

# Seattle Permits

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

## Establishing an Artist's Studio/Dwelling in an Existing Building

Updated July 25, 2022

This Tip highlights many of the code requirements and the application process for these types of permits. Changing a portion of an existing building to a live-in artist studio requires you to demonstrate full compliance with all Seattle codes. See also Tip 125, *Codes That Apply to all Cultural Spaces*. **This Tip does not apply to newly constructed buildings.**

Your project may qualify for assistance with your permit application. Please complete the Arts/Culture Questionnaire to begin the process: [www.surveymonkey.com/r/SDCIARTSQuestionnaire](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SDCIARTSQuestionnaire).

### Definitions

An **artist's studio/dwelling** is a combination working studio and dwelling unit for artists, consisting of a room or suite of rooms occupied by not more than one household (family).

An **artist** is any person who is regularly engaged in the visual, performing or creative arts.

An **existing building** is one where the Certificate of Occupancy has been issued for 18 months or more.

### Application Coaching

You need to design your artist studio/dwelling based on current codes. You can find all Seattle codes on the SDCI website [www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes).

We strongly encourage you to visit SDCI early in your planning to get free 20-minute coaching sessions regarding the Land Use Code and the Building Code. Coaching is available through our Applicant Service Center (ASC), [www.seattle.gov/sdci/about-us/who-](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/about-us/who-we-are/applicant-services-center)

### [we-are/applicant-services-center](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/about-us/who-we-are/applicant-services-center).

Our brief coaching sessions help customers in the feasibility stage of project planning who need specific input before deciding whether to move forward with a project. We will provide zoning (land use), building code, and permit application process information. We recommend you start with Land Use coaching. It is best to begin your research there as adding the artist studio/dwelling to an existing building must be allowed in the intended location.

Seattle allows artist studio/dwellings as a residential use only in specific areas in the city. A zoning map for Seattle can be found at <http://seattlecitygis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=f822b2c6498c4163b0cf908e2241e9c2>.

Once you have determined that an artist studio/dwelling is allowed in your location, you can discuss your plans with a Permit Leader to address building code requirements. Some buildings in Seattle are designated as historically significant by the Department of Neighborhoods (DON). If that's the case, your project might need DON's approval as well. Finally, you can discuss the permit application process. Much of this information is also available on the SDCI website at [www.seattle.gov/sdci](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci).

Free online Land Use and Building Code Q&A is available for simple questions at [https://sdci.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/requests/new?ticket\\_form\\_id=1500003356822](https://sdci.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/requests/new?ticket_form_id=1500003356822).

You can obtain more information about how to apply for a building permit by contacting the Applicant Services Center.

### Land Use Code Requirements

#### Residential Zones

If you are a professional artist, you may maintain a studio within your house in a residential zone if you meet the home occupation standards.

See Tip 236, *Home Occupations* ([www.seattle.gov/DPD/Publications/CAM/cam236.pdf](http://www.seattle.gov/DPD/Publications/CAM/cam236.pdf)).

[www.seattle.gov/sdci](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci)



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If you are a “hobby” artist, you may have a studio in your home if it is incidental and accessory to your residence. These are not considered artist/studio dwellings.

### Commercial Zones

Artist studio/dwelling are allowed outright in the following zones:

- Neighborhood Commercial (NC1, NC2, and NC3)
- Commercial (C1)

You do not need a separate Land Use permit in these zones. The artist studio/dwelling use is permitted by the building permit. See the Building Permit section of this Tip for more information.

Artist studio/dwelling are allowed as conditional uses in outright in commercial (C2) zones. They are subject to criteria listed in Section 23.47A.006.A.3 of the Seattle Municipal Code. You do need a separate Land Use permit in commercial (C2) zones.

