

# Seattle Permits

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

## Subject-to-Field-Inspection (STFI) Permits

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If you have a simple construction project that does not require extensive plan review, you may be able to speed up your permit application, review, and issuance process by getting a subject-to-field-inspection (STFI) permit. This Tip identifies project types that qualify for the STFI process and highlights the corresponding application requirements.

If you are working on a single family house or duplex, please read Tip 303A, [Common Seattle Residential Code Requirements](#). For electrical and over-the-counter mechanical permits, refer to Tip 104, [Getting an OTC \(Over-the-Counter\) Permit](#).

### Special Notice Regarding Projects that Involve Removal and Replacement of an Illegal Portion of a Structure

We do not consider the removal and reconstruction (replacement) of a portion of an illegal (built without a permit) structure to be a repair. We will require proof that your structure was legally constructed under a permit, before issuing your STFI permit. The burden of such proof will be your responsibility.

Prior to applying for a permit, you may want to research previous permits issued for the site in our Microfilm Library, [sci\\_microfilm@seattle.gov](mailto:sci_microfilm@seattle.gov).

You may need a site inspection before we issue your permit.

### Projects that Qualify for STFI Permits

- **Demolition** of a building proposed on a site:
  - That is not located in certain environmentally critical areas (ECAs)
  - Where the project does not require other land use permits
  - That does not exceed 4,999 square feet of land disturbing activity
  - Where excavation can be contained on the site with all cuts at a 45-degree slope.

Other criteria must also be met for demolition projects to qualify as an STFI. Please read Tip 337, [Demolition and Deconstruction](#), for specific demolition requirements.

- **Foundation repair and replacement** where the foundation is not designed as a retaining wall, where its height does not exceed 4 feet from the bottom of the footing, where there is no change in height and location of the structure's footprint, and where the project is not located in an ECA. You must provide photographs showing the extent of the damage. (Note: we require plan review for foundation repair and replacement with pin piles, and therefore we cannot process that as a STFI).
- **Structural alterations** to existing single family and duplex structures. We allow openings in load-bearing walls if these walls support only one story above and roof loads, and they have a maximum structural beam span of 14 feet (30 feet if a manufactured truss is used).
- **Non-structural interior alterations in single family and duplex structures** typically qualify for a STFI. (Note: we require plan review to convert uninhabited attic storage area into a livable space, and therefore we cannot process it as a STFI.)
- **Non-structural interior alterations (tenant improvements) in commercial spaces** qualify for a STFI if the area of all work is not more than 4,500 square feet. These alterations must not change the number of exits or change the path of travel or



distance to exits. See the Multifamily/Commercial Buildings/STFI checklist at [www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/forms](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/forms) for additional eligibility requirements. Before we can issue a STFI permit, you will be required to provide proof that the structure was legally constructed and that you have previously established how you will use your land. See Tip 102, [Small Business: Getting Your Use and Building Permit from SDCI for additional requirements for Use permits](#).

- **Installation or replacement of acoustic ceiling tile systems (ACT)** of unlimited area within commercial, institutional, and multifamily buildings when the construction and seismic isolation meets [industry standard details](#) and complies with the current Seattle Building Code. Fireproofing above the ceiling system must be maintained and repaired if damaged. Any simultaneous tenant improvement work must also qualify for an STFI.
- **Installation of industrial storage racks and free-standing cabinetry** where the height of the upper most shelf is over 5' – 9" and under 8' – 0" above the finished floor.
- **Repairs to damaged buildings** to restore them back to their original configuration. The value of the repairs cannot exceed 60 percent of the building's value if the structure is subject to the Seattle Residential Code (SRC). The value of the repairs cannot exceed 30 percent of the estimated replacement cost of the building if the structure is subject to the Seattle Building Code (SBC). When the value of the repairs exceeds 10 percent of the estimated replacement cost of the building, the structural repairs must be designed by a structural engineer. If the field inspector determines that the damage is too extensive to qualify for a STFI, we will require full plan review. We require photographs showing the extent of the damage.
- **Ground level one-story additions** to existing single-family and duplex residential structures. Additions must be 750 square feet or less in area, with a maximum structural beam span of 14 feet\* (30 feet if a manufactured truss is used). Openings in bearing walls are limited to supporting one story above and roof loads. Additions must meet prescriptive Energy Code (Energy Code Chapter 4) requirements and prescriptive ventilation requirements of the Mechanical Code.

