

# Small Business Guide to Permitting

Planning & Community Development  
17500 Midvale Ave N  
Shoreline, WA 98133  
206-801-2500  
pcd@shorelinewa.gov



Congratulations on expanding or locating your business in the City of Shoreline! Read this information to learn what parts of your business may need government approval. We're here to help you through the process and jump start your success. This handout applies when locating or expanding in an *existing* building, it does not address the permitting of *new* buildings. This handout does not apply to home businesses, which are detailed in the [Home Business handout](#).

## Type of Permits Required

**Sign Permit.** Signage in most cities is regulated by the local government. Check out our [Sign Standards handout](#) for more information.

**Building Permits.** If you want to make physical changes to a building that are not just cosmetic or you are changing the occupancy group classification (see below), you may need a building permit. In addition, you may need a mechanical and/or plumbing permit when providing new fixtures and appliances or modifying locations. See the [Permit Exemptions handout](#) for more information of when a permit would not be required.

**Fire Permits.** When modifying fire systems, a fire permit may be needed. Depending on the work you want to do, you may either need an Over-the-Counter Fire Permit or a Full Fire Review Fire Permit.

## Land Use versus Building Occupancy

Land Use is a term used in zoning codes for the purpose of carrying out the community's vision for where different uses of land should be located. Building Occupancy is a term used in building codes for the purpose of figuring out how a building should be designed for the intended use (occupancy). The terms used in the zoning code may be different than those used in the building code (i.e., they may not match). The terms in both codes may also use the same words but have different definitions since they regulate different things and are written by different organizations. For that reason, it is important to understand how land use terms and building occupancy terms are defined and to find out what definition your business matches in each code.

### *Find Out if your Land Use is Allowed in your Zone (Location)*

The City's Development Code, which is [Title 20](#) of the Shoreline Municipal Code, outlines a list of land uses that are allowed according to the zoning of the property. These are found in the Use Tables, which begin in SMC [20.40.120](#). To find out the zoning district of a property visit the City's online interactive [GIS map](#). To see the zoning, you need to click on "Zoning Designation" from the layer list. The legend on the map will tell you the name of the zone, such as "Mixed Business" and also the acronym "MB" which is important to know when checking the land use tables.

### *Building Occupancy (Use)*

The Washington State Building Code ([WSBC](#)), Chapter 3 outlines a list of different building occupancy groups which are used for the basis of code compliance. Each structure may be classified into one or more occupancy groups based on use and design preferences. Occupancy groups are used to determine allowable areas, total number of stories, building heights, fire-resistance requirements, means of egress requirements and the basis for a Certificate of Occupancy. A building permit is required when changing from one occupancy group to another regardless of any physical modifications.

## Research

Before choosing where to locate your business, and **before** signing a lease or purchase and sale agreement, it is important to know what uses were allowed previously at the site and within the building you're considering

leasing. The previous use may not have been allowed by the City, even if the site or building may have everything you need to operate your business. Knowing what uses were legally allowed in the building, and whether your business is also legally allowed in the building, and under what circumstances, is critical **before** signing any lease agreement.

You should research the building's history, get records of the building's type of construction, and previous use(s) and occupancy history. Be sure to research early to confirm you can locate where you want. In some cases, current uses and construction for a space were never permitted or approved. In rare cases, you will not be able to continue the non-permitted use or occupy illegal construction. Obtain copies of the permit history for the building, the certificate of occupancy, the last approved site plan with associated parking, any parking calculations, and any floor plans for the floor and tenant space. Our staff will use this information to determine the legally established use, occupancy and related requirements for the building and tenant space.

The steps in this process are further detailed below:

1. Find out if there have been any prior permits at the location and/or tenant space.
2. Obtain any permit records of the location and/or tenant space.
3. Determine the property's zoning district and define the land use.
4. Set up meetings with city staff, as needed.

#### Access Information

- The Codes referenced in this handout can be accessed on the [Codes Governing Shoreline Development webpage](#)
- Helpful handouts are available on the [Development Handouts webpage](#)
- The full library of checklists are available on the [Permit Checklists & Application Packets webpage](#)

#### Permit Search

To find out what permits are associated with the property, use the [Permit Search Tool](#) and enter the address of the property. This permit search tool includes permits going back to January 2001. To obtain permit and project information between 1995 and 2001, make a public records request (see next section). Many buildings have been built prior to 1995 (when the city started) and records (such as Certificates of Occupancy) may be with King County. Contact the King County Department of Local Services – Permitting Division (King County DLS) Records Center at 206-296-6696 or [permitrecords@kingcounty.gov](mailto:permitrecords@kingcounty.gov). You can submit a King County Public Disclosure Request by following instructions found on the [King County website](#).

