.

Mechanical permits - are approved by SDCI. Permits for range hoods are approved according to the process in Tip 414, *STFI Mechanical Permits for Commercial and Multifamily Residential*, and Tip 415, *Applicant Responsibilities and Plan Requirements for Mechanical Permits*.

Electrical permits - are required for wiring and service upgrades and are obtained from SDCI's Electrical Counter in the ASC or online through the SDCI Portal.

Health Department permits - for food preparation or handling, pet daycares, pet boarders, pet grooming shops, animal shelters, pet shops, pet food retailers, poultry retailers (sales of birds), the Health Department is located at 401 5th Ave, Suite 1100, (206)263-9566. The Health Department will review any application that involves food handling or preparation, and most pet related businesses. Visit Food Safety Permits at www.kingcounty.gov/health-services/health/ehs/foodsafety.aspx and Pet Related Business Permits at www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/ehs/petbusinesses.aspx.

Plumbing and gas piping permits - are issued by King County Public Health Department. Visit King County Permits: www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/ehs/plumbing/permit.aspx.

Fire Department permits - some businesses will need separate permits from the Fire Department, 220 3rd. Ave S., (206)386-1450. Installing a paint spray-booth, storing flammable liquids, welding and cutting, operating a restaurant with 100 or more occupants, or a self-service gas station are some of the activities which require permits. Visit annual fire permits: www.seattle.gov/fire/FMO/permits/permits.htm.

Urban Conservation certificates - review boards staffed by the Urban Conservation Division of the Department of Neighborhoods must approve exterior alterations in all Special Review and Historic Districts and

for Landmark structures. In some cases the boards also review interior alterations and changes of use. There are special restrictions for these structures, and it is important to discuss anticipated changes with DON early in the process. To reach the Urban Conservation Division, call (206) 684-0464 or visit www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods.

Business licenses - anyone who is engaged in business-related activities within Seattle must have a Seattle business license. If your business is located outside Seattle, you still need a Seattle business license to do work in the city. Both contractors and subcontractors working in Seattle must have their own Seattle business licenses. You can apply for a business license online at <https://web7.seattle.gov/FAS/Self/Account/Logon/Home.aspx>. For questions, email tax@seattle.gov or call (206) 684-8484.

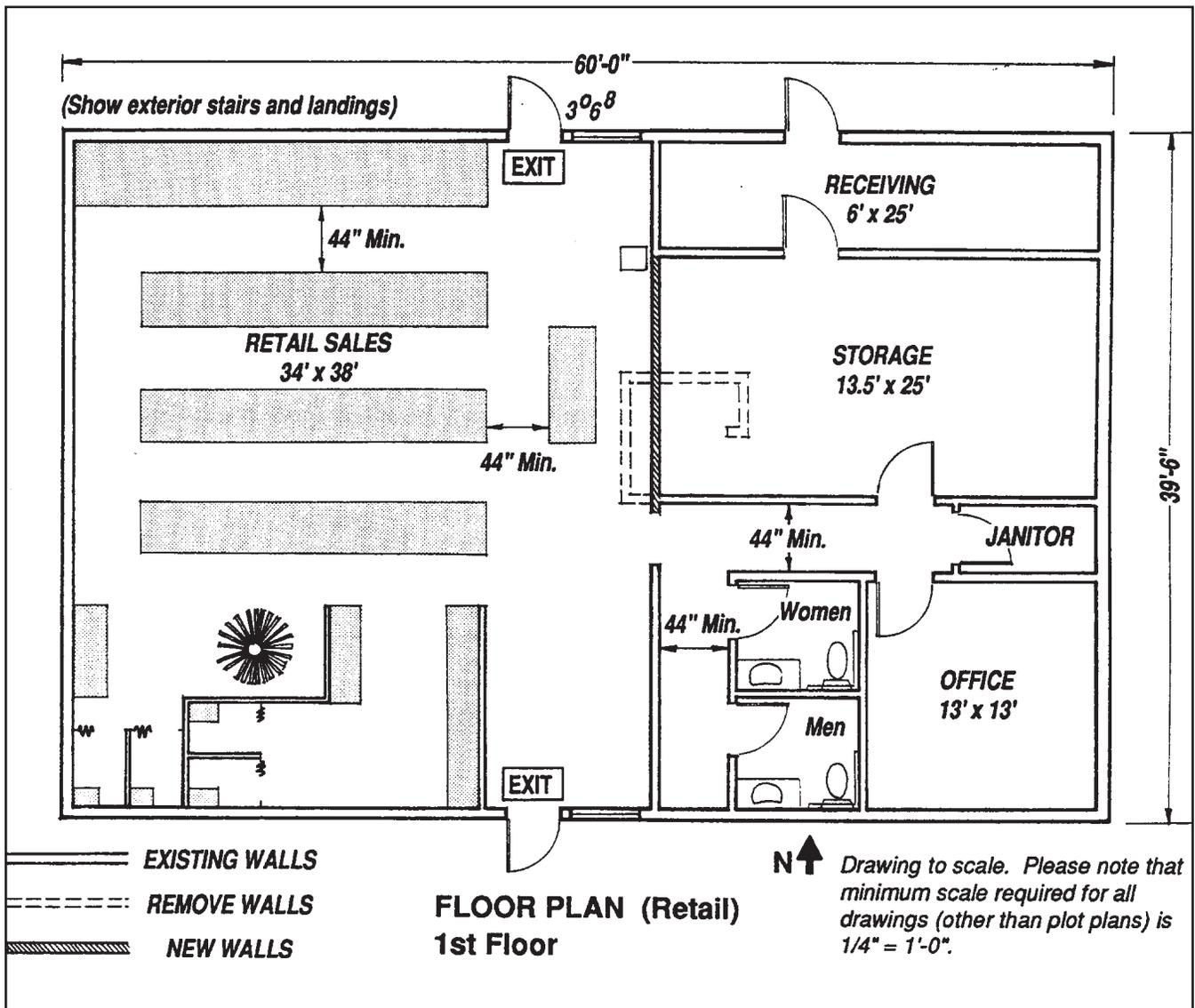
HELPFUL PHONE NUMBERS

- Public Resource Center
(206) 684-8467
- Applicant Services Center
(206) 684-8850
- Building inspections
(206) 684-8900
- Electrical permits
(206) 684-8464
- Seattle Fire Department
(206) 386-1450
- Seattle/King County Health Department
(206) 296-4632
- Seattle/King County Health, Plumbing & Gas Piping
(206) 205-4394
- Department of Neighborhoods, Urban Conservation Division
(206) 684-0228
- Seattle Public Utilities, Water Services
(206) 684-5800
- Department of Finance and Administrative Services, Business Licensing & Tax Administration
(206) 684-8484