*\*For garage door headers the limit is 16 feet.*

- **Detached accessory structures** to single-family and duplex homes, up to 750 square feet in area, with structural spans of less than 14 feet\* (30 feet if a manufactured truss is used).

*\*For garage door headers the limit is 16 feet.*

- **Rockerries** not used as a retaining wall and not in an ECA site, designed according to our prescriptive rockery design (refer to Tip 321, [Rockerries: Prescriptive Design and Installation Standards](#))
- **Dormer additions** to single-family and duplex homes when all of the following criteria are met:
  - The maximum dormer width is 14 feet. New dormers must be physically separate from existing dormers, or they will be measured based on the combined width.
  - The dormer is located at an existing habitable story.
  - No more than 200 square feet of new usable floor space is added to the story.
  - Structural framing plans and details are prepared and stamped by a licensed architect or engineer.
- **Substantial alterations** to single family homes that substantially extends the physical and/or economic life of the building and meet the limitations described above for **structural** or **non-structural alterations, ground level one-story additions** and/or **dormer additions**. To qualify for a STFI, you will need to show one of the following:
  - Structural plans prepared and stamped by a licensed engineer showing seismic upgrades to strengthen foundations and cripple walls (walls supporting the house between the concrete foundation and first floor) throughout the structure
  - [Earthquake Home Retrofit](#) approved plans for strengthening the connection between the house's framing and foundation. The Earthquake Home Retrofit permit must be issued prior to issuance of STFI, and work completed prior to STFI final inspection approval
  - The house was built new per the 1985 UBC or a more recent code

Substantial alteration projects require certain upgrades throughout the structure, including in areas where alterations are not planned. See SRC R107.9 and [STFI Permit Checklist - Single Family and Duplex Buildings](#) for code requirements.

## General Plan Information that May be Required to Determine if Your Project Qualifies as STFI

1. All STFI permit applications require a completed and signed STFI permit checklist:

- [Single Family and Duplex Buildings](#)
- [Multifamily and Commercial Buildings](#)

You must comply with all applicable codes to receive a STFI permit. For projects in a multifamily or commercial building, mark all items that apply to your project on the Multifamily and Commercial Building STFI checklist. Inspectors will review the checklist and also reference the [Seattle Building Code](#) (SBC) in order to ensure compliance regardless of what your plans portray. See Your Responsibilities with STFI Permits later in this Tip.

### 2. SITE PLAN

You need to submit a site plan when you change the outside of your house or accessory structure, or when you do exterior work on your site. Your site plan must show the location of all structures on the site, to representative scale, and identify the location of the work to be performed relative to existing conditions and property lines. You should call out the exterior dimensions of the property and all structures and the distance from all property lines to the structure at its closest point. (See Tip 103, [Site Plan Requirements](#), Tip 220, [Lot Coverage, Height and Yard Standards for Homes in Single Family Zones](#), and Tip 303, [Applicant Responsibilities and Plan Requirements for Single Family and Two-Unit Dwellings](#).)

#### ■ STFI Projects that Require a Site Plan:

- Ground level one-story additions
- Detached accessory structures
- Rockeries
- Dormer additions
- Demolition
- Foundation repair and replacement

### 3. LOCATION PLAN

A location plan is a simple drawing showing the location of the proposed work. It must be drawn to a reasonable scale with the following dimensions and details:

- Include the property address, assessor's parcel number, and legal description. You can find this information on the King County Assessor website.

- Show property lines, streets, building outline, and a north arrow. When more than one building is on the site, show and label each building.
- For projects in a building with more than one tenant, include a plan of the entire floor that shows each tenant space and the area of work.
- For projects involving repair, you must submit photographs showing the location and extent of damage (including interior and exterior views of the damage when appropriate) with your location plan.

