

## Pre-approved Plans for Accessory Dwelling Units

Information session for builders, designers, and architects

January 14, 2020

Before taking questions, we noted that, according to the [Submission Guide](#), submissions are due by the end of the day on February 17. We recognize that this deadline is Presidents' Day and therefore will accept submissions on February 18 as well.

As part our presentation, we shared relevant [draft code excerpts](#) for the forthcoming 2018 Seattle Residential Code.

### Summary of questions and answers

#### 1. How will the permit process be different for applicants using pre-approved plans?

Plans selected for pre-approval will still be reviewed, but the review time for a homeowner using the plan will be shorter because structural review has occurred when the plan is pre-approved. The estimated timeline for the review process is 2-6 weeks for projects and sites that do not require ECA review, geotechnical review, review of protected trees, drainage code review, etc.

#### 2. Will applicants using pre-approved plans be able to change the plans?

Only limited changes, such as plan reversals and different roof lines, will be possible. Any changes will need be approved, which could alter the permitting process timeline.

#### 3. Is the \$1,000 maximum fee for licensing the plan from the architect distinct from fees that the structural engineer might want to charge? How does the engineer get compensated?

The \$1,000 fee is for the owner of the plan. Fees for additional work, such as involve site planning or other components of the construction process, are negotiated between the customer and the plan owner and/or builder.

#### 4. What is the difference between these pre-approved DADU plans and the existing standard plans?

As described in Tip 310, SDCI currently allows an applicant to submit a design, pay for permit review, and create a standard plan. The pre-approved DADU plan process involves the same type of review, and the resulting pre-approved plan is equivalent to a standard plan. However, in this pre-approved process, selected plans will be reviewed at no cost to the designer or builder. Further, selected plans will be showcased in an online gallery.

**5. Does the diversity of designs that the City hopes to achieve among the 6-10 selected plans include different rooflines?**

The design variety we are seeking primarily refers to different unit sizes and types that suit various residents and households, such as individuals in a small unit, occupants with limited mobility who need a one-story design, and families with children in a larger unit. However, submitters can propose multiple roofline options for their DADU design. Where feasible with the project budget, we hope to allow multiple design options, such as rooflines, to provide some choice for prospective homeowners.

**6. Do you want submissions with different foundations too?**

Submissions do not need to include a foundation because foundation design (and its review) will be part of the full site plan that applicants using the pre-approved plan will submit.

**7. If someone wants to license the plan to use it more than once, do they need to pay \$1,000 per use?**

Yes, the fee is per use. Details of such an arrangement would be negotiated and resolved between the customer and plan owner.

**8. What will happen to pre-approved DADU plans as construction codes are updated, rendering plans submitted this year out of compliance in a few years? Will you do another call for submissions to replace old ones?**

We will review submissions under the forthcoming 2018 Seattle Construction Codes that will take effect July 1, 2020, thereby providing the longest possible period of compliance for pre-approved DADU plans. As codes are updated, pre-approved plans would need to be re-reviewed for compliance. We would determine in the future if that would be at the City's cost.

**9. Is 11 x 17 an acceptable size for submissions?**

Yes. Submissions should be at least 11 x 17 to provide enough detail for the selection committee's review. Selected plans will then need to submit a full plan set for SDCI review according to plan requirements and guidelines described in SDCI tip sheets [103](#), [106](#), and [303](#).

**10. Do submissions need to come only from a licensed architect?**

No. The submission process is also open to designers and builders.

**11. If I already have a client who wants to build a pre-approved plan when they're available, what can I tell them to expect?**

Our timeline is to have the pre-approved plans ready this spring, with the permit review time shortened to a goal of 2-6 weeks for standard sites without environmental or geotechnical complications, individual results may vary.

**12. Can someone purchase a pre-approved DADU plan and use a different architect or builder for the site planning and construction?**

Homeowners will not be prohibited from doing that, and if they do, you will have the option to require that they hold you harmless and release you from liability associated with your lack of involvement in the site planning and/or construction process.

