

Seattle Permits

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

Shoreline Substantial Development Exemptions Application Instructions

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This Tip provides general information on Seattle's Shoreline Master Program (SMP) as it pertains to exemptions from the requirement of obtaining a shoreline substantial development (SSD) permit.

Seattle's shoreline regulations are mandated by the State Shoreline Management Act (SMA) of 1971, as amended in Chapter 90.58 of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW). This state law requires local governments to establish a program consistent with rules adopted by the State Department of Ecology (DOE). Accordingly, Seattle has adopted regulations for its shorelines, in Chapter 23.60A of the Seattle Municipal Code (SMC).

Under the SMC, shorelines of the city (designated as the "Shoreline District") include Seattle's saltwater shorelines, Salmon Bay, Lake Union, the Ship Canal, Lake Washington, Green Lake and the Duwamish River, their associated shorelands together with the lands underlying them, plus all "associated wetlands" and all marshes, swamps, bogs, floodways, river deltas and flood plains associated with these waters. Shorelands, by definition, are comprised of areas extending 200 feet landward, as measured on a horizontal plane from ordinary high water.

Any proposal within the Shoreline District that involves the construction or exterior alteration of structures, dredging, drilling, dumping, filling, removal of any sand, gravel or minerals, bulkheading, pile driving, placing of obstructions, or any project of a permanent or temporary nature that interferes with the normal public use of the water is subject to the regulation of the SMA and SMC and will require an SSD permit. An SSD permit is required, unless the project qualifies for a specific exemption under the code. (See also Tip 209, Master Use Permit Application Requirements for Shoreline Permits.)

SHORELINE SUBSTANTIAL DEVELOPMENT EXEMPTIONS

State law and the SMC specifically exempt certain types of development from the requirement of obtaining an SSD permit (SMC 23.60A.020; WAC 173-27-040). The types of development that are commonly exempt are summarized below.

If your project qualifies for a shoreline exemption, you must obtain written approval from the Department of Construction and Inspections before a construction permit can be issued or the project can be implemented. The burden of proof that a development or use is exempt from the permit process is on the applicant. The process for obtaining written approval for a shoreline exemption is described in the following section.

All development within the Shoreline District, even where an exemption from the requirement of an SSD permit is granted, must be consistent with the policies of the State Shoreline Management Act (SMA) and Seattle's Shoreline Master Program (SMP). The SMA also states that permitted uses in the shorelines of the state shall be designed and conducted in a manner to minimize, in so far as practical, any resultant damage to the ecology and environment of the shoreline area and any interference with the public's use of the water. Thus, conditions may be attached to the approval of a shoreline exemption, in order to assure consistency of the project with the SMA and SMP (WAC 173-27-040 and SMC 23.60A.020 B3).

The following types of projects are commonly shoreline exempt:

- Any development with a value of less than \$8,504.00 that does not materially interfere with normal public use of the water (SMC 23.60A.020 A). [adjusted under RCW 90.58.030(3)(e)]
- Normal maintenance and repair of existing structures or developments, including damage by accident, fire or elements (SMC 23.60A.020 C1).
- Interior remodeling of existing structures (SMC 23.60A.020 C1).



- Installation of rooftop mechanical units located behind existing parapet and not visible from the water (SMC 23.60A.020 C1).
- Construction of normal protective bulkhead common to single family residences, including beach nourishment and bioengineered erosion control projects (SMC 23.60A.020 C2).
- Emergency construction necessary to protect property from damage by elements (23.60A.020 C3).
- Construction of a single family residence and accessory structures including landscaping by owner, lessee or contract purchaser, for his/her use, on dry land only (23.60A.020 C6).
- Construction of a pier, designed for pleasure craft only, for a single family residence, the cost of which does not exceed \$2,500 in saltwater, or \$10,000 in freshwater in a single year, and which does not exceed \$12,500 inclusive of the initial investment within five years of the initial investment (SMC 23.60A.020 C7).

You typically need a shoreline exemption or shoreline substantial development permit for any work that is over water and meets the definition of “development” (SMC 23.60A.908). However, as described below, certain projects at verified floating homes do not require a formal shoreline exemption application:

You do not need to obtain a formal exemption for interior remodeling or repairs or replacements of siding, roofing, doors, or windows as long as there is no expansion or changes to the building envelope beyond permitted conditions. In addition, materials and construction methods must be consistent with standards for protecting the shoreline environment (see SMC 23.60A.152 and SMC 23.60A.155).

You may still be required to get a building permit for this work. Check with an SDCI building permit specialist to determine building permit requirements. You should also consult with SDCI regarding projects that involve changes to floats or floatation for floating homes as a shoreline exemption application may be required.

Painting, staining, or similarly maintaining or cleaning exterior surfaces of existing structures within the Shoreline District is subject to standards for protecting the shoreline environment in the SMP (see SMC 23.60A.152 and SMC 23.60A.155). However, we do not require a shoreline exemption application for these activities.

