Construction Pre-Submittal Conference

Updated July 28, 2022

What is the purpose of this Tip?

A pre-submittal conference can save you time and money in redesign work. This Tip tells you how to get this help on your construction project.

This Tip describes what to expect at your pre-submittal conference, including:

- Topics discussed

- Required forms and fees

- How you should prepare

- How we make decisions

- What you need to document in notes

- How your notes are used, and

- Other resources

This Tip is about Building Code related issues, and not about land use issues. It is also not about the required pre-submittal meetings for High Rise/Atrium projects. For information on those, see Tip 313, Conferences for High-Rise Structures and Buildings with an Atrium.

What is a Pre-Submittal Conference?

A pre-submittal conference is your opportunity to ask questions about how to make your project comply with the construction codes. You should request this meeting before you apply for your permit.

We use the pre-submittal conference to identify the options you have to go forward with your project. Once we have an agreement on your options, you can proceed with confidence. This helps you avoid issues or changes later, when they can be more expensive.

What topics could we discuss?

A pre-submittal conference is when you

- Ask us to interpret and clarify what the code means.

- Ask questions about how to comply with the code on your project.

- Explain why you cannot comply with the code and why your project needs flexibility. See Tip 343, Opportunities for Flexibility in the Building Code.

- Present your proposal and the facts to convince us that what you want to do fits within what the code requires.

Specific topics for these meetings depend on your project and its code compliance issues. Examples are:

- Exiting issues

- Barrier-free accessibility issues

- Cost impacts

- Issues related to historic landmarks

Attendees, Forms, and Fees

Who attends a pre-submittal conference?

At least one member of your project design team should attend the pre-submittal conference. Whether you attend is up to you. We might ask you to invite your full design team, if that seems the most practical way to work together.

One of our senior staff members leads the meeting. This person is our expert on the code, its limits and the opportunities for flexibility. We might also invite other staff, including building plan reviewers, mechanical or energy reviewers or Fire Department plan reviewers.

What forms do I need to complete?

You need to submit a Pre-submittal Application form to ask for a pre-submittal conference. Anyone can com-

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plete this form; however, we recommend that you obtain advice from an architect or engineer, as needed.

To request a specific type of flexibility on your project, you need to submit a Code Modification or Alternate Request. An architect or engineer should complete this form. The design professional should:

- Be a member of the design team.

- Include his or her Washington State seal and signature on the form.

- Include a statement of professional opinion that the project meets the standards for the type of flexibility that you are requesting.

If you want us to explain in writing how we interpret what the code requires, you need to submit a Code Interpretation Request. Anyone can complete this form. However, a design professional can help you make a clear and complete request.

How much does a pre-submittal conference cost?

You need to pay a fee when you submit your pre-submittal conference application. This fee is for meeting time and follow up with a senior staff member for about 1 1/2 hours.

We might invite additional staff if your project requires their expertise. If we include additional people, you will usually have additional costs. We charge for the work our subject matter experts do after the meeting, too.

For pre-submittal conference fees, contact the Applicant Services Center or go online to: **https://www. seattle.gov/sdci/resources/send-us-a-question**.

Preparing for Your Meeting

How do I prepare?

Consider the following:

- Decide in advance how you will present the issues on your project.

- List your questions and issues on the form, starting with those that relate to code compliance.

- Include enough details so that we understand what is different about your project.

- Provide a justification for any alternatives. This

argument needs to make sense and account for what the code requires.

- Describe why you think the solution you propose meets the intent and purpose of the code.

- Think about questions that we might ask. How would you answer them? Do you need more information to answer them?

What documents do I need to bring?

You should bring any documents that will help us clearly understand your issues and proposal.

The more precise your plans are, the more definitive we can be at the meeting. If your plans are vague or descriptions are unclear, our answers probably will be, too.

Always bring your designer's plans or schematic and elevation drawings, if those are prepared. You should bring any other information about the topics you want to discuss.

If you want to know if your project is a "substantial alteration," you should bring a list of all work items and the cost of each. The costs must include the cost of labor. We can't decide if your project is a substantial alteration without this information. For more information on substantial alterations, see Tip 314, *Seattle Building Code Requirements for Existing Buildings that Undergo Substantial Alterations*.

Roles and Responsibilities

What is my role as an applicant?

You need to provide all of the information that will allow us to make informed decisions about your project.

What are the reviewer's roles and responsibilities?

Our primary roles and responsibilities are to interpret the code as it relates to your specific project.

In these meetings, we:

- Consider the issues you raise.

- Review your efforts to comply with the code.