#### ■ STFI Projects that Require a Location Plan are:

- Interior Alterations
- Repairs to damaged buildings

### 4. FLOOR PLAN

We require a floor plan when your project involves changes to the interior space of your building. Your floor plan must show the layout and use(s) of the interior space of the building, with the exact location and square footage of work to be done. This drawing must have clear dimensions, showing the already existing structure and proposed work.

Existing structural information, that you provide, should include:

- Direction of framing, size (e.g., 2x8), spacing (16" on center)
- Span (length between supports)
- Spacing (16" on center)
- Location and size of openings
- The path of travel or distance to exits
- Energy code (insulation R-value)
- Glazing u-factor
- Ventilation requirements

Your floor plan must be made available at the site to be verified during inspection. (See Tip 303, [Applicant Responsibilities and Plan Requirements for Single Family and Two-Unit Dwellings](#).)

#### ■ STFI Projects that Require a Floor Plan:

- Interior alterations
- Ground level one-story additions
- Dormer additions
- Detached accessory structures
- Repairs to damaged buildings

## 5. ELEVATION DRAWINGS

We require elevations when you propose changes to the exterior envelope of your structure. An elevation shows the height of the structure, including location of the plate and roof ridge in relation to the existing and finished grade. Your elevation must show the relationship of the exterior wall to the slope of grade (sloped driveways and ground elevations). (See Tip 303, [Applicant Responsibilities and Plan Requirements for Single-Family and Two-Unit Dwellings](#).)

### ■ STFI Projects that Require Elevation Drawings:

- Ground level one-story additions
- Detached accessory structures
- Rockeries
- Dormer additions

## 6. CROSS SECTION DRAWINGS

Cross sections are required when you propose changes within a wall or roof. A cross section is shown through a typical wall from foundation to roof. You need to specify materials size, spacing, and type. Show the foundation, wall construction, insulation (for heated or air-conditioned space), flooring, ceiling, roofing, ventilation and connections. (See Tip 303, [Applicant Responsibilities and Plan Requirements for Single-Family and Two-Unit Dwellings](#), Figures 3 and 4.)

## Your Responsibilities with STFI Permits

You are responsible for the knowledge of, and compliance with, all applicable codes, including, but not limited to, land use, building, mechanical, electrical, energy, shoreline, critical areas, and grading rules. You will need to sign a statement that acknowledges that you did not receive a complete code review prior to getting your permit. (If you are working on a single family house or duplex, see Tip 303, [Applicant Responsibilities and Plan Requirements for Single-Family and Two-Unit Dwellings](#).)

Our building or mechanical inspector(s) can require you to make any changes to comply with the applicable codes. For example, new windows will need to be removed or replaced if they did not meet the energy code requirements. In addition, we may revoke your permit at the discretion of our building or mechanical inspector should the information provided prove to be inaccurate. You will be required to submit new plans to us for our review if your permit is revoked.

## Applying for a STFI Permit

To apply for a STFI permit, submit your plans and documents electronically through your [Seattle Services Portal](#). See the How to Submit a Construction Subject-to-Field-Inspection Application article in the Seattle Services Portal Help Center for step-by-step submittal instructions at <https://seattlegov.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/115001670293-How-to-Submit-a-Construction-Subject-to-Field-Inspection-Application>. Remember to include your property's legal description with the King County Assessor's parcel number. Be ready to pay the full permit fee.

It is important that your plans clearly show all the work you propose to do to avoid processing delays. Once we issue a permit it will be limited to the scope defined and illustrated in the documents you filed.

The following documents, available on our [forms website](#), may be used in conjunction with STFI permit applications.

- STFI Checklist – Single Family and Duplex or Multi-family and Commercial
- Rat Abatement Declaration (demolition only)

## STFI Permits Requiring a Pre-Application Site Visit

A Pre-Application Site Visit (PASV) with an STFI permit is required **only** if you will disturb more than 750 square feet of land or if you will disturb any land on a site with an environmentally critical area (ECA).

