



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 are ready to 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 the location of a building on a lot, property 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 ultimately *really* want to do with your space. Most building 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?** A licensed design professional is required when alterations/additions take place within a building that exceeds 4,000 sq ft.
 - You may be exempt (per RCW18.08.410) if the project size is not more than 4,000 sq ft and the work does not affect the life safety or structural systems of the building.
- 4. Drawing your own plans?** Even if your project does not require a professional, it still may be beneficial and 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 have more requirements:** If there is any exterior work associated with your project, read the Stormwater Permit Submittal Requirements packet to see if a stormwater permit is required and how to apply. Common exterior work that may require a stormwater permit includes new impervious surfaces or removing and/or replacing impervious surfaces, as well as clearing, grading, or excavation. Landscape maintenance and/or gardening are not generally regulated activities and typically do not 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, is there a basement?, type of construction, proposed use(s), occupancy, occupant load, is 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 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. Having this information will assist in determining the type of exhaust hood that might be required.