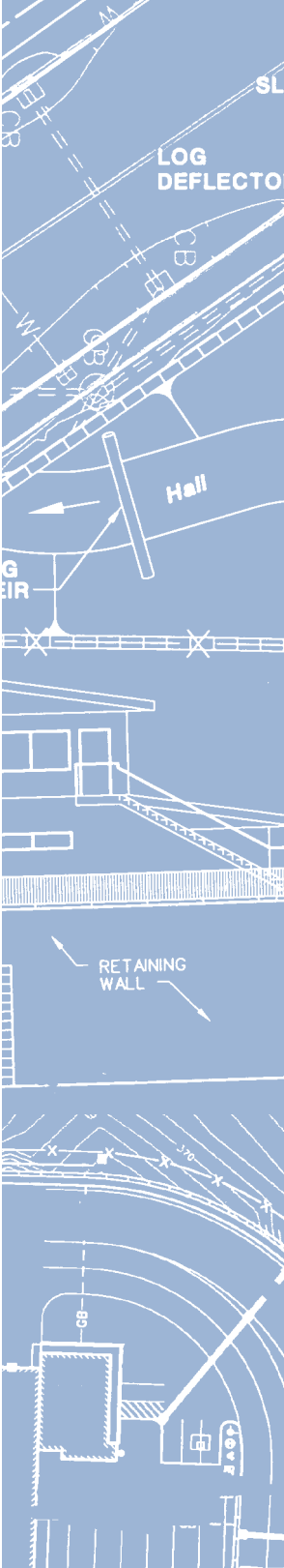




Frequently Asked Questions



Q: How do I find out the zoning of my property?

A: Snohomish County Planning & Development Services (PDS) can provide zoning information for all unincorporated areas of the county. (“Unincorporated” means that the property is not within the boundaries of a city.) For information about properties in incorporated areas, contact the appropriate jurisdiction.

For County zoning information, visit our office on the 2nd floor of the County Admin-East Building in downtown Everett at 3000 Rockefeller Avenue, see PDS Bulletin #37, Zoning Code Use Matrix, or call our office at 425-388-3311. The phone receptionist will take a message for the Permit & Zoning Counter staff. A complete address or a tax account number (parcel number) will be needed to research zoning information. Due to the number of inquiries we receive, it may take 24 to 48 hours to respond. The callback time may be longer during our busy summer season.

In addition, color-coded zoning maps are available to view online on the PDS website. These maps may be difficult to interpret, however, due to their scale and complexity. Hard copies of the maps are available for purchase at the Cashier Station at the PDS offices.

Q: Which zones allow for a certain use?

A: Chapter 30.22 of the Snohomish County Code (SCC) contains a use matrix. This chart lists use categories and whether those uses are permitted in certain zones, allowed as a conditional use permit in certain zones, or prohibited. SCC Title 30 (also known as the Unified Development Code), which took effect February 1, 2003, replaced a number of code titles relating to land development. (See SCC 30 or PDS Bulletin #37, Zoning Code Use Matrix.)

Q: Which properties are considered legal lots?

A: Generally, if the property is an established lot within an approved plat or short plat, that lot is considered a legally created lot. Development of a lot is subject to compliance with applicable building codes and land development ordinances. If a parcel is not a platted or short platted lot, the parcel will need to obtain lot status certification. For questions on lot status certification, we recommend you visit our Permit & Zoning Counter. (Also see PDS Bulletin #24, Legal Lots, for information on how to get lot status certification.)

Q: Does this property have critical areas such as steep slopes, wetlands, streams, lakes, rivers geological hazards or other protected areas?

A: PDS will have the information available if the property is a lot within a plat or short plat, where the plat and short plat maps have identified these areas. Or, if the

lot has been developed previously with a dwelling and these features were identified as part of the plan review process for the building permit, then PDS will have this information. Most lots created by plat or short plat prior to 1995 do not contain this information.

To assist you in the process, Snohomish County offers a “Pre-Application Conference.” This is recommended for owners of raw pieces of land that have streams, wet areas or other conditions that may cause potential site-related development issues. The process may involve a staff biologist, a site reviewer and/or a drainage reviewer who will visit the site and review it for potential development issues. A meeting is then held here in the PDS office to go over the findings of their reviews. (Visit the PDS Applications Packets webpage for pre-application information and request form.)

Q: What can I do in a Native Growth Protection Area (NGPA)?

