

Seattle Permits

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

Master Use Permit (MUP) Overview

Updated January 11, 2024

This Tip is intended to provide an overview of SDCI's land use permit framework, and in particular, the Master Use Permit (MUP). It provides general information about the types of land use permits, the time and approximate costs associated with them, and the processes involved in these permits.

What is Seattle's Framework for Land Use Decisions?

The Land Use Code classifies land use decisions into five (5) categories based on the level of discretion and impact associated with each decision. Procedures are distinguished according to who makes the decision, the type and amount of public notice required, and whether appeal opportunities are provided. Type I and II MUP decisions are made by the SDCI Director.

Type I decisions are nonappealable decisions made by SDCI which require the exercise of little or no discretion. Examples include lot boundary adjustments, street /alley improvement exceptions, temporary uses for less than four weeks, streamlined design review and zoning review on construction permit applications.

Type II decisions are discretionary decisions made by SDCI which are subject to administrative appeals. Examples include environmental review (SEPA), design review, variances, short plats and shoreline substantial development permits. Shoreline decisions may be appealed to the Shoreline Hearings Board, and other Type II decisions may be appealed to the City's Hearing Examiner.

Type III decisions (full subdivisions) are made by the Hearing Examiner after SDCI reviews, prepares and publishes a written recommendation on the proposal. The Hearing Examiner conducts a public hearing on the

proposal together with any appeals of a related environmental decision.

Type IV and V decisions are City Council land use decisions. Examples of a Type IV decision include rezones (site specific) and major institution master plans. Examples of Type V decisions include area-wide rezones and land use code text amendments. SDCI reviews and writes a recommendation on proposals requiring Council decisions. **Type IV** decisions are quasi-judicial decisions made by the Council pursuant to existing legislative standards and based upon the Hearing Examiner's record and recommendation. **Type V** decisions are legislative decisions made by the Council in its capacity to establish policy and manage public lands.

What is a Master Use Permit (MUP)?

A MUP is a single land use permit that integrates the process, procedures, and review of all nonappealable and appealable land use decisions that are made by SDCI. The MUP generally includes discretionary land use decisions associated with a given development or use proposal, and provides for the consolidated appeal of those land use decisions. Examples of the most common types of discretionary decisions made by SDCI include short plats, variances, conditional uses, shoreline substantial development, design review, and environmental review (SEPA). These decision types are components of the MUP, and applications may require one or more components.

How do I apply for a MUP?

SDCI advises that you begin your research of applicable land use provisions as soon as possible in the development process in order to determine if a proposal will require a land use discretionary approval, and to identify applicable regulations related to your property or proposal. More detailed information about the land use permit process, application requirements, and forms are available on SDCI's website at www.seattle.gov/sdci.



Most projects require pre-review by several City departments including SDCI, Seattle Department of Transportation and Seattle Public Utilities for early identification of possible issues related to infrastructure improvements such as street improvements and drainage as well as historic districts/landmark buildings. This review results in an interdepartmental Preliminary Assessment Report (PAR). You will receive your PAR in two to three weeks. In addition, if your proposal involves ground disturbance (including staging areas) or tree or vegetation removal, a pre-application site visit (PASV) by SDCI's site development team may be required.

A pre-submittal conference with a SDCI land use planner is required for proposals involving design review and for full subdivisions, and is recommended for other types of proposals that may be complex or controversial, including rezones and other Council decisions.

Applications for all types of land use decisions require a land use intake appointment and specific plans and associated documentation, such as forms and technical reports, as well as fees.

How long does the process take and how much does it cost?

Generally, less complex proposals take less time to complete reviews than more complex and/or controversial proposals. The review process is dependent upon several factors, only one of which is SDCI review; the quality of plans and associated documentation, applicant response time to correction letters and requests for further information, and public interest are additional factors that affect the time to review a land use proposal.

The costs associated with a Master Use Permit vary with the type of approval and the complexity of the project. Fees and fee collection policies for all services associated with SDCI permit application reviews are detailed in the current SDCI Fee Ordinance, which can be found on SDCI's website at [www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-\(a-z\)/fees](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-(a-z)/fees). Fees are based on the actual hourly cost of reviewing the applications; including time associated with public meetings, responding to phone calls, emails, letters and appeals. Land use permits include a minimum fee to cover processing and review activities, however additional hourly costs may accrue if review time exceeds the time included in the minimum fee that was collected at the time of the application. Monthly billing keeps the applicant informed about fees as they accrue for hourly reviews.

In 2011, SDCI initiated a monthly billing process in 2011 for all Master Use Permit applications. The financially responsible party will receive monthly invoices for hourly fees associated with work performed on a project once SDCI staff have exceeded the hours that are covered in the minimum land use fee paid at permit application.

