

Seattle Permits

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

Temporary Structure Permits

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This Tip describes when you need a temporary structure permit. It also outlines the types of permits and the application process.

If you are proposing a project or event that will include temporary structures, you may need a temporary building permit. Temporary structures are portable or collapsible structures such as:

- Large tents
- Reviewing stands
- Scaffolding structures
- Large performance stages
- Pavilions
- Art installations

You may also need a temporary structure permit for projects when installed on property for a limited amount of time and the scope of work requires a building permit. Examples of such projects include:

- Temporary offices
- Classrooms
- Shelters
- Houses moved from one location to another

Projects eligible for temporary permits must comply with all fire, life safety, structural and accessibility requirements. However, temporary structure permits have reduced fees and often have a quicker intake and review process than that for a regular building permit application. You can pair your temporary structure permit with a temporary use permit (see Tip 206, *Temporary Use*

Permits in Seattle) when appropriate and if the use period is for 4 weeks or less. You can learn more about the Building Code requirements for temporary structure permits in the [Seattle Building Code](#) under SBC 106.13.

Special Events Permits

Special events such as fairs, arts, art-centered performances, festivals, and concerts sometimes include structures that require a building permit. If your special event will include a stage, reviewing stands, pavilions or other site-installed structures, you might need to get a temporary structure permit in addition to your special event permit. For information about special events permits contact the [Office of Special Events](#).

Permits From the Seattle Fire Marshal's Office

The Seattle Fire Department also issues temporary permits for events, large assemblies, and a limited range and type of structures – mostly tents and temporary enclosures. Temporary permits from both SDCI and the Fire Department are rarely required; one or the other is almost always sufficient. Visit the [Seattle Fire Marshal's website](#).

Factory Constructed Offices, Classrooms, and Storage Trailers

You can get a temporary structure permit that allows these types of structures when installed for 3 years or less on a site where the use is established (for example, a portable classroom installed on existing school property). You must ensure that your structures, along with the foundations and site-built facilities like stairs and ramps, fully comply with SBC 106.13.4 and the requirements as described in Tip 305, [Factory-Constructed Structures for Residential and Commercial Use](#). The engineering for these types of buildings shall be prepared and stamped by a Washington State licensed engineer.

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When a Temporary Permit Is Required

- **Tents, canopies, and similar facilities:** The City requires just one permit for these structures—either from the Fire Department or SDCI. For permit information, you should first contact the Fire Department at (206) 386-1450.

SDCI will issue the permit if one or more of the following circumstances apply:

1. The project is not eligible for a Fire Department permit.
2. The structure is built and maintained for more than 4 weeks or in some cases 6 months.
3. The structures are installed inside a tent or existing building and over 4 feet in overall height (such as stages, platforms or bleachers).
4. The structure is attached to buildings or permanent structures for support.
5. The Fire Department determines, for any reason, that the tent or structure requires Building Code review. These reasons may include an unusual shape, location, size or height, type of occupancy, or foul weather use.

SDCI tent permits have a maximum six-month time limit and you cannot renew the permit.

- **Construction buildings:** We do not require a separate permit when the temporary office or storage facilities are associated with and on the same property as a construction site with an issued building permit. You must remove the construction building once you have finished construction. You must get separate SDCI Temporary Use and Temporary Structure permits for a construction office or storage building **located on an adjacent or different property.**
- **Stages, platforms, bleachers, and scaffolding structures:** You need a permit when these types of site-assembled structures are more than 4 feet above the floor or grade. Structural engineering shall reference the current Seattle Building Code and be prepared and stamped by a Washington State licensed structural engineer. Stages supported on a Washington State licensed trailer and stages 4 feet or less above grade are exempt from permit. If a stage includes a backdrop and/or roof structure that supports lighting, murals, backdrop, or speakers, you must get a building permit regardless of the height of the stage.
- **Structures and pavilions erected for events, festivals, or promotions:** You need permits when

any portion of the structure is greater than 8 feet in height. On your structural design, you must reference the current Seattle Building Code, and it must be stamped by a Washington State licensed structural engineer. The permits are good for a maximum of six months and are not renewable.

- **Structures anchored to existing buildings (that weigh more than 2,000 pounds):** Your structural design shall reference the current Seattle Building Code and be stamped by a Washington State Licensed structural engineer. Examples of these types of structures include stage lighting, signs, and artistic structures suspended from the roof or ceilings of existing buildings.
- **Site-built structures:** We may require a structural design stamped by a Washington State licensed structural engineer. Examples of such site-built structures are public art installations, movie projection screens, or cribbing for a house moved from one site to another site.
- **Temporary haunted houses and temporary occupancies:** You must get permits from both the Seattle Fire Department and SDCI for these events. In addition, we often require a temporary use permit (see Tip 206, *Temporary Use Permits in Seattle*). Your temporary use permit is combined with the SDCI temporary structures permit.
- **Residential structures, shelters, and encampments:** We have very specific requirements and limitations for these types of permits. Call (206) 684-8600 to talk to SDCI staff regarding these types of permits.

