

**Department of Permitting and Environmental Review**

35030 SE Douglas Street, Suite 210 • Snoqualmie, Washington 98065-9266 • 206-296-6600 • TTY Relay: 711

# Tenant Improvements

**Permitting Customer  
Information Bulletin #****5****• 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.

This bulletin answers common questions about Tenant Improvement Permits, Certificates of Occupancy, and Shell Modification Permits. To obtain further information, or to obtain a permit, contact the Department of Permitting and Environmental Review (Permitting) at 206-296-6600.

## What is a Tenant Improvement Permit?

A Tenant Improvement Permit is required for completing, remodeling, or altering a space within an existing building. The process for obtaining this permit involves three steps:

- Plans are submitted and reviewed for applicable code requirements;
- A permit is then issued to do the work shown on the plans; and
- When the work has been completed and inspected, a Certificate of Occupancy is issued.

## What is a Certificate of Occupancy?

The International Building Code (IBC) classifies all buildings by type of "occupancy" or use. The 2012 IBC (Effective July 1, 2013) is the version currently in use. There are many classifications in the IBC, but they all fall into 10 general categories:

A—Assembly	I—Institutional
B—Business	M—Mercantile
E—Educational	R—Residential
F—Factory and Industrial	S—Storage
H—High Hazard	U—Utility

A Certificate of Occupancy is issued to identify a building or individual tenant space has been inspected by the building official and no code violations have been found.

**Note: Issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy cannot be construed as approval of a violation of the provisions of the building codes and/or other ordinances and regulations of King County.**

For new commercial or industrial construction, a separate Certificate of Occupancy or Letter of Shell Completion is issued after the building passes final inspection. (See paragraph below.) In multiple tenant buildings, a Certificate of Occupancy is required for each tenant space, with the exception of R-2 (apartment) occupancies.

Many buildings are constructed before actual tenants are found or improvements are planned. These are called shell buildings. A Letter of Shell Completion is issued upon inspection approval of all required work related to the shell permit. Tenant Improvement Permits are required for all spaces that will be occupied in a shell building.

### **What is a Shell Modification Permit?**

A Shell Modification Permit is required to change some element of the structure. Examples include changes to the exterior of the building, structural changes inside the building, or redesign of a stair system. This type of permit is not considered a tenant improvement permit, since additional reviews and processing are required. To initiate this permit process, please contact the Permitting Services Center at 206-296-6600 to request pre-application scoping information. For further details, please review the Permitting pre-application package, available from the Permitting Web site at [www.kingcounty.gov/permits](http://www.kingcounty.gov/permits), under forms and application materials.

### **What if Someone is Moving Into a Space That Was Occupied By Another Tenant?**

A Tenant Improvement Permit may not be required if someone is moving into an existing space that has a Certificate of Occupancy and they are not changing the character of the occupancy. If someone wants to qualify for this provision, the space must retain the same occupancy classification and use designated on the Certificate of Occupancy. The space configuration and exiting must also remain the same. For more information, contact a commercial building or fire inspector at 206-296-6615.

### **Change of Use and Building Additions**

If a customer is changing the use of a building or tenant space or adding onto a building, they may need to fulfill requirements not discussed in this bulletin. Changing the use may result in changes in the number of required parking spaces and changes to the building to meet additional Building and Fire Code requirements. Requirements for new construction and additions are described in Bulletin 8, *Commercial and Multi-family Building Permits*. Parking requirements are included in Chapter 21A.18 of the King County Code (KCC), and other zoning requirements may be found in subsequent Chapters of Title 21A of the KCC. These sources are all available via the Permitting Web site at [www.kingcounty.gov/permits](http://www.kingcounty.gov/permits).

### **What Must a Customer Do To Apply For a Tenant Improvement or a Shell Modification Permit?**

1. The application for a Tenant Improvement or a Shell Modification Permit should include three copies (on 8-1/2 x11-inch paper) of the complete legal description of the property consistent with the site plan.
2. Three sets of plans must be included. Four sets are required if the application is for a food-handling establishment within one of these categories: schools, churches, restaurants, groceries, mini-markets, hospitals, taverns, or nursing homes. The King County Department of Public Health is given the fourth set. The sets of plans should consist of the following items:

(a) Cover sheet including the following:

- A clear statement describing the scope of the work to be done;
- The dollar value of the work;
- The tenant’s name and mailing address;
- The applicant or contact person’s name, mailing address, and the phone number;
- The type of business and proposed business name;
- Property Tax Account Number;
- The permit or application number for any permits related to the tenant space or shell;
- The building construction type and occupancy classification;
- The specific information about the building (whether it is sprinklered, alarmed, monitored, or has fixed systems, etc.);
- The square footage of the tenant space;
- The method of heating (electrical, gas, etc.); and

(b) Site plan (See example Drawing 2 of this bulletin.) that matches the legal description, including the following:

- Location of all property boundary lines, buildings, parking, and driveways;
- North Directional Arrow; and
- Location of the tenant space within the building.