A: SCC 30.62 specifically states that no clearing, grading or construction of any kind can occur in these areas. Passive recreational activities that don't disturb the vegetation or soils are not a problem, although there are exceptions to these restrictions. In order to determine what is allowed in any individual NGPA, review the recorded restrictions on file with PDS.

Q: What do I do about a dangerous tree in a greenbelt or NGPA?

A: Dangerous trees can be removed from an NGPA with County approval. The tree could be in an easement or NGPA area of your property, or on an NGPA tract owned by a homeowners' association. You will need to write to the building official by letter describing the situation and identifying who owns the property with the dangerous tree on it. If the tree is down or in immediate danger of falling, call 425-388-3311.

Q: What are the dimensions and square footage of this property?

A: Newer plats and short plats have the dimensions and square footage of each lot on the face of the recorded plat map. You can visit www.co.snohomish.wa.us/auditor to see if the recorded plat map is available, or you can call or visit our office. If your property is not part of a plat or short plat,

then this information may not be available, and you may need to contact a surveyor.

Q: Where are my property lines?

A: To have the property lines physically established or located on the ground, you will need to contact a surveyor. Snohomish County does not provide surveying services.

Q: Who is the owner of the property?

A: The Snohomish County Assessor's office has ownership information. Please visit www.co.snohomish.wa.us/assessor or call 425-388-3433 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Q: How do I find out the parcel number (tax account number) for a piece of raw land that has no address?

A: See above.

Q: Does PDS have drawings of where my water and sewer lines connect to my house?

A: This information is available from your water and sewer purveyor. PDS maintains a list of Water and Sewer Purveyors but does not guarantee the completeness or accuracy of the information.

Q: Are sewers coming to my area?

A: Snohomish County does not operate sewer and water systems. Contact the sewer district of your area.

Q: Where can a well, septic system, or drainfield be located on property?

A: Contact the Snohomish Health District at 3020 Rucker, Everett, WA 98201, 425-339-5250, www.snohd.org.

Q: Do small accessory storage type buildings require a building permit?

A: You do not need a building permit for a one-story tool shed, playhouse, storage type building that does not exceed 200 square feet in building

area (wall to wall) and carports with two or more sides open that do not exceed 200 square feet. However, properties located outside of the county Urban Growth Areas (UGA's) are allowed to have buildings up to 400 square feet without the requirement for a building permit. To determine if your property is located within or outside of a UGA, please contact PDS at 425-388-3311.

Q: Do I need a building permit to build a deck?

A: If the deck is uncovered and does not exceed 30 inches above any grade within six (6) feet of the deck, a building permit is not required.

Q: Do I need a building permit to do maintenance work on my house?

A: Where the fair market value (material and labor) does not exceed \$2,000, a building permit is not required.

Work such as window replacement (like for like) does not need a permit unless the window size is being increased. Please note that bedroom windows must meet minimum egress requirements.

Reroof projects less than 11 squares do not require a building permit. A square is an area of 10 feet by 10 feet.

Plumbing fixtures, including water heaters, do not require a permit when replacing like for like.

For electrical work, please contact the Washington State Dept. of Labor and Industries at 425-290-1309, located at 729-100th Steet SE, Everett, WA.

Q: How much is a building permit going to cost?

A: It varies. The cost of the permit is based on the valuation of the structure. Therefore, the larger the structure, the higher the plan review and permit fees. The actual cost is determined at the time the building permit application is submitted and a detailed review of the project is made. To get a general idea of the approximate cost, see PDS Bulletin #18, Residential Building Permit Fees, or visit the PDS website.

Q: Where do I get an electrical permit?

A: PDS does not issue electrical permits. Contact the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries, 729 100th Street SE, Everett, WA 98208, 425-290-1309, www.lni.wa.gov.

Q: Can I store a mobile home on my property?

A: This can be a complex question. Residential zones allow only one residential dwelling unit per lot. If you are replacing an existing mobile home with another dwelling (stick-frame built or another mobile home), the existing mobile must be removed from the property within 30 days after the final inspection of the new dwelling. The existing dwelling could possibly be converted to a guesthouse by removing the kitchen facilities. A conversion to a storage building might be possible if the unit was manufactured prior to 1976. In the event that a property owner owns a vacant lot and wants to "store" a mobile home on their property, it is not permitted unless a mobile home permit is obtained meeting all mobile home standards and requirements. (See PDS Bulletin #36, Manufactured/Mobile Home Permit Process.)

