Development Services
First-Timer Primer

Do I need a permit?

How long will it take to get a permit?

How much will it cost?

Will I need an inspection?
Welcome!

So you’re thinking about building that deck you’ve always wanted. Or that addition to create a media room. Or you’ve taken that big step to start your own coffee shop, rented a space, and need to remodel it before opening for business.

But you haven’t done this before, and the thought of having to get building permits and call for inspections is terrifying.

Relax – we’re here to help.

We prepared this booklet to assist inexperienced applicants in navigating their way through the permitting and inspection process.

Inside you’ll find –
- Questions and answers addressing first time applicants’ most common concerns;
- Step-by-step instructions for homeowners and small business owners seeking their first building permit;
- Contact information; and
- Examples of construction tip sheets.

We don’t expect this booklet to answer all your questions: we do expect you to contact us at (425) 486-8152 if any aspect of the process still confuses you after reading this guide.

A word of advice. There are many construction projects you can do yourself, but there are also those where your enthusiasm may exceed your expertise. Know your limits: bringing in a design specialist or a professional contractor may seem expensive, but it could save you money in the long run.

Please note that even if you decide to hire a design specialist and/or a professional contractor, becoming familiar with this booklet will help you understand the journey your permit application is taking.

We look forward to being your partner in achieving your building goals. Good luck!

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Frequently asked questions

When do I need a permit, and when don’t I?

Let’s start with the easy part of that question. Following are examples of typical projects for which you don’t need a permit:

- A storage shed, playhouse or treehouse no bigger than 200 square feet;
- A fence no taller than six feet;
- A retaining wall no taller than four feet, unless it’s supporting a surcharge or impounding certain types of liquids (ask our staff if you have a question about this);
- Residential sidewalks, decks and driveways, as long as they are no more than 30 inches above grade, not over a basement or story below, and not part of a disabled-accessible route;
- Finish work such as painting, tiling, carpeting and installing cabinets and countertops, provided existing disabled-accessible features aren’t altered;
- Playground equipment;
- Satellite antennas no larger than three-and-one-quarter feet in diameter in residential zones, and six-and-one-half feet in diameter in commercial zones;
- In-kind window replacement where no alteration of structural members is required and the insulating values meet Energy Code requirements; and
- Roofing overlays on one- and two-family dwellings when the new layer is no more than the second layer.

The above are most common, but there are other similar projects that don’t require permits. If you have a question about whether your particular project needs a permit, please ask our staff.

Other than these, pretty much everything else requires a permit.

I’m starting a business, and renting space in a commercial building. What’s the difference between a major and a minor tenant improvement, and why does it matter?

A tenant improvement, or TI for short, is the interior alteration of a non-residential space. A TI is major if the space is new and you would be the first occupant, or if the space is existing but the use before you had a different occupancy classification. A TI is minor if the space is existing and the use before you had the same occupancy classification.
There are many types of occupancy classifications: please talk to one of our staff to make sure you are using the right classification for your business.

Correctly stating the occupancy classification of your business is important to ensure your application goes into the right processing queue. Claiming a proposed TI is minor when in fact it is major can cause a delay in issuance of your permit.

**Do I need a design professional and a contractor?**

If your project is in a building having over 4,000 square feet of total space (even if you’re altering only a part of the total space), state law requires construction drawings prepared and stamped by a licensed architect.

If you’re in a smaller commercial building, or are contemplating an extensive home remodel, you might not be required to have a design professional, but it would likely be in your best interests to do so. The codes are very complicated, and a design professional will avoid mistakes that would cost you time and money to undo. The same applies to the construction of your project.

However, if you’re contemplating building a deck or other simple home project, you probably have or can easily acquire the skills to do so successfully. Between our tip sheets and the wealth of information available on the internet, you can learn enough to be your own contractor for these kinds of projects.

**How long will it take to get my permit?**

Permit processing time depends on the complexity of the permit.

A permit to replace a residential hot water heater, for example, can be issued over the counter. Review of a permit application for a residential deck or non-structural interior remodel takes two weeks, typically. Review of a residential addition customarily requires three weeks.