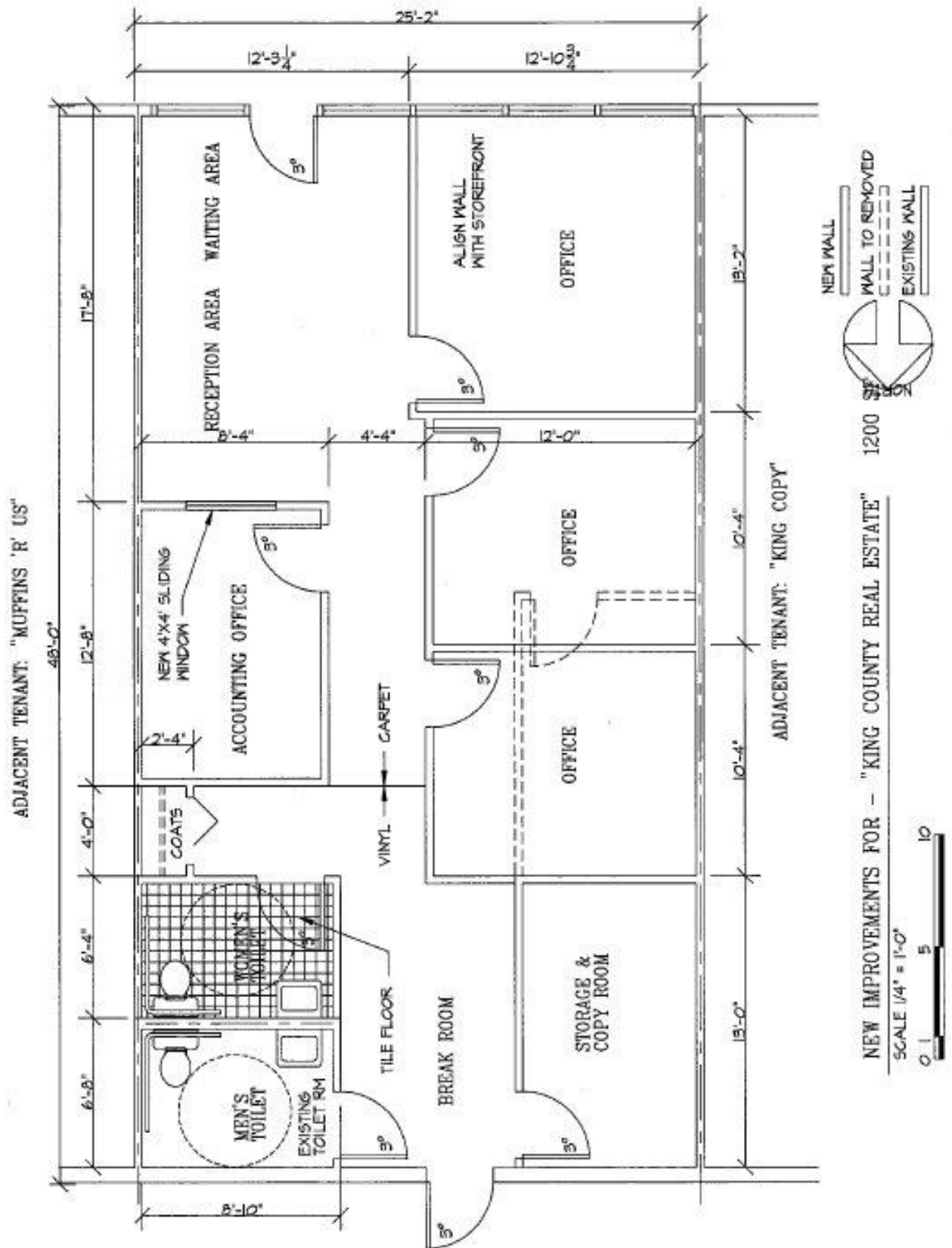
(c) Architectural plans (See example Drawings 1, 2, & 3.), drawn to scale, with dimensions indicated, and as a group showing the following:

- The scales used;
- The floor plan of existing space, when demolition is proposed;
- The floor plans of proposed space (including walls, doors, door swings, fixed equipment, and fixtures) that differentiate those proposed from the existing construction;
- The uses of all areas identified, including the uses of adjacent tenant spaces;
- The room and floor finishes (carpet, vinyl, paint, etc.);
- The size of doors and proposed fire-resistive rating when rating is required;
- The section through corridor construction when corridor is required to be one-hour fire resistive;
- The details or cross-sections of walls and ceilings;
- The barrier-free accessibility to and within the space;

Note: Full barrier-free accessibility compliance is not required in buildings constructed before 1976 that are not substantially remodeled or rehabilitated and have no change of use.