- Review your materials.

- Ask questions about your project and plan.

- Ask for information to support your idea, as needed.

We try to help you do what you want to do within the limits of our authority. We are not responsible for identifying issues you did not include. We are not responsible for suggesting design approaches or alternatives. If we see that your idea has the potential to work, we may suggest a direction for you to consider.

Making Decisions

How do we make decisions?

We may make our decision at or after our meeting with you. We may approve elements of your proposal or agree in concept to what you propose. Sometimes we make a limited, preliminary decision.

We base our decisions about your project on what you give us. You are responsible for giving us information that is complete and accurate. The more in-depth and well prepared your analysis, the more likely we will be able to approve it.

We are looking for evidence or proof that supports your proposal. We may ask follow-up questions or require more information. We need enough information to satisfy our questions and make an informed decision.

We consider past decisions when making new ones. We also ask how any new ones might apply to other projects. This helps us make reasonably consistent decisions based on each project's specifics.

On the other hand, something unique may stand alone; past or future decisions may not apply. We may be able to look at your proposal in this way only if the issue on your project has something unique about it that other projects do not have.

Is flexibility always possible?

No. Flexibility is not always possible. Important principles do not change. In addition, the codes define and limit our authority.

Our first priority is to see that your project complies with the code. We try to help you do what you want to do within the limits of our authority.

Limitations of Decisions

When are decisions preliminary or final?

Sometimes we approve a general concept. These concept approvals help you plan for big issues before you apply for your permit.

You can rely on a decision made at a Pre-submittal Conference when it is part of approved notes from that meeting. Senior staff members at these meetings are experts. They make formal, complete decisions.

You can get valuable help at the permit counter, too. However, final decisions are not made at the counter or in other informal conversations. Even normally reliable decisions that are in writing are subject to change, though.

Our final decisions are agreements included as part of your approved permit.

What could change our written decision?

1. We base our conclusions on the information that you give us. Omissions, changes or new information mean we need to rethink our decision, and it may change.

2. Sometimes we may have questions after our meeting that prompt us to research your issue. We may discover something in our research that we have not yet considered. As a result, we may change how we think about your project.

   If this happens, we will work with you to apply the new information to your project. If you have already submitted your application, we try to honor the decision that is already part of your application.

3. A change we make to the code might relate to your project. However, once you submit a complete building permit application, code changes do not change our agreement on your project.

Note Taking and Documentation

Who is responsible for taking notes?

You are responsible for taking notes of all decisions and approvals made about your project. This includes any decisions or approvals we make when talking in the Applicant Service Center or on the phone. Always take notes at a pre-submittal conference. Any notes we take do not replace yours.

What do my notes need to include?

Your notes should always include:

- Meeting dates

- Who was present

- Important decisions and approvals (especially details of code alternates, code modifications, interpretations or impracticality decisions)

For your reference, you may want to include:

- Information we asked you to provide

- Questions we asked you to answer

- Ideas or issues that you want to remember and consider

What do I do with my notes?

Give a copy of your notes to each City staff member at your pre-submittal conference. You should do this as soon as possible after your meeting. We accept handwritten notes, but we prefer that you email your notes attached as a Word document. Always keep a copy of your notes for yourself.

We will review your notes and work with you to clarify decisions and details. Once we approve your notes, they become part of our project records.

You should submit all notes we have approved with the application for your permit. Include notes on preliminary agreements and concept approvals, as well as specific agreements. We use these notes in our detailed plan review. These notes tell a plan reviewer what we already decided.

Resources

Asking Questions

The Applicant Service Center provides brief, one-on-one help and answers to process questions using one of the contact options on our website at **www.seattle.gov/sdci/about-us/who-we-are/applicant-services-center**.

Getting Information

You can find electronic information on our website at **www.seattle.gov/sdci**. Click on the "Codes and Rules" tab to go to the page with the codes and related information. Click on the "Tools and Resources" tab to find electronic versions of our Tips, Director's Rules and forms.

You can get copies of SDCI's resource materials from our website: **https://cosaccela.seattle.gov/Portal/welcome.aspx**. Visit the Help Center for more information: **https://seattlegov.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/1500005435181-How-to-Purchase-Seattle-Code-Books-From-SDCI**

For access to the microfilm library, please contact:
Email: SCI_Microfilm@seattle.gov
(206) 684-8467 (voice mail only, for messages)

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**.

LEGAL DISCLAIMER: *This Tip should not be used as a substitute for codes and regulations. The applicant is responsible for compliance with all code and rule requirements, whether or not described in this Tip.*