**13. What are the terms of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the designer/builder and the City?**

We are still working with the City Attorney's Office to develop the terms and will share the MOA when available.

**14. Will the full text of the MOA be available online before the submission deadline?**

We cannot confirm that it will be, but we are trying to work out the details of the MOA as soon as possible.

**15. What components of the design development phase should be included in the submission?**

Refer to the list of submission requirements on page 8 of the [Submission Guide](#).

**16. Will any pre-approved plans be Built Green?**

Green building and design is one criterion we will use to evaluate submissions.

**17. Do you have more information about the construction code updates coming this summer?**

Yes. We will share excerpts of the proposed code on our DADU website. Most relevant changes concern sleeping lofts, decks, and emergency escapes.

**18. Will the complete plan set for selected designs be shared online and available for anyone to download?**

No. We will post the design description, include information about the designer, and show images, elevations, floor plans, and other high-level design components so an interested homeowner can assess if the plan meets their needs. We will not make the full set of construction documents available for download.

**19. Is there a required or target percentage for WMBE designers or firms?**

No. Unlike certain more formal contracting processes, we do not have a specific percentage requirement. We ask that you include this information, if appropriate, to inform the selection process.

**20. I'm a woman, but I have not filed the paperwork for WMBE status. Do I need formal WMBE certification to qualify?**

No. The City defines WMBE firms as state-certified or self-identified firms at least 51 percent owned by women and/or minorities.

**21. One criterion you've listed is culturally appropriate designs. Which cultures are you most interested in?**

We do not have specific culture in mind. Rather, we are seeking designs that reflect values, practices, or uses not typically supported by traditional Western architecture. Our goal is to offer a set of pre-approved designs that can fulfill the needs and desires of everyone in our diverse community. We're eager to see what emerges from your expertise as designers and builders, and we're open to creative approaches for serving diverse cultures through design.

**22. How will homeowners and designers get connected after the homeowner selects a plan?**

We are still developing some of these details, and we have not yet created the online gallery that will showcase pre-approved plans. We will likely include the designer's or builder's contact information with the plan description. We will share more details when we finalize them. Our goal is to facilitate a simple, straightforward process for connecting with interested homeowners.

**23. Since the construction codes being updated this summer come primarily from Appendix Q of the International Residential Code (IRC), can we refer to that document to find the new codes you'll be using?**

We have [draft code language](#) for the forthcoming changes. Note that not all changes are the same as what is currently in Appendix Q.

**24. Are units under 200 square feet exempt from codes?**

Some non-dwelling structures, like a playhouse, would be exempt from the Residential Code. But any structure containing a dwelling unit, including a DADU, is subject to the Residential Code regardless of its size.

**25. Does the floor area in a sleeping loft count towards the 1,000-square-foot maximum size limit for a DADU?**

As described in [SDCI Director's Rule 4-2019](#), floors or partial floors with a floor-to-ceiling height of at least 7 feet are counted as gross floor area for purposes of the Land Use Code.

For the purposes of the Seattle Residential Code, a loft meeting the 2018 SRC criteria for a sleeping loft does not count towards gross floor area. Lofts exceeding the limitations of the sleeping loft criteria will be considered a mezzanine and shall meet the requirements in the 2018 SRC for mezzanines.

**26. At up to six weeks, the permit process for a pre-approved plan doesn't seem to be very expedited. Is it possible to get the timeline closer to two weeks?**

Currently 2-6 weeks is what we can offer. We are also looking for other ways to make the permitting process faster.

**27. Will there be sleeping loft changes in the Seattle Building Code too?**

No.

**28. If a unit is not fully accessible, but is visitable, are there standards for visitability that apply?**

The relevant code sections for accessibility and visitability are not different for DADUs compared to other housing units. These requirements are in ICC A117 and Chapter 11 of the Seattle Building Code.

