

Department of Permitting and Environmental Review (Permitting)

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Zoning Code – Overview and Summary

Permitting Customer
Information Bulletin #**17A****• FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS •**

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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.

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What is zoning?

Zoning is a mechanism that local governments use to ensure that the land uses within communities are properly situated relative to each other and that there are adequate setbacks, open space, parking, and landscaping for each type of development. It is the most commonly used legal device available for implementing a community's comprehensive plan. Every property within King County has an established zoning district classification that appears on the zoning maps as a symbol (e.g., R-1, NB).

The current Zoning Code, Title 21A of the [King County Code](#) (KCC), represents the first major rewrite of the Zoning Code (Originally Title 21) in nearly 30 years. The King County Council adopted Title 21A on June 7, 1993, and implementation occurred in January of 1995. The Code was designed to meet the diverse needs of an expanding population in unincorporated King County. Economic, social, aesthetic, and environmental needs were considered during the process of regulating ways in which land is to be developed. Appropriate development standards were created and compatible and complementary land uses were grouped to produce orderly development. Certain provisions in the King County Code anticipate the need for adequate public facilities and services to serve an increasing population. The Zoning Code also regulates lands containing physical hazards through standards that promote public safety and protect the environment.

How is the Zoning Code used?

The Zoning Code is used by individual and commercial developers who plan to build on or develop properties within King County. It provides guidelines on the economic, social, aesthetic, and environmental requirements associated with development on any given parcel. The Zoning Code may be helpful in answering the following kinds of questions:

- What uses are permitted on a Neighborhood Business (NB) zoned property?



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- What parking and landscaping requirements pertain to a zoned property?
- What are the building setback requirements for a zoned property?
- A portion of a property has a Class 1 Wetland. What is a Class 1 Wetland, and what are the associated land-use options and restrictions?

What topics are covered in the different chapters of the Zoning Code?

The Zoning Code is a comprehensive, land-use-oriented document, as reflected by the inclusion of the permitted use tables. It uses tables, charts, graphic displays, and the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) manual to expand the land-use list.

The User Guide (Guide), though not technically part of the Zoning Code, is included at the beginning of the document to help the reader assimilate the information. The Guide includes an overview of the Zoning Code, a broad categorization of the chapters, and a detailed explanation of how to use the permitted use tables (see Chapter 21A.08). In addition, a chapter-by-chapter summary of the key provisions of the Code is included, as well as a land-use index that contains an alphabetical listing of the common permitted and regional land uses found in King County. The “Where to Go for Help” section, included at the end, contains telephone numbers for resource personnel at the King County Department of Permitting and Environmental Review (Permitting). Qualified technicians and staff may be able to provide further assistance. This information is also included at the end of this bulletin.

What is included in adoption, implementation, authority, and definition chapters?

Before reading individual chapters of the Zoning Code, it is highly recommended to review certain chapters that provide context or serve as reference points for the rest of the Code.

Chapter 21A.01, Zoning Code Adoption, implemented February 2, 1995, explains the adoption of the King County Zoning Code, any outstanding issues to be resolved, and the time and circumstances under which certain chapters within the Code apply to specific parcels. The process of transition from the old Zoning Code (Title 21) to the new Code (Title 21A) is discussed, and a table with criteria for converting zoning maps to the new Code is included.

Chapter 21A.02, Authority, Purpose, Interpretation, and Administration, gives a broad overview of the Zoning Code as well as the requirements for conforming to the Code. The rules for interpreting the Standard Industrial Classifications (SIC) (used in Chapter 21A.08) are also included.

Another important reference chapter is Chapter 21A.04, Zones- Maps and Designations. This chapter includes a purpose statement and the supporting plan policies for all zones such as Urban Reserve, Rural Residential, or Neighborhood Business and for zone designations such as Special Use, Property-Specific Development Standards (-P), or Special District Overlays (-SO).

Chapter 21A.06, Technical Terms and Land Use Definitions, is a glossary that explains the technical terms and land uses found in the Code. Examples of the technical terms defined in this chapter include accessory use, residential, base flood, critical areas, and steep slope hazard areas. Definitions of more-common terms are also found here (e.g., daycare, dwelling unit, family, and streams).

What are Permitted Uses?

One of the most important chapters to consult before developing a property is Chapter 21A.08, Permitted Use Tables. Customers will find which land-use activities or types of developments



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are permitted in the different Zone Districts listed in Chapter 21A.04 (e.g., neighborhood business).