Application Submittal Requirements

Prepare Your Plan Set

Your plan set should include drawings that portray the entire scope of work for your project. The plan set should follow architectural and/or engineering conventions and standards, including general notes. The plan set should be based on, and reference, the current building, fire and structural codes.

Your temporary structure plans should include the type of occupancy, occupant load, and a means of egress/exiting analysis. Unless exempt, your temporary structures must be fully accessible with a ramp or lift as required per SBC 1103.1. To demonstrate compliance with structural requirements, your plan set should be comprehensive and detail:

- How the structures are supported

- What the structures are composed of
- How they are assembled
- The means to resist wind and seismic loads per the current building code

If you have questions regarding what is required for your permit, we offer free 20-minute basic coaching sessions through the [Virtual Applicant Service Center \(ASC\)](#). Through the ASC, 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 your project's use must be allowed in the intended location. Once you have determined that the use is allowed, you can discuss your plans with a permit specialist to address any building code items that will need your attention. 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](#). Free online [Land Use and Building Code Q&A](#) is available for simple questions.

Using Professional Designers and Licensed Builders

If you choose to prepare your own application materials, our staff will assist you as much as possible. However, we strongly recommend enlisting the services of a professional designer, architect, engineer, or licensed contractor. We typically have fewer correction requests for well-prepared, fully researched applications. Having fewer corrections can reduce the overall time for our plan review, which is often critical for temporary permits. We cannot recommend designers or builders. We suggest you consult the internet and design and construction associations.

Begin Your Permit Application

You can apply for your temporary permit electronically through the [Seattle Services Portal](#). You should download all required forms from our forms web page, and then upload the completed forms into your portal application. You upload your plans as a PDF document. The application submittal, reviews, corrections, processing, permit issuance, and fee payment can be accomplished through the online portal.

1. Begin the permit process by creating a Seattle Services Portal account with your email and contact information.
2. On the Seattle Services Portal click on Permits - Trade, Construction & Land Use. You may

need to log in if you haven't already done so.

3. Choose Building & Land Use Pre-Application.
4. Enter the site address and click search. Choose and select the correct address if multiple addresses are presented. Click Continue Application.
5. Provide the applicant and owner contact information. (First try the Look Up option instead of Create New). The applicant and owner can be the same person. You can change them during the permit application process by contacting us. Click Continue Application
6. Name your application something appropriate and provide a simple project description. Leave all of the below questions checked NO. Click Continue Application
7. Complete the remaining 4 items, including a project value. Click Continue Application.
8. Upload a Basic Site Plan. Your site plan should be developed per the guidelines in Tip 103, [Site Plan Requirements](#).

The King County Assessor's website has pertinent information needed for your Site Plan. Also, Google Maps and similar sites can provide a bird's eye image to use as an underlay. The site plan when complete should have all of the information required for a Basic Site Plan on a sheet size no greater than 11" x 17" and in PDF form.

9. After you upload your site plan, you need to set the type to Site Plan and enter a description for the project document. Click SAVE. Click Continue Application.
10. Complete and provide the following documents:
 - [Statement of Financial Responsibility](#)
 - Plan Set: A complete plan set demonstrating compliance with the Seattle Building and Land Use codes

Fees

Permit fees for temporary permits are fixed based on the current Seattle Fee Subtitle and are not project value based. When a project requires both a use and a structure permit, both fees are required. You will pay all of the estimated permit fees at your intake appointment. You can pay by check or credit card in person, via mail, or through your portal account. See [How to Pay Fees](#) for directions.

Reviews

At the time of intake, your project will be assigned to the appropriate reviewers. Most simple projects undergo zoning and ordinance review. More complex projects require review by the Fire Department, structural, energy/mechanical, drainage, and/or others depending on your project. You can get information about your project as it is being reviewed by checking its status on the [Seattle Services Portal](#). You will need the record number or project address 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 e-mail when SDCI and other relevant City agencies have approved your plans. Once you have been notified, pay the remaining permit fees online. After you pay your fees, print out your permit document and a copy of the SDCI approved plans. Once your structure has been installed, you should call for an inspection following the directions on the back of the permit document or on the SDCI web site.

How Long Does It Take?

Once we have accepted your complete permit application and you have paid the fees, it typically takes us 4-6 weeks to process, review, approve, and issue your temporary permit. If your project is time sensitive, you need to contact SDCI at 206-684-8600 and make special arrangements for an expedited temporary permit. If this is a repeating installation, like an annual event or festival, you may benefit from a Standard Plan Application. This type of permit has a quicker turnaround time and will cost less over time. See TIP 310, [Standard Plans](#).

Access to Information

Links to Tips, Director's Rules, and the Seattle Municipal Code are available on [SDCI's website](#).