



# Shell Buildings Bulletin # 27

Department of Planning and Land Services, June 2007  
Division of Building Safety and Inspection for 2006 I Codes

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## Common Questions About Shell Buildings

### What is a Shell Building?

A shell building is a building without a defined use, no tenant or is otherwise unoccupied. Shell buildings may have spaces for one or several tenants. Prospective tenants are generally similar in nature. Shell buildings are typically all retail stores, all office or all light to heavy industrial.

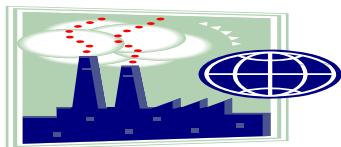
### What is a Certificate of Occupancy? and When Is One Required?

The International Building Code (IBC) classifies all buildings by type of “occupancy” or use. There are many classifications, but they all fall into ten general categories: A - Assembly, B - Business, E - Educational, F - Factory and Industrial, H - Hazardous, I - Institutional, M - Mercantile, R - Residential, S - Storage, U - Utility.

A Certificate of Occupancy is issued indicating that 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 Pierce County.**

For new commercial or industrial construction, a separate Certificate of Occupancy or Certificate of Completion is issued after the building passes final inspection and is in compliance with all other agencies. In multiple tenant buildings a Certificate of Occupancy is required for each tenant space with the exception of R-1 (apartment) occupancies.

Many buildings are constructed without specific tenants or their improvements. These are shell buildings. A Certificate Completion is issued upon inspection approval of all required work related to the shell permit. Separate Tenant Improvement Permits are required for each tenant.



## What is a Certificate of Completion?

Since there is no tenant, a certificate of occupancy may not be issued when the shell is complete. The contractor often needs documentation for the owner or lending agency to satisfy contract or loan requirements. The certification of completion provides that documentation.

## Are Separate Permits Required for Each Tenant?

**Yes.** Each tenant that moves into or within a shell building is required to obtain a permit in order to issue a Certificate of Occupancy for the tenant. This is true even if no construction work is required for the tenant to begin business. Since the shell was set up without specific tenant information many code requirements were not reviewed. Now that specific tenant information is available the occupant load can be established and exits can be identified. Occupancy group and division can also be established and building construction type can be confirmed.

## Change of Use and Building Additions

If you are changing the "use" of a building or tenant space, or adding onto a building, there are requirements that go beyond the scope of this bulletin. For example, changing the "use" from office to mercantile may require changes to the building construction, number of exits and accessibility features.

## Modification of a Shell Building

In order to change an element of the shell building that may not be related to any specific tenant, a building permit (BPCO) is required. Examples of this are a new fascia, structural changes to the building, redesign of a stair system. This type of permit does not result in a Certificate of Occupancy or grant approval for a new tenant.

## Permit Process

The permit process when constructing a new shell building is essentially the same for any new building. The variable is not having the exact tenant information. The plan review process assumes a general type of tenant, based on the applicant's information. The shell building installs the common elements like the building sewer, while the tenant might install the plumbing fixtures. Since there are any number of variations to who does what it is important to develop what we call a shell building file.

## Shell Building file.

The shell building file is a record of how the building was plan reviewed. Most important the file lays out what was included in the shell construction and what each tenant is responsible for. For example, the tenant may be responsible for the heating or mechanical design that must match up with a specific insulation level of the building envelope. Or, the tenant may also be responsible for the insulation. The shell building file establishes all the variables so tenant plans may be easily and quickly reviewed.

The owner or applicant constructing the building shell is required to develop a tenant improvement specification sheet. This will be the primary plan review aid when reviewing tenant improvement plans. It is also a valuable tool for prospective tenants.

## Submittal Requirements for Building Permits (BPCO)

A meeting with a plans examiner is required before making an application. Call 253-798-7218 or 253-798-3741 to schedule.

You must also make an appointment with our Development Center to make the application. Call 253-798-2704 to schedule.

1. Two (2) copies (on 8 1/2 x 11 inch paper) of the complete legal description of the property, consistent with the site plan.

2. Two sets of plans are required. The sets of plans should consist of:

### **(a) Cover sheet including:**

- \* *A clear statement describing the scope of the work to be done, including a code analysis*
- \* *Building construction and occupancy types*
- \* *The tenant's name and mailing address*
- \* *The agent or contact person's name, mailing address and 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*
- \* *Any information about the building (e.g. sprinklered, alarmed, fixed systems monitored, etc.)*
- \* *The square footage of the tenant space*
- \* *Method of heating (electrical vs. gas, etc.)*

### **(b) Architectural plans**

Construction drawings which are drawn to scale and dimensioned showing:

- \* *The scales used*
- \* *North Arrow*
- \* *Existing space and what is proposed*

- \* *Floor plans including entrances, exits, windows, partitions, fixed equipment, fixtures*
- \* *Uses of all areas labeled (also include the use of adjacent tenant spaces)*
- \* *Room and door finish schedules*
- \* *Details and/or cross sections of walls and ceilings*
- \* *Demonstrate barrier-free accessibility to and within the tenant space*
- \* *Specify if any storage in excess of 12 feet in height is to be used*
- \* *Identify any flammable, combustible liquids use, storage and hazardous materials or processes.*

\* *Demonstrate compliance with current Washington State Energy Code where any changes are being made to the thermal envelope of the building.*

(c) **Site Plan:** Site plans should match the legal description including:

- \* *Location of all property boundary lines, buildings, parking and driveways.*
- \* *North directional arrow.*
- \* *Show fire access lanes.*
- \* *Show location of fire hydrants*
- \* *Identify accessibility route of travel and handicapped parking areas.*
- \* *Identify location of solid waste and recycle collection area. (WAC 51-30-009)*
- \* *Indication of where the tenant space is that is covered by this permit.*

3. If you are applying for a BPCO for a Shell Modification, or if your 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.

5. The plan review fee is due at time of application and the remainder when the permit is issued.

## Other Considerations

If you are a new tenant check to see if the use you are proposing is allowed in the zone. Call zoning information at 798-3739.

If any food service/preparation or sales is involved check with the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department for their requirements at 798-3740.

## Other Permits May Be Required

These may include:

**Mechanical Permit:** Energy and ventilation code compliance information shall be included in the mechanical permit information submittal.

**Plumbing Permit:** Plumbing riser diagrams are required for all food service tenants and tenants with banks of fixtures. Tenants with plumbing serving only a restroom group (two) need not provide a riser diagram.

When we issue a shell building permit we should always issue the under-slab plumbing permit. Our current fee table provides for this under items 8 and 9. The fee should be \$64 and provides for the installation and inspection tracking.

This permit is in addition to the plumbing permit(s) issued for any tenant(s).

**Sprinkler system** - Installation and revising of fire sprinkler systems require separate permits.

**Fire alarm system** Installation and revising of fire sprinkler systems require separate permits.

**Type I Hood** permits including their fire suppression system. (these are frequently installed in food service uses)

**Sign Permit:** Sign permits are separate permits and must be specifically applied for.

**Awning Permit:** Awnings are sometimes considered signs and require separate permits. Call zoning information at 798-3739.

**Elevator Permit:** Permits are obtained from Washington State Department of Labor and Industries

**Electrical Permit** from Washington State Department of Labor and Industries or Tacoma City Light if they are the power provider for the building.