Based upon your proposed development and the affected ECA, we may require a reviewed or routed review application in lieu of a STFI.

For STFI permits that do not require a PASV, a site inspector will perform an initial ground disturbance inspection at the start of construction AND after your permit has been issued. You must schedule this inspection **prior** to starting excavation by calling our 24-hour inspection request line, (206) 684-8900. Calls before 7:00 a.m. should be scheduled for an inspection within 24 hours. When we issue your permit we charge you a fee as a deposit toward anticipated site inspections.

## STFI Permits Requiring a Salvage Assessment

In Seattle, you must salvage or recycle asphalt paving, brick, concrete, cardboard, metal, gypsum scrap, and



unpainted and untreated wood instead of putting these materials in a disposal container at either your job site or a receiving facility.

For a list of facilities complying with Seattle's facility certification program go to [www.seattle.gov/utilities/businesses-and-key-accounts/construction/construction-waste/recycling-requirements/certified-facilities](http://www.seattle.gov/utilities/businesses-and-key-accounts/construction/construction-waste/recycling-requirements/certified-facilities).

More information on the city's material bans is at [www.seattle.gov/utilities/businesses-and-key-accounts/construction/construction-waste/recycling-requirements](http://www.seattle.gov/utilities/businesses-and-key-accounts/construction/construction-waste/recycling-requirements).

We require a salvage assessment for projects involving some demolition and having either an area of work greater than 750 square feet or project value greater than \$75,000.

The salvage assessment helps identify which waste materials from your project can possibly be salvaged and reused on your construction project or someone else's. If you are taking materials from one project to be used on another project site, or if your project involves partial building removal or alterations, then the salvage assessment can be filled out by the building owner or agent. Waste from demolishing a building is more complex so the salvage assessment must be completed by a salvage verifier meeting one of the following requirements:

- An established salvage and reuse retail company
- A licensed contractor specializing in deconstruction
- A demolition company with the knowledge of local and current salvage retail markets.

A list of possible verifying agents may be found through resources such as [The Northwest Building Salvage Network](#).

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What happens if my application is rejected?

If we determine your project does not qualify for a STFI permit, we will give you detailed information on how to proceed.

### 2. What happens if there are minor problems with my application?

If our assessment of your application determines that we need additional information, we will notify you on how to resubmit your application material.

### 3. How long does it take to get STFI permits issued?

We typically process STFI permits within one working day from the date of filing. This time frame varies due to

volume fluctuations associated with seasonal demands, but we will make every effort to process your application as soon as possible.

### 4. Can I do work between the time I submit my application and when it is issued?

**NO.** You can only do work that requires a permit once a permit is issued.

## Post-Final Inspection Approval Documentation Submittal

A waste diversion plan should be submitted directly to Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) within 60 days of our final inspection approval for projects that are either greater than 750 square feet or that have a project value greater than \$75,000. Your report should identify the actual materials produced from your project, their quantity, who the hauler was, and where the materials were taken for reuse, recycling, and disposal. A copy of the waste diversion report and directions for how you submit it to SPU are found at [www.seattle.gov/utilities/businesses-and-key-accounts](http://www.seattle.gov/utilities/businesses-and-key-accounts).

For technical questions on how to fill out the waste diversion plan or report, please contact Seattle Public Utilities at [WasteDiversionReport@seattle.gov](mailto:WasteDiversionReport@seattle.gov).

## Projects that Do Not Qualify as a STFI

You cannot get a STFI for the following projects:

- Second story and two-story additions to single-family residences.
- Dormer additions creating a new second floor for habitable living space.
- Additions to single-family and duplex structure in excess of 750 square feet.
- Detached structures accessory to single-family and duplex that are more than 750 square feet.
- Change of use or occupancy group, or change in character of occupancy.
- Exterior alterations and additions of any kind to commercial or multifamily structures.
- Structural alterations of any kind to commercial or multifamily structures.
- Deck additions to single-family residences or duplexes greater than 8 feet above grade.