All permitted uses are displayed on one of the following permitted use tables:

21A.08.030 Residential	21A.08.070 Retail/Wholesale
21A.08.040 Recreational/Cultural	21A.08.080 Manufacturing
21A.08.050 General services	21A.08.090 Resource
21A.08.060 Government/Business Service	21A.08.100 Regional

The specific land use displayed in the tables refers to an activity for which the building or lot is intended or designed. (See Bulletin 18A, *Zoning Code: Permitted Use Tables*.) Here is an example: Under the major land-use category, “residential land use,” the activity might be for a single detached dwelling, townhouse, mobile home park, bed and breakfast guesthouse, or home industry, among others. A major land-use category such as retail/wholesale land use comprises a wide range of specific land uses such as food stores, gasoline service stations, fabric shops, or hardware stores. The specific land use permitted varies with the zone district and the possible conditions placed on the development.

The permitted-use tables are cross-referenced with the rest of the document for the benefit of the user. Suppose a customer were a property owner planning to build a neighborhood grocery store on a site zoned NB. Review of the tables would begin by looking at the land-use index to find “grocery store.” This will tell the customer the page on which this specific land use is listed. The page reference for grocery store (or food store) is 08-18, corresponding to Chapter 21A.08. The permitted-use table can be found for listings of the retail/wholesale major land use. The specific land use, “food store,” is listed on the left. Reading the table for specific uses permitted in different zone categories, it will be found that food stores are allowed in NB zones. Special requirements and/or restrictions are listed with the tables, as are cross-references to chapters on topics such as off-street parking, landscaping, and environmentally critical area requirements.

What are density and design requirements?

Another important chapter to review if a property owner will be developing property is *Chapter 21A.12, Development Standards – Density and Dimensions*. This chapter includes tables that list development standards for two general-land-use categories: Residential and Resource and Commercial/Industrial. Densities are specified in terms of dwelling units per acre (du/ac). This chapter includes standards for base density, maximum and minimum densities, minimum setback requirements, building height, and maximum impervious surface requirements. The chapter also includes calculation methods for and/or allowed modifications of the general standards such as exceptions to height and setback standards and site distance requirements for intersections and site access points.

A companion to the previous one on density is *Chapter 21A.14, Development Standards – Design Requirements*. This chapter describes building and site design requirements for new development, including standards for development and requirements for clustered development. For attached dwelling and group residences, standards are given for vehicular access and parking, building facade modulation, and roofline variation.

Sections on mixed-use development discuss the limits on residential uses, residential density standards, and standards for building floor areas and shared parking. In the sections on mobile home parks, standards for shared parking are also included, as well as standards for new parks



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and alternative design standards. This chapter also covers standards for on-site recreation, storage space, and collection points for recyclables, fences, and trail corridors.

What are the requirements for landscaping and water use?

Before developing property, customers should acquaint themselves with the code requirements for landscaping and irrigation. *Chapter 21A.16, Development Standards – Landscaping and Water Use*, addresses a variety of needs and requirements, from aesthetics to environment. Appropriate use of landscaping promotes privacy, creates a visual and sound buffer, increases aesthetic value, and deters soil erosion. The use of native species is encouraged in the code, and it is required in some instances, depending on the land use. Native species tend to be hardier and more drought-tolerant than plants introduced from other areas. To protect the interests of neighboring properties and to promote compatibility among uses, specific landscaping requirements are given for areas such as street frontages, interior lot lines, and areas next to freeway rights-of-way.

If a property owner plans to install an irrigation system, it is advisable to review the section in this chapter pertaining to water use restrictions and irrigation system design and requirements. Tables for calculating water use and a water budget are also included.

What are the requirements for parking spaces?

Chapter 21A.18, Development Standards – Parking and Circulation, provides the requirements for adequate parking for all land uses, encourages alternatives to single-occupancy vehicles to reduce the demand for parking, and suggests measures to increase pedestrian mobility in urban areas. In this chapter, are standards for off-street parking, including bicycle parking, transit and rideshare programs, pedestrian access and circulation facilities. Also included in this chapter are requirements for loading spaces and stacking spaces, as well as exceptions for community residential facilities.

What are the requirements for signs?

Chapter 21A.20, Development Standards – Signs, should be reviewed for information about any type of sign (wall signs, freestanding signs, etc.), as well as clarification about which signs require a building permit. Real estate signs, community event signs, residential or school signs, home occupation signs, billboards, and political event signs are among those regulated by the provisions of this chapter. Standards for temporary or permanent signs are included. Exempt signs such as historic site markers, gravestones, address numbers, traffic directional or warning signs, and others are listed. This chapter also includes sections that prohibit billboards in billboard-free areas and sections prohibiting billboards from obstructing views (e.g., view of Mt. Rainier). If a customer is considering putting up a billboard or sign, be advised that provisions also prohibit cutting, or otherwise interfering with, vegetation required by Code for a development permit.

What are the requirements for mineral extraction?

Chapter 21A.22, Development Standards - Mineral Extraction, discusses the requirements for extracting minerals, with the intent that these requirements will ensure public safety and minimize the impact of the extraction on surrounding properties. This chapter includes site design standards, such as requirements for setbacks, the use of fences, appropriate lighting, and signs. It also includes operating standards pertaining to noise, dust, or smoke levels, hours of operation, and/or other conditions.



