Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections

Tip 316

Seattle Permits

*Part of a multi-departmental City of Seattle series on getting a permit*

# Construction and Demolition Subject-to-Field-Inspection (STFI) Permits

*Updated October 29, 2026*

If you have a simple construction or demolition 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 explains which projects qualify for STFI and the 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.

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** when the foundation height does not exceed 4 feet from the bottom of the footing, the structure's footprint and height remain unchanged, and 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 an STFI).
- **Interior alterations to existing single-family and duplex homes** may qualify for STFI when new beams or headers meet the span limits below. You may install beams and headers in openings in load-bearing walls without an engineer's stamp when the span does not exceed:
  - 8 feet when supporting no more than two stories above and roof loads
  - 14 feet when supporting no more than one story above and roof loads



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- 16 feet for garage door headers when supporting no more than one story above and roof loads

Beams and headers that exceed these spans, or support three stories above them, still qualify for STFI if the structural plans are stamped by a civil or structural engineer.

If you are removing a shear wall or adding a window or door in an exterior wall, you must show that the structure can still resist wind and earthquake loads. We may ask you to provide plans stamped by a civil or structural engineer.

- **Ground-level, one-story additions and detached accessory structures** to existing single-family and duplex homes up to 750 square feet in area may qualify for STFI.

  Garages and sheds are considered accessory structures. New dwelling units are not.

  We allow new beams, headers, and roof trusses without an engineer's stamp when the structural spans do not exceed:

  - 14 feet for beams and headers
  - 16 feet for garage door headers
  - 30 feet for pre-manufactured roof trusses

  Beams, headers, and roof trusses that exceed these spans qualify for STFI if the structural plans are stamped by a civil or structural engineer.

  We do not limit spans for floor joists or roof rafters. However, if your joists or rafters do not meet the prescriptive span tables in the Residential Code, your inspector may require stamped engineering during construction to justify the longer spans.

- **Rockeries** designed according to our prescriptive rockery standard (refer to Tip 321, *Rockeries: Prescriptive Design and Installation Standards*) that are not in an ECA site.

- **Decks** at single-family and duplex homes may qualify for STFI if they are no more than 14 feet above grade and are not built on a roof or over enclosed spaces such as a basement, garage, or shed. To qualify, the deck must follow the prescriptive design criteria in the Seattle Residential Code (SRC). If it does not, your plans must be stamped by a civil or structural engineer.

  Your building inspector will check the deck during construction to confirm it meets SRC prescriptive requirements. If it does not, the inspector will require engineer stamped plans. We do not review your plans for prescriptive code compliance before issuing your permit.

- **Dormer additions** to single-family and duplex homes may qualify for STFI when all of the following criteria are met:

  - The dormer is no more than 14 feet wide. New dormers must be physically separate from both new and existing dormers; otherwise, we measure the combined width.
  - The dormer is located at an existing habitable story.
  - The dormer adds no more than 200 square feet of new usable floor space.
  - Structural framing plans and details are prepared and stamped by a licensed civil or structural engineer.
  - The dormer is set into an existing roof. Removing the existing roof framing and rebuilding it is considered a second story addition and does not qualify for STFI.

- **Non-structural interior alterations (tenant improvements)** to multifamily and commercial buildings may qualify for STFI when the work area is 4,500 square feet or less and does not include a change in use or occupancy. We may ask you to provide permit records to confirm the existing use and occupancy of the space. This option is intended for simple projects. See "Projects That Do Not Qualify as an STFI" for additional limitations.

- **Window and siding replacement** at single-family and duplex homes may qualify for STFI. Window and siding replacement in kind at multifamily and commercial buildings may also qualify when there are no changes to window size, window operation, or rated wall assemblies. You may include wall sheathing replacement at single-family and duplex buildings, but we will require plan review for wall sheathing replacement at multifamily or commercial buildings.

  Identify on your plans which windows will be replaced. You may do this with a written description, a window schedule, or elevations.

  New windows must meet the Seattle Energy Code prescriptive requirements.

  Siding replacement does not require a permit when work does not include structural changes, sheathing replacement, or alterations to doors or windows.

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Roofing replacement does not qualify for an STFI. See our Re-Roof Permit webpage to determine whether your roofing work requires a permit and how to apply if it does.

- **Installation or replacement of acoustic ceiling tile (ACT) systems** of any size in commercial, institutional, and multifamily buildings may qualify for STFI when the construction and seismic isolation follow industry-standard details and meet the current Seattle Building Code. Fireproofing above the ceiling must be maintained and repaired if it is damaged.

  Any tenant improvement work done at the same time must also qualify for an STFI.

- **Installation of industrial storage racks and freestanding cabinets** where the highest shelf is more than 5'–9" and under 8'–0" above the finished floor.

- **Repairs to damaged buildings** to restore them back to their original configuration. We require photographs showing the extent of the damage. If the field inspector determines that the damage is too extensive to qualify for an STFI, we will require full plan review.

  - The value of the repairs cannot exceed 60 percent of the estimated replacement cost of the building 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.

  - The value of repairs is based on a contractor's bid. Use our Fee Estimator to calculate the building's replacement cost. This cost is determined by the type of construction, occupancy, and square footage.

  If your repair project does not qualify for an STFI, it may qualify for expedited review as an Emergency Repair Permit.

- **Substantial alterations** to single-family homes that substantially extend the physical or economic life of the building and meet the limitations described above for **structural** or **non-structural alterations**, **ground-level one-story additions** or **dormer additions**. If you are reconfiguring spaces or replacing wall surfaces in more than 60 percent of the existing house, your project is likely a substantial alteration. Label your plans to show which rooms will have new drywall or plaster.

