

Seattle Permits

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

Accessibility Laws and Standards

Updated July 26, 2022

What is Accessibility?

Accessibility is about making buildings available to everyone, including people with disabilities. Federal, state, and City law govern accessibility requirements. These requirements include making buildings accessible to persons in wheelchairs and people that are sight- or hearing-impaired. Accessibility features include elevators or lifts, touchable signs, and visible fire alarms. The goal of these laws is to ensure that, over time, all buildings are accessible to everyone.

Accessibility Laws We Enforce

We enforce the accessibility requirements of Seattle Building Code (SBC) Chapter 11 for new buildings. SBC describes where building owners/operators need to provide accessibility and how many accessibility features are required. We have also adopted the ICC A117.1 manual, Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities. This manual tells you what accessible features look like, and how to build them. The Seattle Existing Building Code (SEBC), which applies when you make changes to an existing building, also describes accessibility requirements.

We only enforce the SBC requirements. You must comply with the SBC and with federal laws for accessibility.

Federal Laws

There are two sets of federal laws that govern accessibility:

- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) covers nonresidential buildings. It includes:
 - ADA Regulations
 - 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design

- The Fair Housing Act (FHA) and related guidelines apply to residential buildings. Residential projects are subject to FHA and portions of the ADA.

We do not enforce these federal laws, which are very similar to the accessibility requirements of the Seattle Building Code. We only evaluate building plans and design to make sure they meet the accessibility requirements in the Seattle Building Code. Our approval of a building does not guarantee that it meets federal accessibility requirements.

You are responsible for complying with the ADA, federal accessible design standards, and FHA.

Visit www.hud.gov to find out more information about the federal Fair Housing laws.

- Visit these websites for ADA Standards:
 - www.access-board.gov/guidelines-and-standards/buildings-and-sites/about-the-ada-standards/ada-standards
 - www.access-board.gov/guidelines-and-standards/buildings-and-sites/about-the-ada-standards/guide-to-the-ada-standards

Federal accessibility laws are civil rights laws, and are enforced through the court system. Individuals can file lawsuits for violations of these laws.

Investigation of Disability Discrimination Claims

The Seattle Office for Civil Rights (SOCR) investigates discrimination claims, including discrimination based on disability. They will investigate claims within the City of Seattle in housing, employment, public accommodations, and contracts. If SOCR can't help with your complaint, they may be able to refer you to another agency that can help you.

SOCR can be reached at:

Voice: (206) 684-4500
TTY: (206) 684-4503
FAX: (206) 684-0332



Seattle Office for Civil Rights
Central Building
810 3rd Avenue Suite 750
Seattle, WA 98104-1627

Information about SOCR is also available online at www.seattle.gov/civilrights/.

Additional Information

Purchasing Seattle Building Code:

- Seattle Services Portal: <https://cosaccela.seattle.gov/>

Purchasing ICC A117.1:

- Washington Association of Building Officials, (360) 628-8669, www.wabo.org.

ADA and Accessible Design Standards Information:

- ADA Information Line at the U.S. Department of Justice, (800) 514-0301 (voice); (800) 514-0383 (TTY); www.ada.gov. This website posts the federal standards as adopted by the U.S. Department of Justice.
- The Department of Housing and Urban Development website: http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/topics/information_for_disabled_persons has the text of the laws and other information.
- Guidelines, proposed accessibility standards, and other technical assistance are found at www.access-board.gov.

FHA Accessibility Guidelines and additional information:

- HUD's website at http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/FHLaws/yourrights
- Seattle HUD office, (206) 220-5101

Access to Information

Links to electronic versions of SDCI Tips, Director's Rules, and the Seattle Municipal Code are available on the "Tools & Resources" page of our website at www.seattle.gov/sdci.