What about Public Notice and Appeals?

The City of Seattle's Land Use Code has specific requirements for notifying the public of opportunities to comment on proposed land use activities. The type and extent of this notice generally depends on the type of project in question. Our primary notice methods include one or more of the following: notice mailed to nearby property owners/residents; lawn signs posted on the proposal site, large environmental signs on the proposal site, and SDCI's online Land Use Information Bulletin.

After staff review a land use permit application and any/all corrections or revisions have been completed by the applicant, a decision is issued, which may be appealed by interested parties – the applicant and/or members of the public. An appeal is an opportunity to challenge a SDCI decision without having to go to court. Shoreline permits are appealable to the Shoreline Hearings Board. (Department of Ecology.)

Can a MUP Expire?

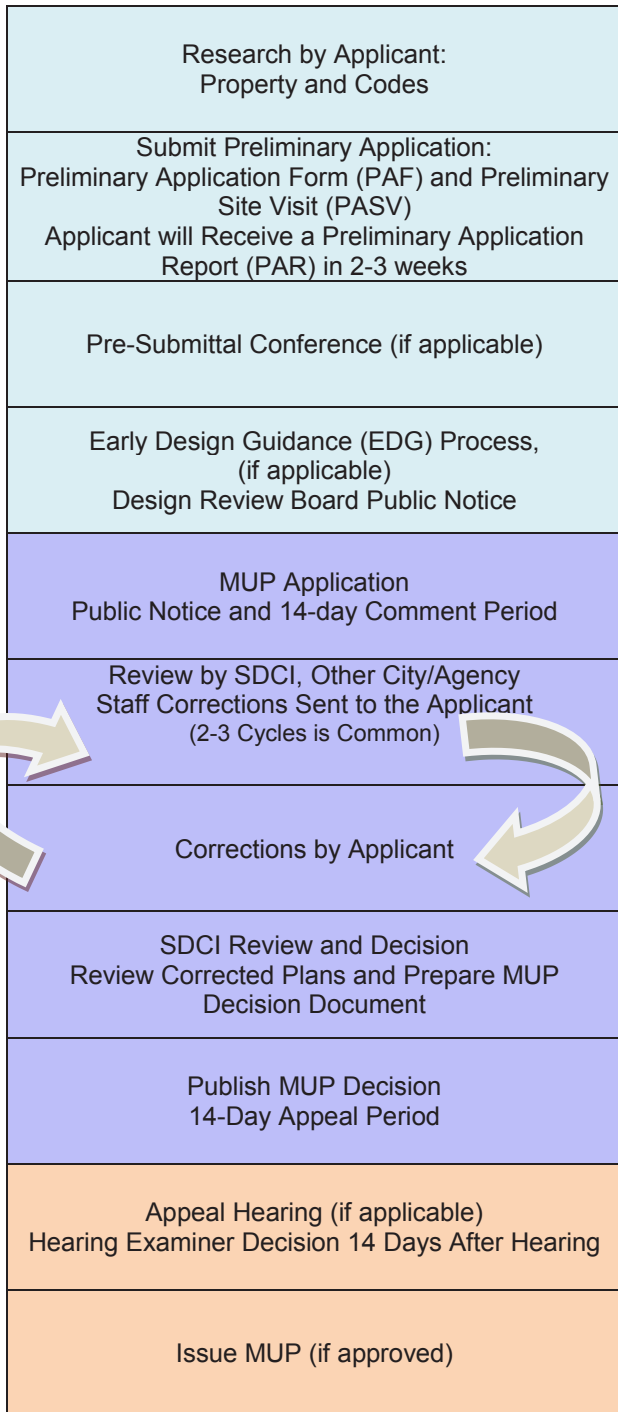
In most cases, the approval expires three years from the date a permit is approved for issuance. Land use permits may be extended or renewed for an additional two or three years depending on certain facts of the permit application. Shoreline permits are subject to different expiration and renewal regulations pursuant to state requirements.

When can I apply for my Building Permit?

Most land use permit approvals must be issued before an associated construction, grading or demolition permit can be issued.

Many MUP decisions include conditions that must be satisfied at various stages of the permit process (for example; prior to MUP issuance, prior to building permit application, prior to building permit issuance, prior to construction, and during construction). It is important that you review the MUP decision or recommendation to assure that you meet the conditions required at the various permit stages. This is an important aspect in keeping your permit and construction processes moving forward smoothly without unnecessary delays.

MUP Process



Access to Information

Links to SDCI Tips, Director's Rules, and the Seattle Land Use Code are available on our website at www.seattle.gov/sdci.