With respect to commercial permits, review of an application for a minor TI permit (see above for description) usually takes around two weeks, while a major TI takes three weeks. A commercial building addition or new building review takes approximately five weeks.

Please note that these times are all for initial reviews. While some of the simpler permits can be issued after the initial review, it is more common that errors are found in the first review, necessitating corrections to the plans, a re-submittal and a second review. Second and subsequent reviews, if necessary, take less time than the initial review.
To be fair to all our customers – big and small alike – we strive to operate on a first-in, first-out system, in which applications wait their turn in a non-discriminatory queue.

However, we do have a “safety valve” for large projects and during high-volume periods wherein we send complex applications out for review by consultants, for an extra fee. Having this ability better enables us to adhere to our advertised timelines for our smaller customers for whom this pamphlet was written.

**How much will my permit cost?**

Permit fees are based on the valuation of the work (labor and materials). The valuation is established based on the square footage of the structure or the valuation of the construction bid documents, whichever yields the higher value.

**Example** - The City has established the valuation of a single family deck at $15.00 per square foot of deck area. If the valuation provided by the applicant equates to more than $15.00 per square foot the City will use the applicant-provided valuation. Conversely, if the valuation provided by the applicant is less than $15.00 per square foot the City will use the City-established valuation. Thus, a 300 square foot deck utilizing the City’s established valuation (300 x $15.00 = $4,500 valuation) would be charged approximately $240 in permit fees.
Following is a list of the most common fees based on the permit type sought:

**Single Family Deck**
Plan Review Fee (valuation based)
Permit Fee (valuation based)
State Building Code
Surcharge ($4.50)
Technology Surcharge
(5% of all permit fees)

Example: SF Deck replacement including stairs and rails.
**Valuation $12,000.00**
- Plan Review: $163.15
- Permit Fee: $251.00
- State Bldg Code: $4.50
- 5% Tech Fee: $20.71
- **Total Cost: $439.36**

**Single Family Addition**
Plan Review Fee (valuation based)
Permit Fee (valuation based)
State Building Code
Surcharge ($4.50)
Energy Code Review
Storm Drain Inspection
Technology Surcharge
(5% of all permit fees)

Example: SF Addition - garage storage
**Valuation $15,000.00**
- Plan Review: $195.91
- Permit Fee: $301.40
- State Bldg Code: $4.50
- Energy Code Review: $141.00
- SF Storm Drain Inspection: $210.00
- 5% Tech Fee: $42.43
- **Total Cost: $895.24**

**Tenant Improvement**
Plan Review Fee (valuation based)
Permit Fee (valuation based)
State Building Code
Surcharge ($4.50)
Energy Code Review
Traffic Impact and Administrative Fees
(for Major or Change-of-Use tenant improvements)
Technology Surcharge
(5% of all permit fees)

Example: Minor TI – Office Expansion
**Valuation $31,604**
- Plan Review: $360.10
- Permit Fee: $554.00
- State Bldg Code: $4.50
- Energy Code Review: $141.00
- 5% Tech Fee: $52.25
- **Total Cost: $1,111.85**
What inspections will I need?

Typical inspections for a single family deck would include:

1. Footings and setbacks
2. Framing
3. Final

Typical inspections for a single family addition would include:

1. Footings and setbacks
2. Foundation
3. Underfloor framing
4. Plumbing rough-in (if new fixtures being added or relocated)
5. Mechanical rough-in
6. Framing
7. Insulation
8. Final

Typical inspections for a tenant improvement:

1. Plumbing underground (if applicable)
2. Plumbing rough-in (if applicable)
3. Mechanical rough-in (if applicable)
4. Framing
5. Drywall (for fire-rated assemblies only)
6. Suspended ceilings
7. Mechanical Final
8. Plumbing Final
9. Final
Homeowner projects, step by step

These directions were prepared with the most common homeowner projects – decks, interior remodels and additions – in mind. If your project is different, please contact us for any variations.

