

Seattle Permits

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

Site Plan Guidelines How to Prepare a Site Plan

Updated July 25, 2022

This Tip is intended to provide directions on how to successfully prepare a site plan for your application. Topics covered include determining property boundaries and legal descriptions, locating structures and features to be shown on the site plan, and drawing the site plan.

STEP 1:

Determine property boundaries and legal description. There are several ways to determine the boundaries and legal description of your property. A legal description usually contains your property's lot number, the number of the block, and the name of the subdivision in which your lot is located or it may be a metes and bounds description making use of the boundaries and measurements of the land in question.

Method #1:

Refer to the surveyor's map that often accompanies your real estate deed or the title to your property. The surveyor's plan shows the dimensions and configuration of your property, its relationship to abutting streets, where any easements exist on your property and other similar legal restrictions on the property.

Method #2:

Obtain copies of the King County Assessor's Office real estate property tax assessment records for your property. This information will include the legal description and a plot map showing dimensions and configurations of your property. (It does not show the location of buildings, driveways, etc.) You will have to visit the Department of Assessment Real Estate Office to obtain information on your property. Information is not available over the telephone. The office is on the 7th floor, King County Administration Building, between Fourth and Fifth Avenues and Jefferson and James Streets.

Method #3:

Review microfilm records at SDCI's Microfilm Library for previously submitted site plans. (NOTE: Plans for work permitted on single family residences prior to 1975 are not available on microfilm.) Contact the SDCI Microfilm Library at sci_microfilm@seattle.gov or (206) 233-5180.

Method #4:

Hire a licensed surveyor to prepare a topographic survey that can then be used to prepare a your site plan. The survey will show the dimensions and configuration of your property in its current/existing condition; its relationship to abutting streets; where any easements exist on your property; and other similar legal restrictions on the property. See Tip 103, *Site Plan Requirements* for full list of requirements for preparing site plans.

STEP 2:

Determine the location of all structures and other physical features to be shown on the site plan.

You need to measure the size of all the buildings on your property as well as other important man-made and natural features (such as carports, garden sheds, rockeries, retaining walls, decks, trees and all structures greater than 18 inches above grade). Include special features of structures, such as cornices, eaves, and sunshades with associated gutters and chimneys. This information will be included in a topographic survey prepared by a licensed land surveyor.

You will also have to determine the distance between these items and the property lines and the main buildings. To make these measurements, you will have to locate your property lines on the ground.

Measuring is best done by two people, using measuring tape long enough to avoid dividing each measured length into several segments. (A 25-foot or 50-foot tape is generally sufficient.) When measuring yards and pavements, hold the tape level and measure perpendicularly to the property line or feature being measured. Record all measurements on a sketch plan



when you do the measuring and then transfer that information onto the final scale drawing.

STEP 3:

Draw the plan. After all of the information has been obtained, drawing the plan should be relatively easy. The first thing to do is to decide the size of the paper needed and the scale of the drawing. "Scale" is a word used in the architectural and engineering professions to mean a variety of things. In our case "drawing scale" or "scale of the drawing" denotes how many inches on the plan equals a given length on the actual property. Thus if the scale of the drawing is $1/8" = 1'-0"$, one inch on the plan equals 8 feet on the property. If the scale is $1/8" = 1'-0"$, a 50' x 100' lot will appear as a 6-1/4" x 12-1/2" rectangle in the site plan.

When preparing the scale drawing, it helps to use a tool called an "architect's scale" or "engineer's scale". These tools basically resemble rulers except that instead of being divided into inches, a given length can be measured directly by reading the markings on the scale.

A standard ruler can also be used. Usually rulers have markings which divide inches into 8 or 16 equal parts. One inch would thus equal either 8 feet or 16 feet.

An architect's scale can be used for drawing plans $1/8" = 1'-0"$, $1/4" = 1'-0"$, $3/16" = 1'-0"$, and $3/32" = 1'-0"$. An engineer's scale measures $1" = 10'$, $1" = 20'$, $1" = 40'$, $1" = 50'$ and $1" = 60'$. Inexpensive architect's and engineer's scales can be purchased at drafting supply stores, and some bookstores and stationery stores. Other low-priced helpful tools are a drafting triangle (to draw right angles) and a protractor (to measure any non-right angles).