**29. How should we generate the cost estimate required with a submission? The characteristics of sites across the city create a lot of variability.**

We recognize the challenge of estimating cost for a design lacking a site. Nevertheless, we think having reasonable cost estimates are an important part of the review process. The Submission Guide specifies that the estimate can be a range and can include assumptions about site conditions. For a DADU that has been built in the past, you can denote when it was constructed and any relevant factors that affected construction cost.

**30. What would stop an architect from providing an inaccurately low estimate to appear as a low-cost design during the review process? This criterion creates an incentive to provide unrealistically low estimates.**

A committee of design and construction experts will be reviewing submissions and can draw on their knowledge and experience to determine if a cost estimate is realistic. The cost estimate is a valuable piece of information for the review process, but it will not be the sole determinant in whether a submission is selected.

**31. Do you want to provide customers with a guaranteed fixed price?**

No.

**32. State law requires that architects cannot be hired on the basis of cost. What are the legal grounds for having designers provide these cost estimates?**

Chapter 38.90 of the RCW sets guidelines for the procurement of professional architecture and engineering services. Unlike other types of contracts that are awarded to the lowest responsible bidder, A&E contracts are awarded primarily based on qualifications. However, that statute governs formal contracting processes. This pre-approved DADU plan process is not a formal Request for Proposals (RFP) or contracting process. The City is not awarding a contract to the designers of selected plans. Low cost is one of several criteria, and to evaluate submissions on that criterion we are requesting an estimate of construction cost. This differs from a bid for services under contract with the City.

**33. How will you ensure that homeowners who purchase a plan expecting a certain cost for construction are not surprised when the actual price varies, whether due to market forces or the particular characteristics of their site?**

We have not decided what information, if any, about cost estimates will be presented in the online gallery. We recognize that construction costs change over time due to many factors. Our goal is not to mislead potential applicants, and we will not be providing a guaranteed price point.

**34. What if all the plans the City selects are ugly?**

Our selection will be based on several criteria, including aesthetic quality. We are hopeful that we will receive submissions of designs that are both relatively low cost and attractive.

**35. How did you select the committee who will be reviewing the designs?**

We asked the directors of the City boards and commissions whose members will comprise the selection committee to identify board members and commissioners with appropriate experience and availability to participate in the selection process.

**36. How will the selection committee's blind review work?**

In facilitating the selection committee's review, staff will redact information that identifies the designer of each submission.

**37. If a plan has previously been reviewed by SDCl, permitted, and built, could it be included with these pre-approved plans?**

Any plan can be submitted for review to become a Standard Plan, as described in Tip 310.

**38. Will the City consider hiring a cost estimator to review the plans after they're selected?**

We will consider that suggestion. Thank you.

**39. What if the low-cost designs use poor quality materials? They could end up being less sustainable, costing homeowners more during the life of the structure.**

Seattle's construction codes are some of most rigorous in the nation and hold buildings to a high standard. Additionally, our review of submissions will include materials and wall and roof assembly details, so we can consider materials and evaluate their quality and durability. Green building and design — of which durability and lifecycle cost are a factor — is one of the selection criteria.

**40. If a submission uses structural insulated panels (SIPs), can a homeowner instead choose stick-frame construction for the same design?**

This should be determined between the homeowner and the designer with the understanding that additional documents may need to be provided for SDCI to approve the changes.

**41. The Office of Housing (OH) is developing an affordable ADU financing pilot for lower- and middle-income homeowners. Will that process include these pre-approved plans?**

OH recently received funding through the 2020 budget process in November, so staff are just beginning to develop the details of that pilot program. That effort is therefore on a different timeline and will not direct connect with our selection of pre-approved plans. That said, we hope both efforts support one another, as lower-cost design options make low-cost financing for a lower- or middle-income homeowner more feasible.

For more information or to subscribe to email updates, visit [seattle.gov/opcd/ongoing-initiatives/encouraging-backyard-cottages](https://seattle.gov/opcd/ongoing-initiatives/encouraging-backyard-cottages) or email [DADUplan@seattle.gov](mailto:DADUplan@seattle.gov).