

**Department of Local Services, Permitting Division**

# Agricultural Buildings

Permitting Customer  
Information Bulletin #**58****• FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS •**

*Visit the Permitting Web site at  
[www.kingcounty.gov/permits](http://www.kingcounty.gov/permits)  
for more information*

King County Permitting has created customer information bulletins to inform the general public about the effect of codes and regulations on their projects. These bulletins are not intended to be complete statements of all laws and rules and should not be used as substitutes for them. If conflicts and questions arise, current codes and regulations are final authority. Because the codes and regulations may be revised or amended at any time, consult King County staff to be sure you understand all requirements before beginning work. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that the project meets all requirements of applicable codes and regulations.

For alternate formats, call 206-296-6600.

## **Agricultural Buildings – Permit Application Requirements and Processing**

This bulletin serves as a guide to help customers living in the rural areas of unincorporated King County understand the requirements for obtaining permits to construct agricultural buildings. A variety of programs and resources are available to assist you during this process.

Permitting has formed an Agricultural Review Team that has been working in conjunction with the King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks, Office of Business Relations and Economic Development, Seattle-King County Department of Public Health and other interested agencies, to develop strategies to assist with the unique challenges that agricultural zones present. Efforts are being made to streamline the review and approval process for structures for agricultural uses while continuing to adhere to the requirements of code compliance for the safety and welfare of King County citizens.

### **What is an agricultural building?**

Agricultural buildings are structures designed for farming and agricultural practices, including but not limited to growing and harvesting crops and raising livestock and small animals. Specific examples of agricultural buildings include

- barns
- greenhouses
- storage buildings for farm equipment, animal supplies or feed
- storage buildings for equipment used to implement farming and/or agricultural practices
- storage buildings for crops grown and raised on site (cold storage)
- horticultural nursery. (Not including any sales area.)

The International Building Code (IBC) classifies these structures as Group “U” occupancy (Utility and Miscellaneous) and further states that these structures “shall not be a place of human

habitation or a place of employment where agricultural products are processed, treated or packaged, nor shall it be a place used by the public.”

Please keep in mind that if the use of the agricultural structure includes the public (such as public riding arenas); the permit may need to be reviewed under more stringent commercial building code standards.

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### **Does my project require a permit?**

Whether or not, all accessory structures 200 square feet or less in floor area do not require a building permit; all other residential structures and any used for commercial purposes require a permit. An accessory agricultural structure without a primary residential use may be permitted provided; an agricultural use such as farming or farm animal is established on the property and provided an affidavit of use is signed by the applicant. The Revised Code of Washington (RCW) does, however, exclude “temporary growing structures used solely for the commercial production of horticultural plants including ornamental plants, flowers, vegetables, and fruits” that are constructed using a flexible membrane material from requiring a building permit per the State Building Code (for details, see RCW 19.27.065 at <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=19.27.065>). A separate clearing/grading permit may be required in this instance.

### **Can I build a pole building?**

Pole buildings often are constructed for agricultural use. Pole buildings are structurally similar to post and beam construction, using repetitive posts in isolated footings. Roof and wall framing systems support the required snow, wind and seismic loads. Pole buildings can be more economical to build and may often be constructed in less time.

However, care must be taken in their design since locations for such buildings are often in areas susceptible to high wind and snow loads. Verifying soil capacities are also critical in the design of embedded columns and footings. Since there is no prescriptive provision for this method of construction in the IBC, King County requires all pole buildings be designed by a professional engineer in accordance with the IBC. Stamped plans and structural calculations from the engineer are required at the time of building permit submittal.

As noted in this bulletin, agricultural buildings can take advantage of reduction in some structural design requirements. Your engineer can help to identify the appropriate allowances. Please contact the Permitting Services Center at 206-296-6600, if you have any specific questions regarding pole building construction.