Application Type	Project Types	Estimated Permitting Timeline	Basic LU Hourly Range**	Basic Hourly Cost Range* @ \$439/hr
Lot Boundary Adjustment	Basic	2-4 months	5-7 hrs	\$2,195 - \$3,073
Short Plats	Basic	3-4 months	10-16 hrs	\$4,390 - \$7,024
Full Subdivisions	Preliminary Phase	8-10 months	25-40 hrs	\$10,975- \$17,560
*Final plat submittal is initiated @ SDOT, who may have separate additional fees	Final Plat Phase	2 months	10-30 hrs	\$4,390 - \$13,170
SEPA	Basic	4-10 months	15-25 hrs	\$6,585 - \$10,975
Administrative *** Conditional Use	Basic	5-7 months	15-20 hrs	\$6,585 - \$8,780
	Minor Communication Utilities		10-15	\$4,390 - \$6,585
	Human Services	1-6 months	10-35 hrs	\$4,390 - \$15,365***
				***Fee exception applies
Variances	Basic	5-8 months	20-30 hrs	\$8,780 - \$13,170
Temporary Uses (up to 6 mos.)	Basic	2-3 months	10-20 hrs	\$4,390 - \$8,780
Early Design Guidance	For all types of DR projects	2-4 months	15-25 hrs	\$6,585 - \$10,975
Design Review	Basic w/SEPA	6-12 months	65-70 hrs	\$28,535 - \$30,730
	Additional for All projects	2-4 months	15-25 hrs	\$6,585 - \$10,975
	Downtown Zones		70-150 hrs	\$30,730 - \$65,850
	w/Council Action such as rezone, alley vac.		120-200 hrs	\$52,680- \$87,800
Design Review, Streamlined		3-5 months	20-25 hrs	\$8,780 - \$10,975
Design Review, Administrative	Basic	3-5 months	20-25 hrs	\$8,780 - \$10,975
	Other Types		25-35 hrs	\$10,975 - \$15,365
Shoreline permits	Basic	5-6 months	15-25 hrs	\$6,585- \$10,975
	Complex/Controversial	6-10 months	25-50 hrs	\$10,975 - \$21,950
Rezones	Basic w/Development proposal	6-14 months	120-200 hrs	\$52,680- \$87,800
	w/o Development proposal		80-100 hrs	\$35,120- \$43,900
Council Actions such as public facilities like fire stations, not meeting development status	Basic	4-12 months	40-80 hrs	\$17,560 - \$35,120

Additional Cost or Complexity Factors Which Increase The Overall Cost of MUP Permits

Some development proposals experience one or more of the complexity factors that can increase the cost and overall timing of the permit review process. If more than one application type is involved and/or if more than one complexity factor is in play, applicants should anticipate that review time spent and the overall timeline to obtain the permit will increase above the added impacts for a single application type or complexity factor.

Applicants are advised to review the list of factors and consider how they can play a proactive role in managing the complexity in the permit process.

Complexity Factor - Environmentally Critical Areas (ECA)

Developments on sites with ECAs will always require more review time, and will have higher permit fees. Reviews by technical staff such as geotechnical engineers, wetland and fish and wildlife experts add billable time. Technical reports may be needed as well as requirements for mitigation, surveying and ECA covenants, etc. **Additional billable time for ECA review may add 30-50 percent or more to the cost of the permit and timelines as shown in the estimate table.**

Complexity Factor - Applicant Responsiveness

To help minimize the number of hours spent by a planner on a project, applicants should:

- Submit a complete set of plans and reports at intake.
- Respond to all corrections requested by all reviewers.
- At the time of correction re-submittal, show where to find the corrected info on the plans.
- Ask for clarification when needed, but minimize repeat conversations or arguing about details (refer to **Resolve a Permit Disagreement** at www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/resolve-a-permit-disagreement).
- Check for project status on our website versus contacting the reviewers, unless they are behind target dates. Seattle Services Portal at <https://cosaccela.seattle.gov/Portal/>.
- **Additional billable time for lack of applicant responsiveness may add 10-20 percent or more to the cost of the permit and timelines as shown in the basic estimate table.**

Complexity Factor - Public Opposition and/or Appeal

Public inquiry and opposition regarding a development can add billable hours to the overall cost of the project. Planners may bill additional time in the following ways:

- Responding to phone or email inquiries about the project impacts
- Spending time coordinating with applicants to address public concerns
- Scheduling and staffing additional public meetings if significant public concern
- Preparing for and attending an appeal hearing
- **Additional billable time related to public inquiry and opposition, or appeal of the project to the Hearing Examiner may add 20-50 percent or more to the cost of the permit and timelines as shown in the basic estimate table.**