Q: What do I do if I want to move a house to a new location?

A: An inspection report is required for a code check of the house and the building permit. An inspection report application along with \$120 will be collected. Inspection requests called in before 3 p.m. will receive an inspection the next workday. See the online Inspection Report Application Packet.

Q: How do I find out if a structure had a building permit?

A: For properties in unincorporated (outside of all city limits) Snohomish County only, please call our office at 425-388-3311 or you may directly contact our file room at 425-388-3622.

Q: Can I run a home business from my residence?

A: "Home occupations," as they are called, are permitted in residential zones of Snohomish County provided they meet the strict criteria outlined in the County Zoning Code. In urban zones, the business must be operated from within the dwelling and not

in a garage or other detached building. In rural zones, it is possible to operate the business from a detached building. Contact PDS for the requirements and standards.

Q: If I buy a piece of property and find out that the previous owner did work without permits, what do I do?

A: You, now being the current owner, are responsible for obtaining the proper permits and having the work inspected. Contact PDS at our office in downtown Everett to determine what permits and inspections will be necessary.

Q: What do I do if I have a noise complaint about a construction site?

A: If it is regarding a plat (a subdivision of homes being built), the project manager will need to be contacted in order for an inspector to visit the site of the noise complaint. If “Proposed Land Use Action” signs are posted, the project manager’s name and extension will be available on the sign. If no sign is posted, PDS will need an exact address or a tax account number to assist you. For single-family projects, we will need the address or Assessor tax account number as well. If you are not sure what the address or tax account number is, please visit the County Assessor’s website or call their office at 425-388-3433, Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Q: What are the setbacks from property lines?

A: This can be a difficult question. Setback requirements depend on:

- The zone that the property is located in;
- The type of building that is being constructed;
- Whether or not there are streams and water bodies adjacent to the property;
- Other recorded NGPAs; and
- Building setback lines or utility and access easements encumbering the property. General setbacks are outlined in PDS Bulletin #27, Residential Building Setbacks. You can also review SCC Section 30.23, which is the part of the code that specifies setback requirements. SCC Title 30 (also known as the Unified Development Code) took

effect February 1, 2003 and replaced a number of code titles relating to land development.

If you have any questions, you may call or visit the PDS office. We will need a complete address or a tax account number (parcel number) in order to assist you. If you don’t know the tax account number, visit the Snohomish County Assessor’s website at www.co.snohomish.wa.us/assessor or call their office at 425-388-3433 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Q: I want to put up a fence. What are the rules?

A: Fences up to 6 feet high do not require a building permit from PDS. However, there are some fence placement restrictions. If you have a corner lot, for example, there are fence height limitations as the fence approaches the corner. (See PDS Bulletin #6, Fences.)

Q: Is there ever a situation where you cannot develop property?

A: Yes. Some lots are “landlocked” (inaccessible from public roads) and therefore not eligible for building permits. Sometimes soil conditions will not allow the installation of a septic tank and drainfield. Some properties that lie within the hydraulic floodway of a floodplain cannot be developed. In certain cases, a parcel may not be considered a legal building lot due to illegal subdivision actions. If you believe you have a parcel that cannot be developed, you should visit the PDS office in downtown Everett.

Q: What is the definition of my zoning classification?

A: Such definitions can be found in Snohomish County Code. SCC Subtitle 30.2 contains the County’s zoning regulations. Chapter 30.22 discusses and defines the zoning classifications in unincorporated Snohomish County. Chapter 30.23 defines minimum lot size, maximum lot coverage, and maximum building height per zone. SCC Title 30 (also known as the Unified Development Code). Hard copies of Subtitle 30.2 are available in the PDS office. You can also look on the PDS website for a List of Snohomish County’s zoning classifications. If you have questions, please visit or call our office.

Q: What is the status of my permit?

A: You may visit PDS' online permit information and search for your permit record by permit number, address or tax account number. You also may call our office at 425-388-3311 x 2475. You must provide the permit number in order to be helped over the phone.

Q: I noticed some kind of development going on at a certain piece of property. What is taking place?