### **Is a farm management plan required?**

The King Conservation District (KCD – [www.kingcd.org](http://www.kingcd.org)) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS – [www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov)) partner to provide technical and financial assistance to livestock and crop managers with regard to natural resource management. Working with KCD or NRCS, “cooperators” (owners and/or farm managers who enter into the farm plan process) develop farm management plans to meet their land stewardship goals for each farm as a whole. A farm plan may offer Permitting customers a number of additional benefits related to critical areas regulations and permit costs. Such a plan may help property owners determine the best site for the agricultural building, reduce livestock setbacks from streams, and help locate access roads within wetland buffer areas if necessary. In addition, certain agricultural activities may be exempt from the need to obtain clearing and grading permits when undertaken in accordance with an approved farm plan. You may be authorized to use KCD registered plans for manure bins, with an approved farm plan.

**What if my farm is located in a flood hazard area?**

Thorough research is required to determine what development can occur on property located in flood hazard areas. Typically, new residences are prohibited in the FEMA floodway. However, existing, lawfully established agricultural structures located within the FEMA floodway can be repaired, replaced, remodeled or altered, even if the work qualifies as a substantial improvement under King County Code (KCC) 21A.06.1270, provided the work can meet the applicable development standards. Please refer to KCC 21A.24.230 to 21A.24.270 to determine if your proposed project meets the necessary requirements. For additional assistance, see Permitting bulletin 38, "[Flood Insurance and FEMA](#)," or contact the Permitting Flood Inquiry assistance line at 206-296-6600.

**How much will my permit cost?**

Please refer to the current King County Fee Ordinance for applicable charges. Depending upon the size of the building, proposed use and site-specific conditions, permit fees can vary widely. Some agricultural structures may be qualified for reduced fees.

Concerns and questions about agricultural buildings and the permitting process for such structures should be directed to Permitting staff at 206-296-6600.

**Applying for Your Agricultural Building Permit**

Before applying for your agricultural building permit, you must complete the pre-submittal services (PSS) offered online through [mybuildingpermit.com](http://mybuildingpermit.com)

**Note:** Electrical permits are issued by the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries and plumbing permits are issued by the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health. See the "How to request an inspection" section on page six for more information.

**CAUTION: Mail order plans**

Mail order plans may appear to simplify the permitting process for you, but these plans usually meet the local codes and ordinances in the jurisdiction where they were developed. Additionally, the drawings may not meet KCC requirements and local building practices. Property owners should review the mail order plans with someone familiar with King County Permitting requirements to ensure that these plans are in compliance or to prepare any modifications before application submittal. Customers may find it necessary to seek professional assistance when using mail order plans.

**Special setback requirements for agricultural buildings**

- The minimum interior property line setback for any building used to house, confine, or feed swine shall be 90 feet.
- The minimum interior property line setback for any building used to house, confine, or feed any other livestock shall be 25 feet.
- The minimum interior property line setback for any manure storage shall be 35 feet.
- The minimum interior property line setback for any other type of building is established by KCC sections 21A.12.030 and 21A.12.040.
- More restrictive setbacks may apply for structures on sites impacted by critical areas.

### **Pre-application meetings**

Apply online through [mybuildingpermit.com](http://mybuildingpermit.com)

### **Department review**

Approval by the Seattle-King County Department of Health (SKCHD) is required for ANY improvements proposed on property serviced by an On-site Sewage System (OSS) to ensure the system is adequate and will not be impacted by the new construction (whether or not the proposed structure has plumbing). Customers must apply directly to SKCDH and a copy of this approval is required prior to building permit issuance. The King County Health application form is available on the permitting Web site at [www.kingcounty.gov/permits](http://www.kingcounty.gov/permits).

### **Addressing**

If this is the first structure on the site, a street address must be assigned to the property. This will become the official site address, and it is critical for fire, life, and safety services not to use any other address from any other document. Contact the Permitting Services Center at 206-296-6600 for address information.