### Industrial Zones

In all industrial zones, artist studio/dwellings are allowed as administrative conditional uses in buildings that existed as of October 5, 1987, and if they:

- Are located in areas that do not have environmental or safety hazards
- Are not located on freight lines or next to freeway or highway access, or anywhere that would restrict or disrupt industrial activity
- Do require the proposed space to accommodate the nature of the artist's work

In order to establish an artist studio/dwelling in an industrial zone, you must complete and record a covenant and equitable servitude (a legal agreement between parties that limits the use of the property) acknowledging the neighborhood's industrial character. This is intended to ensure that artist/residents understand that neighboring industrial activity may not necessarily be compatible with residential use.

### Administrative Conditional Use

An Administrative Conditional Use is a type of Master Use Permit (MUP). An administrative conditional use is a Type II discretionary decision made by SDCI's Director. It requires a public notice of application and a public comment period. This decision can be challenged, and

you can appeal the Director's decision to the Seattle Hearing Examiner.

For more master use permits, see Tip 201, *Master Use Permit (MUP) Overview* ([www.seattle.gov/DPD/Publications/CAM/cam201.pdf](http://www.seattle.gov/DPD/Publications/CAM/cam201.pdf)). Tip 201 outlines general information about this type of land use permit and the time, processes, and approximate costs associated with getting one.

### Building Code Requirements

Projects that add an artist studio/dwelling in an existing building are changing the use of a building and adding a dwelling unit to a building. These types of projects always require a building permit. Adding an artist studio/dwelling to a building cannot qualify for a subject-to-field-inspection (STFI) permit—even when there are no alterations to the building. Getting a building permit can take a month or more; complicated projects can take significantly longer.

The Seattle Existing Building Code (SEBC) and the Seattle Building Code (SBC) regulate alterations to add a dwelling unit in an existing building. Two important SEBC provisions to consider early in your project are:

- **SEBC 307 Accessibility in Existing Buildings** - In general, all newly constructed elements, spaces, and facilities are required to be fully accessible – including bathrooms and showers – unless specifically exempted by the building code.
- **SEBC 403.1 Alteration** - The code allows one unit, over the life of the building, to be added to existing buildings without requiring sprinkler protection. If a unit has already been added in the past or if more than one unit is being added, you are required to add a sprinkler system for the dwelling units.

### Getting a Building Permit

#### Begin Your Permit Application

You can apply for your building permit electronically through the Seattle Services Portal at <https://cosac-cela.seattle.gov/Portal/>.

1. Begin the permit process by creating a Seattle Services Portal Account with your email and contact information.
2. Log into your Seattle Services Portal account.
3. On the Seattle Services Portal home page, under +Create, select Permits - Trade, Construction & Land Use.

4. Choose Building & Land Use Pre-Application
5. Enter your project's site address and click search. Select the correct address if multiple addresses are returned. Then click Continue Application.
6. Provide the applicant and owner contact information. (First try to Look Up a contact, then use Create New to add a new contact if necessary). The applicant and owner can be the same person. You can contact us during the permit application process if these need to be changed later. Choose Continue Application.
7. Name your application something appropriate and provide a simple project description. Leave all the below questions checked NO. Choose Continue Application
8. Complete the remaining 4 items including a project value and then select Continue Application.
9. Create and provide a Basic Site Plan per Tip 103, *Site Plan Requirements* ([www.seattle.gov/DPD/Publications/CAM/cam103.pdf](http://www.seattle.gov/DPD/Publications/CAM/cam103.pdf)).

The King County Assessor's website has information needed to create your Site Plan. Google Maps and similar sites can provide a bird's eye image to use as an underlay. When complete, your site plan should have all the information required for a Basic Site Plan per Tip 103, *Site Plan Requirements*, on a sheet size no greater than 11" x 17" and in PDF form. Upload the document. Then choose Continue.

1. Set the Type: Site Plan and enter a Description that portrays the project. Choose Save and then choose Continue Application.
2. Upload the required application forms (see below). Set the Type and Description for each one. Chose Save and then Continue Application.
3. Review all information for accuracy. Select Edit to make changes. Once you have confirmed everything is correct, select Continue Application.