  **To qualify for an STFI**, you must provide one of the following:

  - Structural plans prepared and stamped by a civil or structural 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. If the EHR plans are prepared and stamped by a civil or structural engineer, they may be submitted as part of the STFI.

  - The house was built under the 1985 Uniform Building Code or a more recent building code.

  Substantial alteration projects require certain upgrades throughout the structure, including in areas where you are not making changes. See SRC R107.5.1 and STFI Permit Checklist - Single-family and Duplex Buildings for code requirements.

## Projects that Do Not Qualify as an STFI

- Exterior work on a site with an Environmentally Critical Area (ECA), unless approved by SDCI staff.
- Excavation deeper than four feet near a property line or deeper than three feet next to a right-of-way, unless excavation can be contained on the site with all cuts at a 45-degree slope.
- Projects with more than 750 square feet of new and replaced hard surface.
- Second story and two-story additions to single-family residences.
- Existing unheated attic to be converted into living or habitable space.
- Additions and new accessory structures that do not meet the prescriptive requirements of the Seattle Energy Code or prescriptive ventilation requirements of the Mechanical Code.

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- Projects that need review or approval from 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).
- Proposal adversely impacts any Tier 1, 2 or 3 trees or proposes removal of these trees.
- Concrete or block retaining walls over four feet, measured from the bottom of the footing, or over six feet when stamped by a civil or structural engineer.
- Foundations using piles, including pipe piles and pin piles.
- More than three steel beams, steel beams with welding or shear tabs, and cantilevered steel beams.
- Steel moment frames.
- Composite wood and steel beams, such as flitch beams, unless stamped by a civil or structural engineer.
- Lowering a basement floor.
- New lofts with stair or ladder access, other than a storage loft within a garage.
- 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.
- Converting an existing structure to an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) or Detached Accessory Dwelling Unit (DADU).
- Establishing or constructing an ADU or DADU.
- Change in use as defined by the Land Use Code.
- Change in occupancy or character of occupancy as defined by the Seattle Building Code or the Seattle Residential Code.
- Change in occupant load or floor plan configuration of an assembly occupancy.
- Exterior work of any kind to commercial or multifamily structures, other than window or siding replacement.
- Structural work of any kind to commercial or multifamily structures.
- Addition or removal of floor area in a multifamily or commercial building.
- Change to the size or configuration of tenant spaces or dwelling units in a multifamily or commercial building, including relocating or adding new demising walls.
- Initial tenant improvements for the first tenant in the space.
- Changes to exiting in a multifamily or commercial building, including changes to the location of exits, number of exits, path of travel to exits, or distance to exits.
- Reducing accessibility in a multifamily or commercial building.
- Installing a new walk-in cooler.
- The total area of proposed work plus the area of other recently permitted work in the tenant space exceeds 4,500 square feet.
- Alterations that reduce the number of plumbing fixtures (such as water closets, sinks, urinals, and showers) in a bathroom facility except for those within a dwelling unit.

**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.

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## 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 permit website, 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 SDCI staff through our SDCI Services webpage.

## Plan Set and Checklist Requirements

### 1. STFI Checklist

- Single-family and Duplex Buildings
- Multifamily and Commercial Buildings

All STFI permit applications require a completed and signed STFI permit checklist. You must comply with all applicable codes to receive an STFI permit.

For multifamily and commercial projects, complete all applicable items on the Multifamily and Commercial Building STFI Checklist. Inspectors will review the checklist and the Seattle Building Code (SBC) to verify compliance, regardless of what is shown on the plans.

See "Your Responsibilities with STFI Permits" later in this Tip for additional information.

### 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 all structures to scale and clearly show where the work will take place in relation to existing features and property lines. You should show the exterior dimensions of the property and all structures, and show the distance from each property line to the closest point of the structure. See Tip 103, Site Plan Requirements, and Tip 303, Applicant Responsibilities and Plan Requirements for Single-family and Two-Unit Dwellings for more information.

- **STFI Projects that Require a Site Plan:**
  - ground-level one-story additions
  - detached accessory structures
  - rockeries
  - decks
  - 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:**
  - interior alterations
  - window and siding replacement
  - 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)
- span (length between supports)
- spacing (16" on center)
- location and size of openings

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- 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
  - decks
  - 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 knowing and following all applicable codes, including 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 do 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 an STFI Permit

To apply for an STFI permit, submit your plans and documents electronically through your Seattle Services Portal. Refer to 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. 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 only cover the scope shown in the documents you submitted. The following documents may be used in conjunction with STFI permit applications.

- STFI Checklist
  - Single-Family and Duplex
  - Multifamily 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), other than Riparian Corridor, Wetland, and Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Area.

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Based upon your proposed development and the affected ECA, we may require plan review in lieu of an 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 AM 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 their certified facilities webpage.

More information on the city's material bans is on the Seattle Public Utilities recycling requirements webpage.

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

- **What happens if my application is rejected?**
  If we determine your project does not qualify for an STFI permit, we will give you detailed information on how to proceed.
- **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.
- **How long does it take to get STFI permits issued?**
  We typically process STFI permits within a few working days 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.
- **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 on their businesses and key accounts webpage.

For technical questions on how to fill out the waste diversion plan or report, please contact Seattle Public Utilities.

## 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

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- Tip 103, Site Plan Requirements
- Tip 104, Getting an Over-the-Counter Permit
- Tip 303, Applicant Responsibilities and Plan Requirements for Single-Family and Two-Unit Dwelling Units
- Tip 321, Rockeries: Prescriptive Design and Installation Standards
- Tip 337, Demolition Permits

Code References

- Seattle Building Code
- Seattle Mechanical Code
- Seattle Energy Code
- Seattle Residential Code
- Seattle Land Use and Zoning Code

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