### **Fire flow and fire sprinklers**

After permit intake, a site plan and particulars about the proposed building will be routed to the King County Fire Marshal Office for review. KCC 17.08.030 provides an exemption for agricultural buildings from fire flow AND from fire hydrant requirements. This is only for structures classified as Group U occupancy under the International Building Code and that conform to the definition of an agricultural building in Appendix C of the IBC. (See page one of this bulletin for a listing of agricultural buildings that are classified as Group U.) Furthermore, these structures must be located outside an Urban Growth Area as designated in the King County Comprehensive Plan. **If the structure does not meet these requirements, a sprinkler system may be required.**

In addition, fire department access roads are required to meet current King County Roads Standards. This includes driveways on private property and requires a minimum width of 20 feet. You may discuss deviations from this requirement by contacting the King County Fire Marshal Office at 206-296-6600.

### **Site visit / reviews**

Site reviews are determined upon completion of a site visit by Permitting review staff. Site reviews may include but are not limited to drainage, access, wetland, geotechnical, streams, FEMA flood hazard, clearing/grading, shorelines, SEPA, and wildlife protection. Based upon the site visit, the application may be approved without further requirements, conditionally approved with site requirements, or put on hold pending the submittal of additional information. Written requests for such information will be sent directly to the applicant. Site reviews may involve the review and approval of delineations, studies and other technical analysis by licensed professionals and will be reviewed for compliance with rural stewardship, forest, or farm management plans as applicable.

### **Building plans review**

A Permitting Plans Examiner reviews all drawings to ensure they meet current building, mechanical, and energy codes (as applicable). The examiner may ask for technical information or supplementary drawings in an effort to complete the review. If required, a correction sheet may be attached to the approved plans. There are some special allowances for agricultural buildings classified as Group U occupancy in the Building Code as listed on page one. These include reduced structural load, reduced exiting requirements, and increases in allowed building areas. Please consult with your design professional for more information about these standards.

## Permit approval and issuance

Applicants will be notified via [mybuildingpermit.com](http://mybuildingpermit.com)

## Construction and Inspection Process

**All work must be in accordance with the approved plans and permit conditions.**

### General construction inspection requirements and information

Permitting staff provides building and site inspections for agricultural buildings.

It is the responsibility of the applicant and contractor to make inspection requests at the appropriate time and have the approved plans and official permit card on the job site, including final inspection approval.

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### Preconstruction conference

Some projects have significant site and building concerns such as wetlands, shorelines, floodplain, geotechnical, steep-slope, erosion hazard, drainage, excavation near a property line, etc. A preconstruction conference may be required to address these issues with Permitting staff before the start of construction. A notice and condition will be added to your permit package if a preconstruction conference is required. Allow up to two working days after a preconstruction meeting is requested for the meeting to be scheduled.

### How to request an inspection

**Building inspections.** Inspection requests can be made 24 hours a day, 7 days per week either online at <http://inspections.kingcounty.gov> or by calling the automated 24-hour inspection request line at 1-888-5-INSPCT (1-888-546-7728). Inspection requests received before 3:00 p.m. on a workday will be scheduled for inspection the following workday.

**Plumbing inspections.** The King County Health Department performs inspections for plumbing, septic systems, and wells. Contact 206-296-4932 to request these inspections.

**Electrical inspections.** The Washington State Department of Labor and Industries Electrical Division perform electrical inspections for King County permitted projects. Contact the Bellevue Office at 425-990-1400 or the Tukwila Office at 206-835-1111 to request an electrical inspection.