A: If there is a "Proposed Land Use Action" sign posted on the property, you can obtain the project tracking number and name of the staff member handling the project from the sign. If there is no sign, you must determine the address or tax account number of the property. Then you can call our office or visit the online permit information for more information about the project. If you are not certain of an address or tax account number, visit the Assessor's Office website or call them at 425-388-3433 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Project files are available for review in the PDS Records Room, which is on the 2nd floor of the County Admin-West Building. Please call our Records Room staff at 425-388-3622 ahead of time to make sure the file is available. PDS also offers Building Permit and Land Use Activity Reports.

Q: Is my property subdividable?

A: This can be a complex question. It depends on the zoning of the property and other special land development requirements. We recommend that you visit the PDS Permit & Zoning Counter for information on the subdivision processes.

Q: Can I have two dwellings on one lot?

A: Typically you are allowed only one residence per legal building lot. There are provisions for temporary dwellings and accessory apartments, however. See the following bulletins for more information: Attached Accessory Apartments (#13), Detached Accessory Apartments (#12) and Temporary Dwellings (#49).

Q: What type of stream is on this property?

A: Streams are classified by Snohomish County according to a system called Water Typing. Streams

are classified into five different Water Types. The Water Types are determined by their physical characteristics, including channel width, gradient, fish use, stream flow and human use. Generally, the larger streams with significant fish use are typed higher (1,2, or 3) and the smaller, non-fish-bearing streams are 4s and 5s. In addition, while the Water Typing system classifies all surface waters (natural and artificial), the County's critical areas regulations (see SCC 30.62) address only naturally occurring streams. If you have further questions, contact one of the PDS biologists at 425-388-3311.

Q: Do I need a permit to cut down trees on my property?

A: Trees that are located in a Native Growth Protection Area (NGPA) or a County approved landscaping plan may not be cut without prior approval from Snohomish County. Properties that are less than two acres may remove as much timber as they wish provided the timber is not removed from a critical area. The timber is for personal use only. For properties two acres or larger, up to 5,000 board feet of timber in a 12 month period, for personal use may be harvested from areas that are OUTSIDE of critical areas. If cutting over 5,000 bf, or ANY cut timber leaves the site to be traded, bartered, or sold, a Forest Practice permit is required. For further information, please call our office at 425-388-3311 and ask for someone in Forest Practices. You might also want to contact the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, 919 N. Township Street, Sedro Woolley, WA 98284, 1-800-527-3305, www.wa.gov/dnr/htdocs/forestpractices/.

Q: Is this property in a flood zone?

A: The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) determines what areas are in flood zones. For FEMA flood map information, call 1-800-358-9616 (Bothell office 425-487-4678), or visit www.fema.gov for an online flood map. You may also visit or call our office for flood zone information.

Q: What should I do if I am having a dispute with a neighbor over a property line or their vegetation encroaching into my property?

A: This is a civil matter. You will need to contact an attorney if you are unable to reach an agreement with your neighbor.

Q: Where can I get aerial photos of properties in Snohomish County?

A: Snohomish County Public Works has many aerial photos of the county. They are located on the 2nd floor of the County Admin-East Building. Call 425-388-3488.

Q: Do you have the plans of my house on file there?

A: More than likely we do NOT have the structural plans. PDS keeps structural plans for houses during the construction of the house and for 90 days after the final inspection. After the 90 days, the plans are destroyed.

Q: Do you have a drawing of how my house sits on the property?

A: We refer to this as a “site plan” or a plot plan. If the house was built after 1982, PDS permit records will contain this information. Contact our Records Room at 425-388-3622. Please note, however, that during construction of the house minor changes in the field could have occurred, so the house location may not match the site plan on file.

Q: Who is the sewer and/or water purveyor for this property?

A: Snohomish County does not operate sewer and water systems. There are various sewer and water districts and cities that provide these services to properties in unincorporated Snohomish County. PDS maintains a list of Water and Sewer Purveyors but does not guarantee the completeness or accuracy of the information.

Q: Where is my septic tank located?

A: Contact the Snohomish Health District, 3020 Rucker, Everett, WA 98201, 425-339-5250, www.snohd.org.

Q: What is a perc test?

A: See above.

Q: How do I get a building permit?

A: You may request one of our informational application packets by calling 425-388-3311, pick one up in our office or see our Applications Packets

page online. (Also see the list of bulletins following the next answer.)

Q: How long does it take to get a building permit?