#### Public Records Request

Once you know which permits are associated with the property you can make a Public Records Request (PRR) with the City Clerk's Office. You can make this request on the [website](#). If you have questions before making your PRR, call 206-801-2231 or email [pr@shorelinewa.gov](mailto:pr@shorelinewa.gov).

#### Determine the Zoning District and Define the Land Use

Find out the zoning district of the property you are interested in locating or leasing by using the City's online interactive [GIS map](#). To see the zoning, you need to click on "Zoning Designation" from the layer list. The legend on the map will tell you the name of the zone, such as "Mixed Business" and also the acronym "MB" which is important to know when checking the land use tables.

The land use tables start in SMC [20.40.120](#) and are divided up by broad use category, such as residential, nonresidential, and other. Some uses, such as Daycare, are specifically defined in SMC [20.20](#) Definitions. Others are not, so you should meet with a city planner to confirm the land use.

#### City Staff Meetings

We offer free 30-minute meetings regarding the Development Code, the Building Code, and the permit process. Meetings are intended to help business owners who are in the feasibility stage and need specific input before deciding whether to move forward with a project. We recommend you start with zoning by

meeting with a Planner to first determine if the business is allowed in a particular location. If a business isn't allowed in a particular zone, we can find out what zones your business would be allowed. Once you have determined the land use is allowed, you can discuss your plan with a Building Plans Examiner. Finally, if permits are required, you can discuss the permit application process with a Permit Technician. You can schedule a virtual (Microsoft Teams) or in person meeting on the [Bookings webpage](#).

## **Important Items to Consider**

### ***Parking Requirements***

The Development Code has different off-street parking requirements depending on what land use is proposed (see SMC [20.50.390](#) for specific requirements). If you are expanding your floor area or changing use, such as from retail to a restaurant, an increased parking requirement may apply. It is important to understand very early in the process how much parking is required for your business and how much parking is available on the site to meet those requirements. There may be waivers, exceptions, and off-site parking solutions available. If you are one tenant in a building with other tenants, like a strip mall, you may need to provide some information on the other uses. That information may be available with permit search history of the site, or you may need to contact the property owner and/or leasing agent. This information will allow us to calculate parking requirements.

### ***Required Site Improvements***

The Development Code requires full site improvements, meaning compliance with the current lighting, parking, landscaping, and signage requirements, in the following situations:

1. If your project is worth more than half the value of the building and land per the King County Assessor Office; or
2. If your project, and any other projects on the same property within a five-year period, are worth more than half the value of the building and land per the King County Assessor Office.
3. When you convert a single-family home to a commercial use.

These improvements may be difficult to meet on certain sites and would increase costs. There are exceptions to this in certain circumstances, but an additional design review process is required prior to building permit submittal (see SMC [20.50.230](#)).

### ***Common Required Improvements in Existing Buildings***

The existing Building Code ([WSEBC](#)) requires accessibility improvements in existing buildings. The dollar amount you will be required to spend on these improvements is based on overall project costs. In addition, a complete change of occupancy classification will require accessible parking, building entrance and an accessible route from parking. All new construction must be fully accessible as required per Chapter 11 of the Washington State Building Code and the Accessibility Standard [ICCA117.1](#). Additional restrooms may also be required, depending on the occupancy and extent of changes being proposed.

### ***Fire Safety Improvements in Existing Buildings***

If you are expanding your floor area or changing land use or building occupancy, such as from retail to a restaurant, you may need to make some fire safety improvements. Additions or alterations resulting in a nonconforming building must be brought up to current code requirements for fire protection systems (see Shoreline Fire Municipal Code section [901.4.7.1](#)). Commercial tenant improvements or additions that result in a change in use may have to provide a fire sprinkler system and a fire alarm and detection system (see section [s903.2.1](#) and section [907](#)). If your project is worth more than half the building value per King County Assessor Office within a 70-month time period, the building must be brought up to current fire protection codes and standards. Depending on the scope of the work that is being proposed, you may either need an Over-the-Counter Fire Permit or a Full Fire Review Fire Permit. You can visit the [Shoreline Fire Department website](#) or call the Fire Marshal's office (206-533-6565) to get additional information on permit requirements.

### ***Using Professional Designers and Licensed Builders for building permits***

We strongly recommend enlisting the services of a professional designer, architect, engineer or licensed contractor. Well-prepared, fully researched applications typically have fewer issues and potentially reduced overall time for permitting. In most cases, you must have your construction documents prepared and stamped by a design professional such as an architect or engineer licensed in the State of Washington. Commercial projects 4,000 sf or less might not require a licensed design professional. We cannot recommend any professionals such as designers or builders and suggest you consult design and construction associations.

