

Seattle Permits

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

Codes That Apply to All Cultural Spaces

Updated July 26, 2022

This Tip is intended to provide information about the codes that apply to cultural spaces. When you use any building or space for an arts or cultural use, for any period of time, the City of Seattle enforces a set of codes to ensure that this use is safe and is allowed in the intended location. You are required to comply with the codes regardless of whether you need a permit. Each individual code covers specific areas of concern and importance. Codes are governed and enforced by different agencies and jurisdictions within Seattle.

For assistance navigating your specific cultural space project through these codes, please contact the Arts Permit Liaison in the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections. Please complete the Arts/Culture Questionnaire to begin the process: www.surveymonkey.com/r/SDCIARTSQuestionnaire

Below are some of the common codes that may apply to your cultural space.

Seattle Land Use Code

[www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-\(a-z\)/land-use-code](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-(a-z)/land-use-code)

The Land Use Code is developed by SDCI planners to regulate the use of land in Seattle and ensure that regulations benefit the public while meeting the City's design standards.

- Examples of Land Use or Zoning questions are:
 - “This building is in the Georgetown industrial area. Can we open art gallery here?”
 - “Can I open up a pottery studio or radio station in my house?”
 - “Do I need to provide more parking?”

- Find the zoning of your property on our GIS map (<http://seattlecitygis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=f822b2c6498c4163b0cf908e2241e9c2>)
- An example of how the code evaluates uses in different zones can be found in the Seattle Municipal Code, Title 23 Subchapter II – Uses in all industrial Zones – 23.50.012 Permitted and prohibited uses (https://library.municode.com/wa/seattle/codes/municipal_code?nodet=23.50.012)

Seattle Building Code

[www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-\(a-z\)/building-code](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-(a-z)/building-code)

The Seattle Building Code (SBC) provides minimum requirements for design and construction of new buildings and ensures life-safety and fitness of new buildings.

- Examples of Building Code questions are:
 - “I want to relocate my glass blowing studio into the basement of this new building. Can I do that?”
 - “Will my studio need to be accessible?”
 - “If we put the stage in this space, do these doors work as exits?”
 - “Our space will be a dance performance venue. Is this considered an assembly?”
 - “What is the occupant load?”

Seattle Existing Building Code

[www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-\(a-z\)/existing-building-code](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-(a-z)/existing-building-code)

The Seattle Existing Building Code (SEBC) provides minimum requirements for repair, alteration, change of occupancy, addition, and relocation of existing buildings.



- Examples of Existing Building Code questions are:
 - “We want to open a small comedy club in the old boat repair shop. Can we do that?”
 - “Will we need to insulate the walls?”

Seattle Fire Code

([www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-\(a-z\)/fire-code](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-(a-z)/fire-code))

The Seattle Fire Code is enforced by the Seattle Fire Department and ensures that buildings are provided with and maintain protection from fire and other hazards.

- An example of a Fire Code question is:
 - “We are planning on taking over the adjacent space and putting in a bar and performance stage connected to our restaurant. Will this require installing sprinklers?”

The above codes are enforced by SDCI in conjunction with the Seattle Fire Marshal’s Office. We provide free 20-minute coaching sessions through our Applicant Service Center (www.seattle.gov/sdci/about-us/who-we-are/applicant-services-center).

Seattle Historic Preservation

(<http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/programs-and-services/historic-preservation/landmarks>)

This office (part of the Department of Neighborhoods) manages the designation and protection of more than 400 historic structures, sites, objects, and vessels, as well as eight historic districts throughout Seattle. Approval for uses, temporary and permanent, are subject to historic preservation limitations.

Seattle Plumbing Code

([http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-\(a-z\)/plumbing-code](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-(a-z)/plumbing-code))

The Seattle Plumbing Code regulates design, installation, and maintenance of plumbing systems and fixtures.

- An example of a Plumbing Code question is:
 - “We are converting this store into an art and music school for teens. Will we need to build more bathrooms?”
- However, “Does this shower/bathroom need to be accessible?” is NOT a plumbing Code question. Accessibility is a building code requirement.

The plumbing code is enforced by King County Public Health. For coaching about plumbing questions visit their permit center at Environmental Health Services, 401 5th Ave, Suite 1100 (on the 11th floor) Seattle, WA 98104, Phone: (206) 263-9566 (answered until 4:00 p.m.)

If you discover a code requirement that your project might not fully comply with, there may be options for your organization that the Arts Permit Liaison can help you strategize, such as:

- Revising your proposal to stay below a threshold. You may be able to modify your project to avoid triggering certain demands.
- Find alternate ways to comply with the code. The City has discretionary control, in certain situations, to accept alternatives to specific code compliance. An example may be establishing a “fire watch” for a special event in lieu of the need to install a fire sprinkler system.
- Create time to comply. The City may be able to strategize a longer timeline for code compliance to meet your organization’s capacity.

Access to Information

Links to electronic versions of our Tips, Director’s Rules, and the Seattle Municipal Code are available on our website at www.seattle.gov/sdci.

The Office of Arts & Culture also has online resources to assist project proponents understand and navigate various permitting systems. This information is available at www.seattle.gov/arts under the Cultural Space program area of the site.