The following types of development do not qualify for a shoreline exemption:

- Grading over 250 cubic yards, which is not incidental to the construction of a single family house. A shoreline substantial development permit is required.
- Installation of fences or other accessory structures, located waterward of the residential setback of a single family house, if the views of the shoreline from adjacent residences are blocked. This type of development is not allowed. Photo documentation of views from adjacent properties is required.

FILING AN EXEMPTION APPLICATION

All requests must be part of a specific development proposal and should be submitted before you apply for your permit application. To submit the exemption request, you’ll need to first complete a preliminary application and pay the fee for your pre-application site visit (if the visit is required for your project). A pre-application site visit (PASV) is required for most projects that involved ground disturbance.

You can begin your preliminary application and request your exemption online via the Seattle Services Portal at <https://cosaccela.seattle.gov/portal/>.

The forms attached to this TIP will help you prepare the information you need to submit your application. You do not need to submit the forms; you’ll enter the information directly into the Seattle Services Portal.

There is an hourly review fee for shoreline exemption requests. You must pay the minimum review fee when you apply; it is non-refundable once we begin review of the request.

We will review your application to determine if it meets the criteria for a shoreline exemption per SMC 23.60.020A and notify you in writing whether the application was approved or denied. You must obtain a Shoreline Substantial Development Permit if the exemption application is denied. Conditions for the exemption approval may be attached in order to assure consistency of the project with the SMA and SMP (WAC 173-27-040 and SMC 23.60A.020 B3).

You must have your approved shoreline exemption at the application intake appointment for the associated permit or you may be required to reschedule the appointment. You must also place the conditions of the shoreline exemption approval on the applicable permit set of plans.

SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS: MAPS AND PLANS

The plans for all exemption applications should include the following information, where applicable. Submit your exemption request online via the Seattle Services Portal, <https://cosaccela.seattle.gov/portal/>, and pay the fees for the exemption. Please ensure that all materials are legible if handwritten and that all electronic documents are appropriately contrasted.

General Information

- Vicinity map
- Property address
- Name of adjacent streets, places or alleys, where applicable
- Access easements to or across the property, where applicable
- Calculations for existing and proposed impervious surface in square feet, show on plans
- Property lines and their dimensions
- Location, size, shape and dimensions of all existing and proposed structures
- Dimensions from all proposed buildings to the property line
- Height of all proposed structures, including decks, porches and garages, from average existing grade immediately prior to any site preparation
- Location of driveway and width, where applicable
- North arrow
- Drawing scale

Shoreline Information

- Name of adjacent water body (e.g., Lake Union).
- Line of ordinary high water (i.e., mean higher high water level for salt water, or mean high water for fresh water).
- Pierhead line, harbor line, construction limit line, where applicable.
- Ownership of property to be developed including state-owned aquatic lands.

- If the proposal involves alteration of the existing contours, or if the site is sloping, indicate existing and proposed ground elevations and contour lines at 5-foot intervals for submerged areas and 10-foot intervals landward of the ordinary high-water mark.
- If the proposal involves residential structures, you must show the location and distance from the ordinary high water of all structures on the subject site, and on all adjacent properties within 100 feet. Accurate distances are critical and a survey may be required.
- If the proposal involves a residential pier and/or floats, you must show the location and length of adjacent piers within 200 yards of the proposed pier.

Elevation Information

- Elevation of existing and proposed structures, if project includes additional structures on land.
- A cross-section, showing structure height and water depth if the proposal involves piers, other in-water structures, bulkheads or other shoreline protective structures.

Additional Information

- A contractor's bid to verify the total cost or fair market value of your proposal including labor and material, if the proposed exemption category is the \$7,047.00 threshold, as provided under SMC 23.60A.020.A.
- A contractor's bid to verify the total cost or fair market value of the proposed new single family pier, if proposed exemption category is for single family pier per SMC 23.60A.020 C7.
- A statement from a structural engineer licensed by the State of Washington to verify the need for immediate action, in order to address the imminent threat to public health and safety on the property, if proposed exemption category is for emergency construction per SMC 23.60A.020 C3.

REVIEW PROCESS

After an application is submitted, it will be reviewed for compliance with the state and City regulations. SDCI may require the applicant to furnish additional information to assist in the evaluation of the application. The SDCI Director's decision on the request is final.

FEE INFORMATION

A fee will be charged for the review of an SSD permit exemption. The fee is based on the number of hours to review the application. The cost for the first hour is collected at the time of application. Any additional money owed for review of the project will be collected at the time of issuance of the SSD permit exemption. Once the analysis begins on an application, the fee is non-refundable. See [http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-\(a-z\)/fees](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-(a-z)/fees) for more information.

Questions regarding fees should be directed to a land use planner at the Applicant Services Center.

Access to Information

Links to SDCI Tips, Director's Rules, and the Seattle Land Use Code are available on our website at www.seattle.gov/sdci.