Top Mistakes We See for Multifamily Building Permits

We often see recurring mistakes in applications during the permitting process. To help reduce corrections and save you time, we have created a comprehensive list of the most common errors for multifamily housing with five or more units.

We recommend that you attend a pre-submittal meeting to answer complex code requirements.*

Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection

Please use the reference materials below for more help with multifamily building permits:

- Priority Permit Handling for Publicly Funded Low-Income Housing (OH Website)
- Screening and Submittal Checklist – New (Small) Multifamily
- Screening and Submittal Checklist – Large Multifamily

Make sure to include the items below when you submit your plans

Land Use (Zoning):

- Provide the correct address on plans and ensure consistency between the legal description, site plan, and development site. See Tip 247 for site permitting guidelines
- Complete a zoning analysis table to demonstrate compliance with the Land Use Code.
- Provide dimensioned floor area plans to verify Floor Area Ratio (FAR) calculations. If the building permit you are applying for will be used for low-income housing, you do not need to follow Multifamily Housing Affordability requirements.
- Include dimensioned diagrams on plans to support calculations.
- Identify code exceptions being used and describe how you meet the criteria. (Ex. FAR, height exceptions, setbacks).
- Label the use per the Land Use Code on each floor plan.

Ordinance/Structural:

Exit stairway exceptions

- SBC 1028.1 exception 1 allows 50% of the interior exit stairways to discharge through a lobby.
- The exterior exit door shall be readily visible and identifiable from the stair exit door.
- Free and unobstructed path of travel to the exterior exit door.
- The floor of the exit discharge is required to have the same construction rating as the stair enclosure.

Accessory amenity spaces:

- Accessory amenity spaces, such as occupied roof decks and community rooms, must have the correct plumbing fixtures. (See Chapter 29 of 2021 SBC.)
- Typically, plumbing fixtures must be located on the roof deck or one story below the roof deck
- See the 2018 SBC Code Interpretation, 2902.1-Minimum number of fixtures reduction for facilities serving R-2 amenity areas, for more information

Diaphragm design:

- Confirm all chords and collectors are identified in the diaphragm design of the concrete podium and the wood structure
- Show all open-front diaphragms for the wood structure

Irregularities:

- Identify horizontal and vertical irregularities. These need to be identified early in the design and can have a significant impact on the design.

Geotechnical:

Geotechnical report compliance:

- When using a geotechnical report, ensure the shoring and/or foundation design match the recommendations of the report, e.g. apparent earth pressure or passive earth pressure applied incorrectly, subgrade preparations not included in plans, foundation doesn't go deep enough to bearing layer.

Energy:

Energy Compliance pathways:

- Make sure energy compliance pathways are noted on the drawings for the project. Refer to 2021 Seattle Energy Code (SEC) section C401.2 for compliance paths.

Mechanical:

Commercial kitchens:

- Include the SDCI Commercial Kitchen Hood Worksheet with all projects involving Type I and Type II kitchen hoods. Note that the Worksheet is to be included with the plan set (do not upload separately).

Seattle Department of Transportation Street Use:

- If your project has ADA curb ramps triggers and design issues – applicants are advised to familiarize themselves with the SDOT policy & technical issues covering construction standards and tolerances for ADA ramps.
- Right-of-Way Opening & Restoration Rules outline various conditions where a project's impact to existing public infrastructure requires construction of a new ADA ramp. Applicants are advised to familiarize themselves with these restoration rules at the outset of project planning so that your likely project scope is fully understood.
- Private encroachments such as walls, stairways, and fences are encouraged to be located on private property rather than in the right-of-way (ROW). Any structures proposed to encroach into the ROW require SDOT approval by way of a Street Use permit(s). An application to encroach into the ROW is a discretionary decision by SDOT, based on the impact of the use on the traveling public, impact on public infrastructure and other factors, and should not be viewed as an automatic approval. **Permit approval from SDOT should be obtained before finalizing design to the extent your project relies on encroachments being permitted within public ROW.** Failure to obtain SDOT approval at an early enough point may result in the need to re-design your project. Private encroachments require an on-going permit for the life of the encroachment in ROW, require payment of an annual fee for that same duration, and are subject to revocation, and removal of the encroachment at SDOT's discretion. Review Section 3.5 (Structures in the Right-of-Way) of the *Streets Illustrated* manual for additional information.
- Comply with all clearances is required for any structures or objects placed in the ROW for private development. Review section 3.3 of the *Streets Illustrated* manual.