### Site inspections

- **Erosion and sedimentation control (ESC).** All ESC measures must be installed when the site is cleared. ESC measures are identified in a 'Notice to Customers' form which is included in your permit package. This notice is also available at the Permitting Services Center and can be accessed via the permitting Web site at [www.kingcounty.gov/permits](http://www.kingcounty.gov/permits). ESC measures must be maintained throughout construction. ESC measures are verified at the first foundation inspection and monitored during all subsequent inspections.
- **Drainage / critical areas inspections.** The King County Surface Water Design Manual (KCSWD) may require the installation of drainage facilities such as infiltration, dispersal, or routing of surface water to an approved facility as appropriate for the size of the structure. Inspections for drainage facilities may be combined with other inspections or may require a separate inspection. In addition, setbacks from critical areas, buffering, and mitigation approvals will also be inspected in the field.

**Building inspections**

- **Foundation inspection.** The foundation inspection occurs after the building pad excavation has taken place. For concrete foundations, forms and reinforcing steel must be in place. Inspection approval is required before placement of concrete. For pole structures, the holes must be excavated and cleaned out. For pile foundations, special inspection by an approved agency is usually required. At the foundation inspection, inspectors check building placement per the approved plan, setbacks (from property lines, easements, critical areas and buffers, etc.), soil conditions, ESC, critical areas requirements, forms and reinforcing steel, hold downs and special frame anchors, and any other requirements specified in the approved plans and permit conditions.
- **Shear wall inspection.** Shear wall inspections are necessary when a specific structural design for lateral restraint panels is required in the approved plans. The inspection occurs when the framing, hold downs, sheathing, attachment and strapping are in place in accordance with the approved plans. Elements of shear panels should be left exposed until inspected and approved.
- **Framing cover inspection.** The framing cover inspection occurs when construction of the building framing is complete, plumbing and electrical rough-in is completed and approved, and the windows and roofing have been installed (as applicable). Insulation should not be installed at the first framing inspection. Inspectors verify that structural, ordinance and life safety requirements visible at the framing inspection are in conformance with the approved plans. A required fire sprinkler system requires rough-in approval before framing cover approval. A required FEMA Flood Elevation Certificate must be received and approved for elevation requirements before framing cover approval.
- **Energy inspections (if applicable).** Elements of energy inspections include foundation wall and slab insulation; infiltration barriers; wall, ceiling and under floor insulation; windows; gasketing; and whole house fans. Inspectors provide spot check inspections of these elements at the appropriate inspection for conformance with the approved plans and energy code.
- **Revision resubmittals.** Construction of the building and site improvements are required to be completed in accordance with the approved permit, plans and conditions. If changes are required to the design following permit issuance, the modifications need to be approved separately by Permitting. Minor field changes should be discussed with your building inspector to determine how and if the change is allowed. Major modifications will typically require submitting a revision permit to Permit Center. A revision permit number is assigned and the revisions are routed to the appropriate review disciplines. Ordinarily, an intake appointment is required for the submittal of a revision.
- **Permit extension.** A King County building permit is valid for one year from the date of issuance. A permit extension is required if all required work is not completed by permit expiration. Permit applicants are notified of the pending permit expiration 30 days before expiration if the permit has not received final inspection approval by that time. Permit extensions will be granted in accordance with KCC upon payment of the appropriate fees. Contact the Permitting Services Center at 206-296-6600 for more information about the permit extension process.

- **Final inspection.** The final inspection occurs when all work required by the approved plans and permit conditions and applicable codes has been completed. Building elements inspected at the final inspection include the occupancy separation, egress requirements (including stairs, handrails, guardrails, ramps, porches, doors and landings), etc. Site elements inspected at the final inspection include impervious surface, drainage facilities, final site stabilization and completion of all sensitive/critical areas requirements and mitigation including final plumbing inspection approval (if applicable). A required fire sprinkler system or fire access mitigation must have final inspection approval. A required FEMA Flood Elevation Certificate must have final approval by the Department of Permitting.

**Be sure to visit our Web site at:**  
[www.kingcounty.gov/permits](http://www.kingcounty.gov/permits)



King County complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you require an accommodation to attend a meeting (two weeks' notice) or require this information in Braille, audiocassette, or large print, please call 206-296-6600 or TTY 206-296-7217.