Once you have submitted your application, your project will be assigned a preliminary application record number. SDCI will review your application and assign you a related construction record number. Use the construction record number to schedule your intake appointment for your permit application. See our help article for directions: <https://seattlegov.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/115004984887-How-to-Schedule-an-Inspection>

### Prepare Your Plan Set

For your artist studio/dwelling, you need to provide a floor plan of the studio and dwelling unit, a key plan

(if there is more than one tenant in the building), and a site plan with parking details. It is important that all plan sheets conform to Tip 106, *General Standards for Plans and Drawings*.

### Required Application Forms

You should complete the following documents and upload them with your plan set as part of your permit application package. These forms are available at SDCI's forms page, [www.seattle.gov/dpd/permits/forms](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/permits/forms).

- Statement of Financial Responsibility Agent Authorization
- Waste Diversion Plan (for projects greater than 750 square feet in area)

### Fees

Permit fees are based upon the value of the work to be performed as established in the current Seattle Fee Subtitle. Interior alteration projects have an associated project value. You are required to give us a "fair market value" for your proposed project, including all labor and materials at current market rates, whether paid for or not. You will pay approximately 80 percent of the estimated permit fees at your intake appointment. You can pay fees online through your Seattle Services Portal account at <https://cosaccela.seattle.gov/Portal/>. You can also mail a check to SDCI.

### Reviews

At the time of intake, your project will be assigned to the appropriate reviewers for your project's proposed scope of work. Most simple projects undergo zoning and ordinance review. More complex projects require review by the Fire Department, structural, energy/mechanical, and/or others depending on your project. You can get information about your project as it is being reviewed by visiting our website, [www.seattle.gov/sdci](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci). You will need either the site address or the project/permit number to track our review. If you receive a correction notice(s), carefully review the accompanying letter for how to make the corrections, revise your plan set to address and incorporate the correction items, and upload a complete new set into the portal. Note that all reviews must be complete (approved or failed) on a cycle before you can upload your revised set into the portal.

### Permit Issuance

You will be notified by email when your plans have been approved by SDCI and other relevant city agencies. Once you have been notified, pay the remaining permit fees online. After you pay your fees, you will be notified that we have issued your permit. It is your responsibility to print out the approved plans and permit document.

We do not allow occupancy until all permitted work has been completed, all inspections have been approved and, if needed, a certificate of occupancy has been issued by SDCI.

## Inspections

To request a building inspection, schedule one online through the Seattle Services Portal at <https://cosac-cela.seattle.gov/Portal/>, or call the 24-hour inspections line at (206) 684-8900. Same-day inspections are provided for requests made by 7:00 a.m. If you have questions for your inspector, call (206) 684-8950. The timing and type of required inspections are described on the flip side of your official building permit document and on our web page.

Once the final inspection is approved and a Certificate of Occupancy is issued, you may move into and operate the live-in artist studio.

## Other Permits and Departments

**Mechanical permits** - are approved by SDCI. Permits for range hoods are approved according the process in Tip 414, *STFI Mechanical Permits for Commercial and Multifamily Residential*, and Tip 415, *Applicant Responsibilities and Plan Requirements for Mechanical Permits*.

**Electrical permits** - are required for wiring and service upgrades and are obtained online through the SDCI Portal.

**Plumbing and gas piping permits** - are issued by King County Public Health Department. Visit King County Permits: [www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/ehs/plumbing/permit.aspx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/ehs/plumbing/permit.aspx).

## Helpful Phone Numbers

- Applicant Services Center  
(206) 684-8850
- Building inspections  
(206) 684-8900
- Electrical permits  
(206) 684-8464
- Seattle Fire Department  
(206) 386-1450
- Seattle/King County Health, Plumbing & Gas Piping  
(206) 205-4394
- Department of Neighborhoods, Urban Conservation Division  
(206) 684-0228
- Seattle Public Utilities, Water Services  
(206) 684-5800

## 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](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci).