

Seattle Permits

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

Getting a Certificate of Occupancy

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Before most new buildings or structures can be used or occupied in Seattle, a Certificate of Occupancy (commonly known as a "C of O") must be obtained. This certificate indicates that the project complies with the regulations for occupancy and activity required by the Seattle Building Code (Section 109). Changes in occupancy classification are not generally permitted until the building official has issued a C of O.

A C of O is not required on remodel projects where the occupancy classification is not changing or for R-3 occupancy (single family or duplex). A mixed use building (e.g., containing parking, offices, retail and residential uses) will have a C of O that indicates all these occupancies. Be aware that "use" for Land Use Code purposes is not the same thing as "occupancy" for the Building Code.

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.

Summary of Requirements Prior to Final Inspection

Prior to final inspection and issuance of a C of O, the following requirements must be met:

1. All land use conditions in a Master Use Permit (e.g., easements, design review conditions, installation of pedestrian walkways) must be completed per plan.
2. All alarms, pressurization, sprinkler systems, emergency power plants, and other safety systems must be approved by the Seattle Fire

Marshall's office. Prior to the building inspector's approval of the final inspection, the Seattle Fire Department must approve a final inspection. To request a fire department inspection, contact the Fire Marshall's Office at (206) 386-1450.

3. All mechanical systems commissioning and completion requirements must be approved by SDCI inspectors.
4. All work authorized by specialty permits—such as electrical, plumbing, elevator, mechanical, boiler, and street use—must be inspected and finalized. This includes Seattle Public Utilities conditions such as water supply provisions and back flow prevention, and public contract work and street vacations approved by Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT).
5. All work by special inspection agencies including soils, excavation, fireproofing, concrete, and steel, must be completed and on file at SDCI, including final letters from involved agencies.
6. All required signage must be installed (exit, maximum occupancy, maximum storage load, address, etc.).
7. All required post-permit submittals must be on file with SDCI and all fees paid.

Final Inspection and Issuance

After all applicable final approvals are complete and in hand, applicants should call the SDCI Inspection Request Line at (206) 684-8900 for a final inspection by the building inspector. If everything is in order and in compliance with approved plans, approval of the C of O will be granted and the certificate issued.

The C of O contains the following information:

- building permit number
- address
- description of the space
- statement that the space complies with applicable regulations
- name of the building official



Temporary Certificates

In certain circumstances, a Temporary Certificate of Occupancy (TCO) may be issued by the building official for use of a portion of a building prior to completion of the entire building, provided that all devices and safeguards for fire protection and life safety are maintained. The TCO allows a tenant to occupy space for a specific period of time, i.e., it has an expiration date. Before that expiration date, the TCO must be renewed if the project is not complete and a permanent C of O has not been obtained.

Both the permanent C of O and the temporary certificate are tied to an active building permit, so you must keep your building permit renewed in order to get your certificate of occupancy.

One example of how a TCO may be used is a high-rise building where the fire/life safety features are complete, but certain conditions such as landscaping may not yet be installed due to the season. Another example where a TCO may be appropriate is when a building and all fire/life conditions are complete, but because street improvements are being coordinated with an adjacent project, certain right-of-way conditions have not yet been completed.

Affected departments, such as SDOT in the last example above, must give their approval for a TCO to be granted.

Posting Requirements

The Seattle Building Code requires C of O's to be posted in a conspicuous place on the premises and states that they may not be removed at any time, except by the building official. Posting the occupancy certificate facilitates inspection by the Fire Department and other regulatory agencies.

Fees

For the most current fees, consult with SDCI Inspection Services staff at (206) 684-8950 or visit 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).

Penalties and Exemptions

Occupancy of a space or building without a C of O is a violation of the Seattle Building Code, and carries financial penalties. If you let your TCO expire with no renewal (and no permanent C of O), a Notice of Violation may be issued.

For buildings older than 1956 with no change in occupancy, a new C of O is not required and no penalty applies. Property owners who want to have a C of O for an existing building for financial or real estate purposes may apply for the certificate without construction components.

Learning the History of Your Building

Applicants can research available building records at the SDCI Microfilm Library, located on the 20th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower at 700 Fifth Ave., (206) 233-5180.

Note: Historical research can be challenging because building code occupancies have changed significantly over time. C of O's were first required in Seattle in 1956. That means older buildings that have not changed occupancies will not have any C of O records at SDCI.

For additional information about C of O's, call SDCI Inspection Services at (206) 684-8950.

Access to Information

Links to electronic versions of SDCI **Tips** and other helpful publications are available on our website at www.seattle.gov/sdci/resources. Paper copies of these documents 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.