

Top Ten Ways To Improve Your Permit Experience

These guidelines, compiled by City of Bellingham permit review staff, are guaranteed to improve your permit process experience!

- 1. Ask Questions!** Visit the Permit Center before you submit your application to ask questions about your project. The “[City IQ](#)” mapping system is very useful and is available on-line. It provides information such as building location, lot lines, location of utilities, easements and zoning. The Bellingham Municipal Code is also available on our website at www.cob.org. The more work you put in upfront, the better chance you have for a smooth permit process.
- 2. More information is always better!** Ask questions! Describe what you *really* want to do with your space. Most code requirements are based on size and use of space. This can trigger number of exits, number of bathrooms, and whether or not a fire sprinkler is required. By informing Permit Center staff of your desired intentions early on, you can avoid surprises later.
- 3. Do your plans require a professional architect or engineer’s stamp?** The following structures *generally* do not require plans be stamped by a licensed design professional per City Policy:
 - Any building not exceeding 4,000 square feet in size.
 - Design-build construction by registered general contractors if the structural design services are performed by a registered engineer.
 - Any commercial tenant space up to 4,000 square feet in size in a multi-tenant building provided:
 1. The tenant space is completely separated from adjoining spaces by full height walls.
 2. All exits from the tenant space are directly to the building exterior.
 3. Structural alterations must meet prescriptive requirements as defined by the IBC.
 4. Occupancy classifications are limited to group B and group M.
 5. There will be no cooking allowed other than microwave or convection ovens.
 6. There will be no use of medical gases.
- 4. Drawing your own plans?** Even if your project does not require a professional, it may be more efficient for you to have a professional (designer, architect, etc.) draw your plans. First-time applicants often spend weeks going back and forth trying to submit what the State Building Code requires to approve their plans. To get a business up and running sooner, it can be worthwhile to employ a professional.
- 5. Clearly represent your project space.** Neatness counts! Draw your plans to a standard scale. Include all dimensions and room uses. Include neighboring tenant uses if you are in a multi-tenant building.

6. **Follow the checklist.** If you believe there is a submittal requirement that doesn't apply to your project, ask the Permit Center staff first or explain why in writing with your submittal. Ignoring a requirement may lead to delays. We have recently updated many of our handouts and checklists to clarify the submittal process.
7. **Lease a space that meets your needs.** Does the space you are leasing/buying already have a Certificate of Occupancy for the same occupancy type? (i.e. restaurant to restaurant). If yes, it is often a quicker permit process and reduced or waived traffic impact fees.
8. **Exterior work may require a Stormwater Permit.** If there is any exterior work associated with your project, read the [Stormwater Permit Submittal Requirements](#) packet. Common exterior work that may require a stormwater permit includes new impervious surface or removing and/or replacing impervious surface, as well as clearing, grading, or excavation. Landscape maintenance and/or gardening are generally not regulated activities that require a permit. Make sure to include any exterior work in your application submittal.
9. **Do your research!** To avoid delays in tenant improvement projects, include important building data such as the building square footage, number of stories, whether there is a basement, type of construction, proposed use(s), occupancy, occupant load, and whether there a sprinkler system. This information is often available in the permit archives. If you have any questions or need assistance with microfiche, please ask the Permit Center staff!
10. **Be aware of potentially "big ticket" items such as backflow assemblies and exhaust hoods.** As an example, backflow protection is required on water fixtures that have the potential for a cross connection with the City's water supply or with other water fixtures in the building. Backflow assemblies are required on fixtures such as ice machines, water filters, espresso machines, sterilization equipment, salon equipment, boilers and the like. Your plans should **show all water using fixtures** and the proposed location of the backflow assembly. Also, It is important for food preparation establishments that the **types of cooking equipment** be shown on the building plans. This information will assist in determining the type of exhaust hood that might be required.