**Step 1** – **Tip sheets** – The following have been prepared to help you provide the required information or incorporate the required design elements in your application packets:

- Construction Tip Sheet 1 - Basic residential stairs
- Construction Tip Sheet 2 - Residential handrails
- Construction Tip Sheet 3 - Residential guards
- Construction Tip Sheet 5 - Basic decks
- Construction Tip Sheet 8 - Restrooms
- Construction Tip Sheet 9 - Accessible parking spaces
- Construction Tip Sheet 10 - Residential emergency escape & rescue openings
- Construction Tip Sheet 13 – Ramps and landings

These are available in our lobby and online.

**Step 2** – Obtain property information from the county assessor’s office, including the address and parcel number.

King County:
[http://www.kingcounty.gov/Assessor.aspx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/Assessor.aspx)

Snohomish County:
[http://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/175/Assessor](http://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/175/Assessor)

**Step 3** – Prepare a site plan that is drawn to scale and depicts all structures in existence on the property, and any new structures or additions to existing structures that are being proposed.

**Step 4** – Prepare building plans. There are numerous software applications available on the web which can be utilized to prepare your application drawings. Many of them are free downloads, such as:
Step 5 – Fill out the appropriate checklist. Checklists are provided for every type of development permit the City administers. Each checklist is specific to an application and clearly details essential elements of the application and plans, including the number of plans to submit for review.

Step 6 – Submit the application, plans and associated review fees.

Step 7 – Wait patiently for review. For decks the review timelines are two weeks; for single family additions, three weeks; and for tenant improvements, two weeks and three weeks for minor and major tenant improvements, respectively. While the City strives to complete all reviews within our published timelines, actual review times can vary (summer is our busiest time of the year!).

Step 8 – Make corrections and re-submit once you have received the review comments from all review disciplines.

Step 9 – When you receive notice that your permit is ready, come in, pay the appropriate fees and pick up your permit.

Step 10 – Build your project, calling for inspections at appropriate times (if you use a contractor, they must be licensed in Bothell).
Small business owner projects, step by step

These directions were prepared with the most common small business owner projects – tenant improvements – in mind. If your project is substantially different, please contact us to discuss any variations.

Step 1 – Minor or major tenant improvement (TI)?

Minor – altering or modifying existing facilities, and no change of use, meaning the occupancy classification stays the same.

Major – first-time tenant improvement or change of use in an existing facility.

Ask staff for help. It’s important to make sure you have this right, because processing times are different for minor and major TIs.

Step 2 – Request a pre-application coaching service. While a mandatory pre-application meeting is not required for either a minor or major tenant improvement, the City offers a “coaching” service free of charge to help explain the process ahead of the application. This in turn reduces the number of submittal errors and reduces the plan review times for applicants.

Step 3 – Submit an application, checklist, plans and application fee for the tenant improvement permit. You will also need to obtain separate plumbing, mechanical, fire suppression and fire detection permits from the City. Additionally, new sign permits may be anticipated. The City cautions against ordering any signs for your project until you are sure it is a permitted use and the sign(s) proposed have been reviewed and approved by the City.

Step 4 - Wait patiently for review. While the City strives to complete all reviews within our published timelines, actual review times can vary (summer is our busiest time of the year!).

Step 5 - Make corrections and re-submit once you have received the review comments from all review disciplines.

Step 6 – When you receive notice that your permit is ready, come in, pay the appropriate fees and pick up your permit.

Step 7 - Build your project, calling for inspections at appropriate times (if you use a contractor, they must be licensed in Bothell).
Contact information

**Utility Districts**
Alderwood Water & Wastewater District - 425-743-4605
Bothell Water & Sewer - 425-488-0118
Northshore Utility District - 425-398-4400
Woodinville Water District - 425-487-4100

**King County Health Department**
Restaurants – 206-263-9566
Septic systems – 206-296-4932
Assessor’s office – 206-296-7300

**Snohomish County Health Department**
Restaurants – 435-339-5200
Septic systems – 435-339-5200
Assessor’s office – 425-388-3433

**Department of Labor & Industries**
Electrical permits (Snohomish County) – 425-290-1300
Electrical permits (King County) – 425-990-1400
Elevator permits – 360-902-6130
Boiler permits – 360-902-6400
Examples of Construction Tip Sheets
NOTES:

1. These regulations apply to stairways for one- and two-family dwellings and townhouses subject to the International Residential Code (IRC).