The selection of an appropriate scale for the site plan usually depends upon the size of your property and how much information is needed to be shown on the site plan. The most commonly used scales are $1/8" = 1'-0"$, $1/4" = 1'-0"$ and $1" = 10'$. If you wish to use a smaller scale than these, you must have prior approval from a permit specialist or land use technician.

Select a scale that will permit you to draw the site plan so that the information is not crowded together and so that it is large enough to be easily read by someone who is not familiar with your property.

A formal site plan must be drawn on paper that is at least 18" x 18", but not larger than 41" x 54". The size limits permit the plans to be microfilmed and easily stored.

Plans should be drawn on relatively heavy drafting paper such as "Crystalline," "1000H", or Mylar. Drafting supply stores can help you select suitable paper. Graph paper, poster board, and card board cannot be used because they are difficult to microfilm and store.

The next task is to draw the plan. It is usually easiest to begin by drawing in the property lines. Next, add the existing features and then show proposed additions or changes. Notes and dimensions are generally drawn last so they can be placed to avoid conflict with the lot and building elements. Printing and numbers should be at least 1/8" high so that they can be read easily once they are microfilmed.

Varying the line weight (thickness of pencil line) will help the drawing be more readable. Property lines and buildings are usually drawn in heavy lines while dimension lines and pavement lines are usually lighter.

Indicate the proposed work using notes and cross hatching. The dimension line "strings" or segments through the property should add up to the overall property dimensions.

If you propose to build on a sloping site you may have to show contour lines that indicate how much change in ground elevation occurs across your property. For building sites that do not slope uniformly and gradually, a licensed surveyor may have to plot the contour lines. Before drawing contour lines, contact the SDCI Applicant Services Center, www.seattle.gov/sdci/about-us/who-we-are/applicant-services-center, to see if they are needed and to determine how much information you should provide concerning the slope of property to make sure that your site plan is complete and accurate.

STEP 4:

Check the drawings and make copies. You can save yourself time in the application process by making sure that your site plan is complete and accurate.

You need to submit your application materials online at <https://cosaccela.seattle.gov/>. You will need to upload electronic versions of your site plan drawings electronically or high-quality scans of hand-drawn drawings.

Questions?

Refer to Tip 103, *Site Plan Requirements*, for details about what information is required on your site plan. If you have questions, contact the SDCI Applicant Services Center at www.seattle.gov/sdci/about-us/who-we-are/applicant-services-center or (206) 684-8850.

Definition of Terms

Contour Line: A line on the site plan that connects the points on the ground that have the same elevation. Contour lines are shown on a site plan when the property is not flat.

Dimension: A measure in feet and inches of how long something is, such as the length of a wall, or how far something is from something else, such as the distance between a building and a property line.

Easement: A legal right to use a piece of property owned by someone else. An easement often states that a property owner cannot build on a portion of his or her property to allow access for utility lines or vehicular traffic. Easements must be recorded with King County.

Ground Elevation: A number that states how high a specific point on the ground or on a structure is above sea level or some other recognized reference point.

Legal Description: The written description of the property that legally defines the property's boundaries. It is usually written in surveyor's language stating the length and direction of a property line from a given reference point or referring to the lot and block number of a subdivision plot on file at the City. Legal descriptions are found on real property tax statements and the deed to your property; or they can be provided by the King County Assessor's Office.

Property Line: A line on a site plan that accurately shows the legal dimensions of your property. It shows how long each edge of the property is and shows the configuration of the property as if you were viewing the property from a point above it.

Scale: The relationship (or ratio) between the size or distance of something on a map or plan and its actual size or distance. If something is actually 8 feet long and it appears on a drawing as being 1 inch long, the scale of the drawing would be 1 inch equals 8 feet or 1/8 of an inch equals 1 foot (1/8" = 1'-0").

Setback: The distance from a building or other structure to the property line.

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.