Seattle Fire Department:

Biggest multifamily permit issues that need to be checked with the Seattle Fire Department are:

- Adequate water supply for sprinkler systems
- Emergency vehicle access

Review the fire code to ensure your construction is in compliance.

Seattle Public Utilities Development Service Offices:

Keep the information below in mind if your project requires a Street Improvement Permit; Water, Drainage, and Wastewater (DWW) System Improvements; and/or Large Water Service (more than 2 inches) Review.

- There are specific clearances from the curb and property line that determine where your water service vault meets up with your downstream piping. For more information, check Standard Plan 314b.
- Maintain horizontal clearances between existing/proposed utilities and proposed street trees (Standard Plan 030).
- Maintain horizontal and vertical clearances between proposed SPU water/DWW infrastructure and existing infrastructure (Standard Plans 286a and 030).
- Ensure minimum slope and depth of cover of proposed DWW infrastructure follow code
- Public storm drain slope and depth of cover (Director's Rule DWW-210). Public sewer system slope and depth of cover.
- Replacement of substandard drainage inlets and laterals with standard materials (Director's Rule DWW-210, Standard Plan 250a).
- Director's Rule DWW-210, Standard Plan 241b tells you how to grade alleys to route stormwater drainage to a Type 241 catch basin.

These are the items you will want to address in your project plans if your project needs a Small Water Service Plan (2 inches or less) Review:

- Adequate water service site plan meeting guidelines (Standard Plan 314b):
- Show all utilities, trees, and ROW improvements.
- Meet clearance requirements for existing and proposed water services.
- Show existing & proposed water services.
- List SDCI assigned addresses on plan.
- Ensure approved Street Improvement Permit (SIP) matches water service site plan.
- Ensure water service sizes are not oversized for intended project.
- Ensure new water line inspection and multiple meter flow test are completed.

Seattle Public Utilities Solid Waste

- Applicants of most residential and commercial building types must complete and submit the SPU Checklist for Designers and should review the relevant sections of CAM 1301 in early design. Solid Waste Storage and Access for New or Remodeled Buildings - Utilities | seattle.gov

- If you require dumpsters and subsequent services: Only dumpsters with loose materials that are 2 cubic yards or smaller may be pushed by drivers. Any compactor or any dumpster 3 CY or larger in volume must be set out for service such that trucks can directly connect to and dump the contents of the container into trucks. Sample plans are available in CAM 1301.

Seattle City Light

The biggest issues that Seattle City Light (SCL) sees when reviewing multifamily housing permits can include:

- Clearance from high voltage lines (HVL) and secondary lines. Refer to SCL Construction Standards, 0100.03 and 0100.04
- Incomplete and/or unclear survey and plan details
- Not showing HVL locations, elevations, property lines, etc.
    - Survey and plan measurement discrepancies
- Review for construction within an existing City Light easement.
- Review for land use and City Light easement requirements
- Incomplete survey and plan details not showing existing electrical facilities

All the above may require the applicant to work with the SCL application/engineering process directly - before permit approval you must apply for new or upgraded Electrical Service.

- Undergrounding existing overhead HVL, and pole relocations to meet clearance requirements.
- Scope of work and financial agreements are needed before SCL will approve the application.
- For land use, relocation of existing services to avoid crossing proposed new parcels, and/or SCL easements (before approval).