2. For exceptions related to the construction of circular, spiral, or winding stairways, see R311.7.5.2.1 & R311.7.10.

3. The largest riser or run within any flight of stairs is not to exceed the smallest by more than 3/8".

4. A landing extending the width of the stair and measuring a minimum of 36" in the direction of travel is required at the top and bottom of every stairway. R311.7.6

5. A floor landing is not required at the top of an interior flight of stairs, provided a door does not swing over the stairs.

6. Handrails are required for stairways with four or more risers. See Tip Sheet 2 for additional information regarding handrails. R311.7.8

7. Interior and exterior stairs must be illuminated with an artificial light source at each landing or over each stairway section per R303.6. Light activation must be accessible at the top and bottom of each landing without traversing any steps. Exterior stairways must be controlled from inside the dwelling unit unless continuously illuminated or automatically controlled. R311.7.9

GENERAL INFORMATION:

- Consult with your local planning department regarding required setbacks.
- Obtain a building permit before starting construction.
- The intent of this sheet is to address the basics of private residential stair construction only and does not address the subject in great detail. Additional information can be found at your local building department, home improvement store, or library.
- This tip sheet is intended to show code requirements per the 2012 International Residential Code.
Stair runs with 4 or more risers require a handrail. See Tip Sheet 2 for more information on the requirements for handrails.

Minimum required stairway width is 36".

Typical Stair Elevation

The minimum headroom of a stair is 6'-8". (Measured vertically from the sloped plane adjoining the tread nosing)

No more than 12' without a landing

Overhead obstruction
CONSTRUCTION TIP SHEET 8
Restrooms
July 2010

Uneobstructed floor space (minimum 30" x 48")

Grab bar

Doors are only permitted to swing into the wheelchair turning spaces when the room is for individual use, and a clear floor space 30" x 48" is provided within the room, beyond the arc of the door. 304.4, 1002.11, 603.2.3

56"x60" clear floor space required for parallel & forward approach to water closet. Other fixtures not allowed in this area. 604.3.2

Provide a minimum 60" diameter unobstructed floor space for turning around. Permitted to include knee & toe clearance; see page 2. 304.3.1 & 306

Uneobstructed floor space maneuvering clearance, see Tip Sheet 14 for minimum dimensions.

Outward Swinging Door Plan

Insulate hot water and drain lines. No sharp objects.

Grab bars 1-1/4" to 1-1/2" in diameter, maximum, 1-1/2" between rail and wall

Elevations

Maximum toe clearance

Clearance beneath lavatory

Maximum toe clearance within total lavatory clearance depth

GENERAL INFORMATION:

For code requirements, refer to:
- Chapter 11 of the 2009 IBC
- Appendix Chapter C, Sections E101 - E107
- ICC / ANSI A117.1 - 2009 as amended in IBC 1101.2

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Side Wall Grab Bar
for Water Closet

Rear Wall Grab Bar
for Water Closet

Dispenser Location
Below Grab Bar

Dispenser Location
Above Grab Bar
Front Approaches

2012 Codes

NOTE:
X = 12" if the door has both a closer and a latch.
X = 0 if no closer or latch.

Hinge Side Approaches

NOTE:
X = 36" min. if Y = 60"
OR X = 42" min. if Y = 54"

Latch Side Approaches

NOTE:
Y = 48" min. if the door does not have a closer.
Y = 54" min. if the door has a closer.

GENERAL INFORMATION:
- All doors in alcoves must comply with the clearances for front approaches.
- For specific questions not addressed here or requiring further clarification, please contact your local building department.