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What are the requirements for environmentally critical areas?

An essential chapter regarding property development is *Chapter 21A.24, Environmentally Critical Areas*. This chapter provides measures for the protection of the natural environment and for preservation of public health and safety. It includes requirements for critical-area review of any King County development permit application or request for alteration of a site that includes such an area or buffer. Standards for each critical area are included, as well as provisions for complete exemptions, partial exemptions, and exceptions to the requirements in this chapter. Standards and permitted alterations are given for the following critical areas and their buffers:

- Coal mine hazard areas;
- FEMA Floodways, flood hazard areas, Flood Fringes, and Zero-Rise Floodways;
- Seismic, erosion, steep slope, and volcanic hazard areas;
- Wetlands; and
- Streams.

This chapter also contains information on the critical area review process, as well as measures used to protect critical areas and their buffers.

What are adequate public facilities and school concurrency standards?

Chapter 21A.28, Development Standards - Adequate Public Facilities and Services, specifically addresses the needs of a growing population. This chapter contains adequacy and school concurrency standards for facilities and services that must be provided to the public at the time of development. This provision applies to all new development proposals, including any use, activity, or structure, allowed by Chapter 21A.08 of the King County Code that require King County approval.

The following facilities and services are required before the time of occupancy, plat recording, or other land-use approval:

- Sewage disposal
- Water supply
- Surface water management
- Roads and access
- Fire protection
- Schools.

What are the requirements for animals/home occupation and home industry?

Livestock and pet owners or business owners operating at home should review *Chapter 21A.30, Development Standards - Animals, Home Occupancy, Home Industry*. The intent of this chapter is to preserve compatibility among neighboring properties by regulating the scope and intensity of accessory uses. This chapter contains provisions restricting ownership of small animals, standards for livestock densities, and provisions to reduce the impact of livestock on streams and wetlands.

Two types of home business are described in this chapter: home occupations that are considered permitted uses and home industries that are subject to a Conditional Use Permit (CUP). Topics covered are requirements pertaining to total floor area devoted to the home occupation or industry, number of employees, parking, and related topics.



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What are the map designations -P Suffix and -So Suffix?

A chapter is devoted to the map designations added to a map symbol: the designation for “Property Specific Development Standards” (-P Suffix) and the designation for “Special District Overlay” (-SO Suffix). These designations are described in Chapter 21A.38, General Provisions- Property Specific Development Standards/Special District Overlays. The standards set forth in this chapter provide for alternative development for sites with unique characteristics that are not addressed by the general requirements of the Zoning Code.

The -P Suffix indicates that unique development standards apply to the development proposals for any of the following:

- Residential or commercial building permits
- Grading permits
- Subdivision or short subdivision permits
- Urban Planned Development permits
- Subsequent zoning reclassifications
- Conditional use permits
- Variance or special-use permits.

The -SO Suffix designation is a means of carrying out the King County Comprehensive Plan and functional plan policies for achieving public benefits by allowing or requiring alternative uses and standards differing from the general provisions of the Code. The -SO Suffix can apply to a group of individual properties or to an entire community planning sub-area. The special district overlay may waive, modify, and/or substitute for the range of permitted uses and development standards established by this title for any use or underlying zone. When no modification occurs for the overlay, the general standards of this title apply to the property.

What is required for Urban Planned Development?

Chapter 21A.39, General Provisions - Urban Planned Developments (UPD), contains information about the application and review process for UPDs, conditions of approval, and general requirements. A UPD project is primarily a residential development and may include other uses such as neighborhood businesses, schools, and parks. The minimum area for a UPD project is 200 acres, and ample open space is provided. Individual sections of this chapter cover land use, affordable housing, recreation and open space, road and school adequacy, water and sewer service, road design, and storm water management design.

What are the application/enforcement requirements?

Chapter 21A.42, Review Procedures/Notice Requirements, includes procedures for Code Compliance Review, Director Review, and Hearing Examiner Review. The review process for new high schools is also described in this chapter. Chapter 21A.44, Decision Criteria, outlines provisions for clear, consistent evaluation of land use applications.

Criteria are provided for Temporary-Use Permits, variances, Conditional-Use Permits, special-use permits, zone reclassifications, and UPD Permits. Chapter 21A.50, Enforcement, covers the authority of DPER to enforce penalties for Code violations. This chapter defines violations and regulations for suspending, revoking, or modifying permits when violations occur.

Where is the land use index?

A land use index of permitted and regional land uses, arranged alphabetically, is included at the end of the Permitting Zoning Code binder.



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Where can property owners go for help?

- Call the Permit Center at 206-296-6600
- Email DPERWebInquiries@KingCounty.gov
- [Permit Center hours and location](#)

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