- Deck additions to single-family residences or accessory structures located on a roof or above any enclosed space such as a basement, garage, or shed.
- Existing unheated attic to be converted into living/habitable space.
- Additions that do not meet the prescriptive requirements of the Seattle Energy Code or prescriptive ventilation requirements of the Mechanical Code.
- Initial tenant improvements for the first tenant in the space.
- Commercial tenant improvements that modify the exits in commercial occupancies in any way (even relocating an existing exit door).
- Alterations that change the number and/or position of plumbing fixtures (such as water closets, sinks, urinals, and showers) in a bathroom facility in commercial, institutional, and multifamily buildings except for those within a dwelling unit.
- Openings in bearing walls supporting more than one story and roof loads, structural beam spans in excess of 14 feet\* (30 feet span for manufactured trusses that support roof and snow load only – trusses shall be designed by a licensed engineer and fabricated in a WABO certified facility. Provide the engineer's stamped documents to the SDCI field inspector).  
\*For garage door headers the limit is 16 feet.
- Projects that require routing to other City departments.
- Relocating a structure on your property.
- Projects that require SEPA review (see Director's Rule 29-2015, *State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Exemptions From Environmental Review Requirements When Establishing, Changing or Expanding A Use*).
- Retaining walls.
- All wood foundations and foundations using piles, including pipe piles and pin piles.
- Demolishing residential structures without an abatement order, or removal of a residential use requiring a Tenant Relocation Assistance Ordinance (TRAO) license.
- Repairs to a nonconforming structure built without permits.
- Changing the number of dwelling units in any building.

- Modifying parking spaces except when accessory to a single family dwelling.
- Projects that require special inspections (structural or geotechnical).
- Projects that include new impervious surface in a Category 1 peat settlement-prone area.
- Construction using atypical materials or methods.
- Using a code modification for alternate materials.
- Substantial alterations to any building that is not a single-family home (including duplexes and townhomes).
- Converting an existing structure to an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) or Detached Accessory Dwelling Unit (DADU).
- Establishing or constructing an ADU or DADU.

This Tip outlines the most common criteria for a project to qualify as an STFI. Your project may have other conditions that would require a plan review. These items vary depending on the specifics of your project and site. We will address them individually during our assessment of your application.

### Permit Processing for Projects that Do Not Qualify as STFI

Projects that do not qualify for STFI require plan review. You will need to prepare more detailed plans and schedule an appointment to submit your plans. The time it takes to get your permit depends on how complex your project is, how many corrections you need to make to your plans, and how quickly and completely you respond to plan review comments.

For additional information on the plan review process, please visit our website at [www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits), see Tip 101, [Getting a Single-Family Building Permit From SDCI](#) and Tip 102, [Small Business: Getting Your Use and Building Permit From SDCI](#), or contact the Applicant Services Center (ASC), [www.seattle.gov/sdci/about-us/who-we-are/applicant-services-center](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/about-us/who-we-are/applicant-services-center).

### Helpful Tips

The following Tips, mentioned earlier in this document, are available online at:

- Tip 101, [Getting a Single-Family Building Permit From SDCI](#)

- Tip 102, [Small Business: Getting Your Use and Building Permit From SDCI](#)
- Tip 103, [Site Plan Requirements](#)
- Tip 104, [Getting an Over-the-Counter Permit](#)
- Tip 220, [Lot Coverage, Height and Yard Standards for Homes in Single-Family Zones](#)
- Tip 303, [Applicant Responsibilities and Plan Requirements for Single-Family and Two Unit Dwelling Units](#)
- Tip 321, [Rockeries: Prescriptive Design and Installation Standards](#)
- Tip 336, [Sustainable Building and Reuse of Building Materials](#)
- Tip 337, [Demolition Permits](#)

### Code References

- [Seattle Building Code](#)
- [Seattle Mechanical Code](#)
- [Seattle Energy Code](#)
- [Seattle Residential Code](#)
- [Seattle Land Use and Zoning Code](#)

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