A: It depends on the type and complexity of the project, and the time of year. The summer months are the PDS’ busiest season. Single-family homes and accessory buildings such as garages and car-ports on sewers may take only 10-15 working days if there are no site concerns. (Site issues such as critical areas, drainage and grading may involve additional reviews that will make the overall permit approval time longer.) Lots served by a septic tank and drainfield also may experience a longer review if the project has problems or other issues with the Snohomish Health District. There are some types of permits that can often be issued over the counter, including mechanical permits, plumbing permits and demolition permits.

For more information on the permit process, see the Permit Process Information online on the PDS website or see the following PDS bulletins: Detached Accessory Apartment Permits (#12), Attached Accessory Apartment Permits (#13), Residential Building Permit Process (#23), Residential Building Permit Application Guide (#30), Accessory Structure Permit Application Guide (#31).

Q: Do I need a permit to replace my mobile home with a new one?

A: Yes. A permit is required any time a mobile home is placed on a piece of property, regardless of whether it is new or a replacement. See PDS Bulletin #36, Manufactured/Mobile Home Permit Process, or view the the Mobile Home Application Packet and Information on the PDS website.

Q: Can I live in a travel trailer?

A: No. Travel trailers are not considered full-time dwelling units and therefore cannot be used as a permanent residence. In certain rural zones, however, travel trailers are allowed on parcels for up to 180 days for recreational dwelling purposes. See PDS Bulletin #53, Travel Trailers, or visit the PDS website for more information.

Q: Is there a special permit needed to move a house, accessory building or mobile home on a county road?

A: Yes. Contact the Snohomish County Treasurer's office at 425-388-3366 or visit www.co.snohomish.wa.us/treasurer. If a state highway will be traveled on, please contact the Washington State Department of Transportation at 206-440-4000 or visit www.wsdot.wa.gov/freight/mcs.

Q: How do I make a structure "legal" that was built without a permit?

A: You will need to get a building permit from PDS. In addition, an inspection report may or may not be needed, depending on the nature of the work and building. Our recommendation is to visit our Permit & Zoning Counter to explain the issues associated with the work done without a permit. PDS staff will then determine the appropriate course of action.

Q: Can I raise and have chickens, turkeys, pigs, sheep, goats, rabbits or similar small animals on my property?

A: Yes. Zoning code provisions allow a person to have these types of farm animals for non-commercial purposes in residential and rural zoned areas. Structures used to house or feed these animals, however, must maintain a setback of 30 feet from all property lines.

You should also be aware that privately recorded restrictive covenants in a plat might restrict animal ownership. If you live in a subdivision that has restrictive covenants, you will need to review those covenants to see if your homeowners' association allows this activity. In the R-7200, R-8400, R-9600, R-12,500, R-20,000 and WFB zones, you need a minimum of 5 acres and a conditional use permit if raising these animals is not for the primary consumption of or use by the occupants of the premises.

Acronyms used in this bulletin:

- FEMA: Federal Emergency Management Agency
- NGPA: Native Growth Protection Area
- PDS: Snohomish County Planning & Development Services
- SCC: Snohomish County Code

Q: Can I have horses on my property?

A: Yes, but as with the above animals, structures used to house or feed the horses must maintain a setback of 30 feet from all property lines. Check for any private covenants that may restrict this type of activity. If you are proposing to have an equestrian facility for commercial purposes, see PDS Bulletin #2, Stables and Equestrian Centers.

Q: Whom do I contact about asbestos removal?

A: Contact the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency, 110 Union Street, Suite 500, Seattle, WA 98101-2038. They can be contacted at (206) 343-8800 or 1-800-552-3565, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., or at www.pscleanair.org.

Q: If I am using a contractor, does the County require verification that the contractor license is valid?

A: Yes. Verification means the receipt and duplication by the city, town or county of a contractor registration card that is current on its face, checking the Department of Labor and Industries data base or by calling the Department of Labor and Industries to confirm the contractor is registered.

Q: How do I get someone from the County to come out and look at a piece of property that appears to have a code violation?

A: You may report a code violation online, download an Investigative Report form or call Code Enforcement at 425-388-3650 to obtain an investigative report form. (Also see PDS Bulletin #51, Reporting Code Violations.) Fill the form out and return it to the PDS office. Upon receipt of a completed form, a Code Enforcement Officer will visit the site. He or she will then determine if there is a violation and, if needed, initiate the code compliance process.

This bulletin is intended only as an information guide. The information may not be complete and is subject to change. For complete legal information, refer to the Snohomish County Code.

*Snohomish County Planning & Development Services,
(425) 388-3311 or 1-800-562-4367, ext. 3311
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