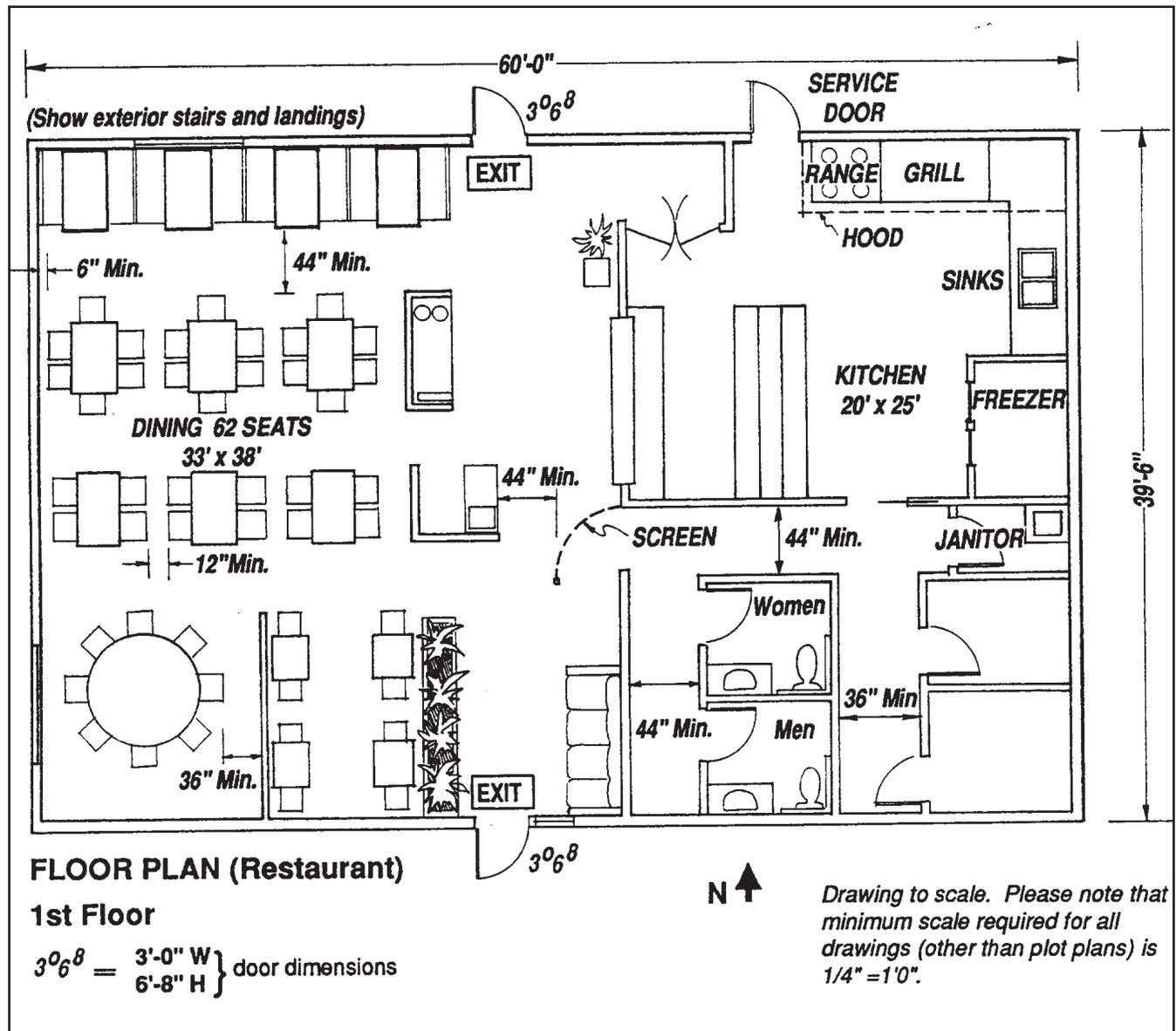
Access to Information

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.

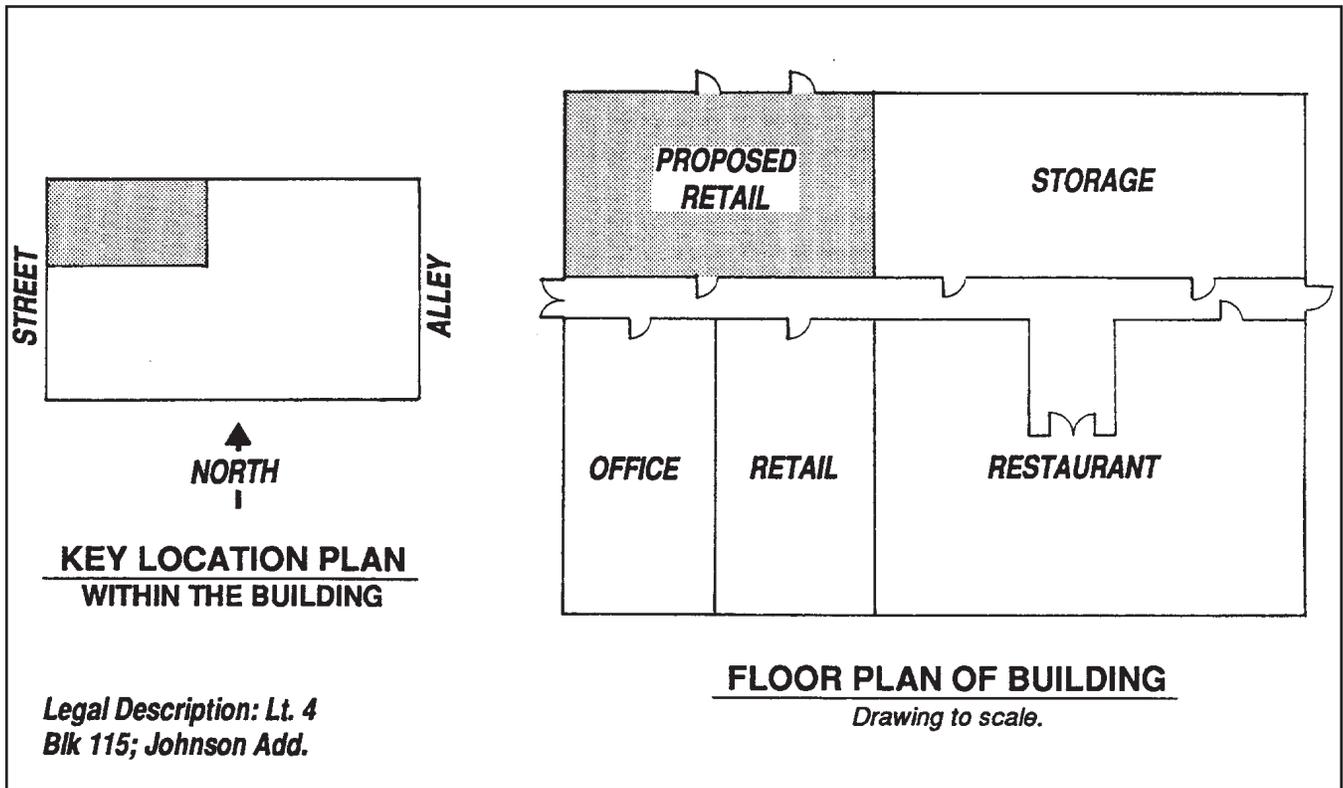
Example of Floor Plan (Retail) 1st Floor