### ***Discretionary Land Use Approvals***

If the scale and scope of your project triggers environmental review (SEPA), a variance, or conditional use permit, you should plan for an extended review period needed for public comment and appeal periods. We can help you determine if these elements apply to your project.

## **Applying for Land Use Approvals and Building Permits**

It is your responsibility to obtain the necessary permits or approvals before operating your business at the chosen location.

### ***Prepare Your Application Materials***

For your small business project locating within an existing building, you will need to follow the [Tenant Improvement Building Permit Checklist](#). You will need to provide all the items on the checklist. If you are leasing a multi-tenant site, on the site plan, provide a parking table that list all tenants in the shopping center, their use, their parking rate, and their square footage, in order to demonstrate there is adequate parking for all uses on the entire site.

### ***Begin Your Permit Application***

You can apply for your building permit electronically. The [Electronic Permitting Instructions handout](#) contains instructions. Anticipate some back-and-forth with Permitting staff during this process to ensure all of the required information is submitted at the same time. Once the City has everything we need to process your application we will contact you for fee payment.

### ***Fees***

Fees are due once Permit Services has completed in-take of your application. The [Construction Fees handout](#) contains more detail on the required fees.

### ***Reviews***

After you pay the required fee, your permit materials are routed to a Project Manager, who will coordinate reviews, and to subject matter experts who will review your proposal for compliance with City codes. Your project will be assigned to the appropriate reviewers for your project's proposed scope of work. Most simple projects undergo zoning and building review. More complex projects require review by the Fire Department, structural, energy/mechanical, and/or others depending on your project. Most proposals will receive one or two round(s) of correction notice(s). Carefully review the correction notice for how to make the necessary changes, 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 revisions.

### ***Permit Approval and Issuance***

You will be notified by e-mail when your plans have been approved. Your approval notice will detail any required items prior to permit issuance, such as remaining permit fees. After you pay any outstanding fees, you will be notified that we have issued your permit. It is your responsibility to print out the approved plans and permit document. We do not allow occupancy until all permitted work has been completed, all inspections have been approved and, if needed, a certificate of occupancy has been issued.

## ***Inspections***

To request a building inspection, schedule [online](#). If you make your request before 6:00 am, the inspector can perform the inspection that same workday. To avoid being bumped to the next workday as a result of a high number of requests, do not wait to the last minute to make your request.

## **Other Approvals**

This handout specifically covers permits needed from PCD, other approvals may be needed, depending on the type of business and scope of work.

### ***City Issued Business Licenses***

Shoreline requires all businesses to be licensed with the City if they are:

- Located within City limits and generating \$2,000 or more per year within City limits, or
- Located outside City limits, but conducting business within City limits and generating \$2,000 or more per year within City limits.

Business Licenses are issued for the calendar year and expire every December 31.

See the [City Clerk's Business license webpage](#) for more information. Note that this is separate from any business licensed issued by the State.

### ***Specialty Licenses***

Your business may require a license specific to the type of operation. Common specialty licenses are listed below.

- Adult family homes are licensed by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). See the DSHS website for more information <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/residential-care-services/about-adult-family-homes>.
- Daycares are licensed by the Washington State Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). Email [dcyf.welcome@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:dcyf.welcome@dcyf.wa.gov) or see the DCYF website for more information <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers>.
- The Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board (LCB) is granted authority by the Washington State Legislature to regulate the production, sale, and distribution of alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and vapor products. See the LCB website for more information <https://lcb.wa.gov/resources/resources>.

### ***Electrical Permits***

Electrical permits can be applied for online or through any State of Washington Labor & Industries (L&I) office. See the [Electrical Permit Information handout](#) for more information.

### ***Health Department Permits***

King County Health Department permits are required for food preparation or handling, pet daycares, pet boarders, pet grooming shops, animal shelters, pet shops, pet food retailers, poultry retailers (sales of birds). The Health Department is located at 401 5th Ave, Suite 1100, Seattle, 206-263-9566. The Health Department will review any application that involves food handling or preparation, and most pet related businesses. Visit Food Safety Permits at [www.kingcounty.gov/health-services/health/ehs/foodsafety.aspx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/health-services/health/ehs/foodsafety.aspx) and Pet Related Business Permits at [www.kingcounty.gov/healthser-vices/health/ehs/petbusinesses.aspx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthser-vices/health/ehs/petbusinesses.aspx). Health Department plan review approval is required prior to building review approval. Due to lead times, it is highly recommended not to delay your submittal to the Health Department.

### ***Other Agency Approvals***

See the Washington State [Small Business Guidance website](#) and the [Regulatory Handbook website](#) to see which additional approvals your business may need.