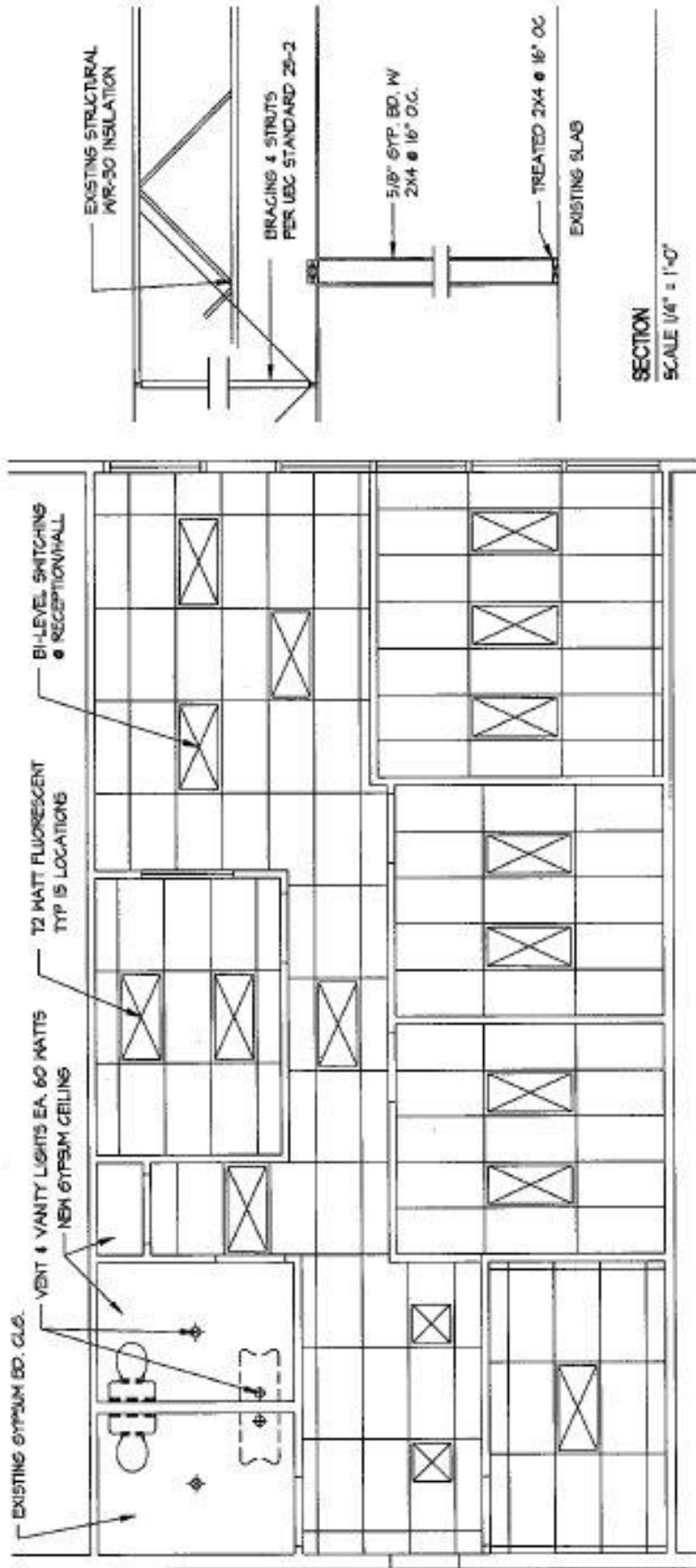
- Any storage use in excess of 12 feet in height;
- The uses, storage, or processing of flammable or combustible liquids or hazardous materials;
- The lighting and switching plans showing compliance with the Washington State Energy Code (WSEC) lighting and switching provisions when lighting fixtures are to be added, or when use is changed indicating fixture wattages; and
- The compliance with the WSEC, where any changes are being made to the thermal envelope of the building.

Drawing No. 1





Drawing No. 3



**What Must Customers Do To Apply For a Tenant Improvement or a Shell Modification Permit?** (Continued From Pages 2-3)

3. If customers are applying for a Shell Modification Permit, or if a tenant improvement application includes structural work, the plans should reflect sufficient structural details for the proposed work.
4. A copy of the Contractor's current Registration Number needs to be included.
5. A portion of the fees will be due at application and the remainder when the permit is issued.
6. Affidavit for Application. (See Bulletin 8, *Commercial and Multi-Family Building Permits*.)
7. Glass specifications and thermal envelope compliance documentation are required when adding additional glazing (windows).

**Other Considerations**

If one is looking to become a new tenant, they should check to see if their proposed use is allowed in the applicable zone. Contact King County Permitting for more information at 206-296-6600.

A menu and fourth set of plans are required when food service preparation or sales occur. Only complete applications will be accepted. Call 206-296-6797 for an appointment to submit an application.

**What Other Permits May Be Required?**

Other permits that may be required include the following:

- Mechanical Permit (See Bulletin 36, *Mechanical Permits*.);
- Sign Permit (See Bulletin 20A, *Zoning Code: Sign Requirements*.);
- Installation or revision of a sprinkler system (See Bulletin 13, *Fire Systems Permits*.);
- Installation or revision of a fire alarm system (See Bulletin 13, *Fire Systems Permits*.);
- Hood permits and fire suppression system permits for hoods (frequently required in food service uses). (See Bulletin 36, *Mechanical Permits*.);
- Electrical Permit from the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries (Call 206-835-1198 or 425-990-1400); and
- Plumbing Permit from the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health. (Please contact 206-296-4932).



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.

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