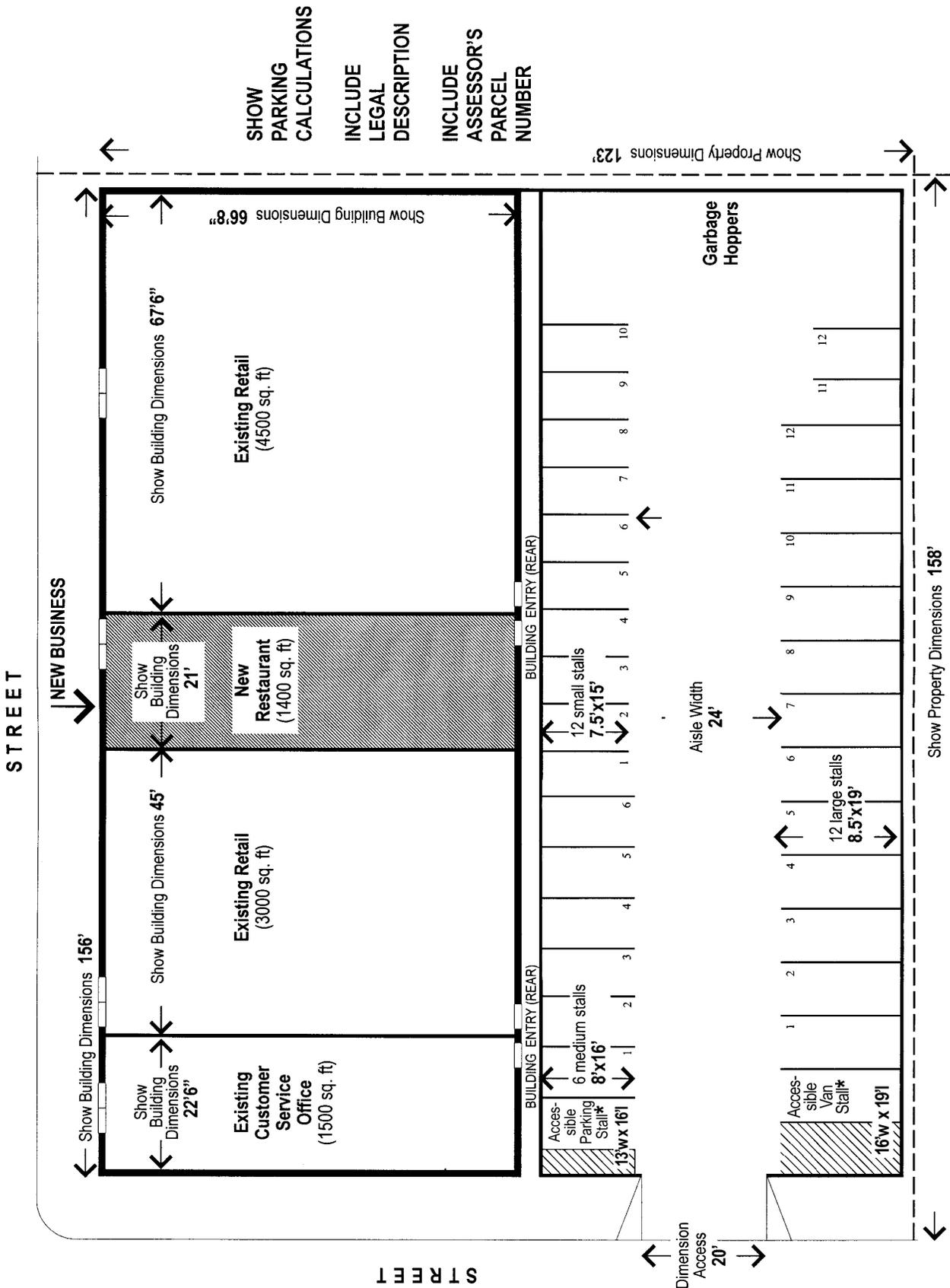
Example of Floor Plan (Restaurant) 1st Floor



Example of Key Location Plan and Floor Plan of Building



Example of Site Plan for Establishing Use Locations



SHOW PARKING CALCULATIONS
 INCLUDE LEGAL DESCRIPTION
 INCLUDE ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBER

* The first barrier-free stall provided on site must be 19 feet long, additional barrier-free stalls can be the standard 16 feet long. The minimum aisle that must be provided is a 5 foot aisle, but when a Van stall is required (most commercial sites), then a minimum 8 foot aisle is required.