



Tenant Improvement and Shell Building Overview

Bulletin #26

Division of Building, Safety, and Inspection for 2015 International Codes

What is a Shell Building?

Many buildings are constructed without specific tenants or improvements. These are shell buildings.

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 shell building is a structure with empty spaces that have not yet been classified with a known tenant. This condition will remain until a future tenant proposes a use to the building department. When this occurs, the shell space will be reviewed as to the proposed use and if it is approved, it will then have a use and an occupant. Shell buildings may have one tenant or be divided up and have several tenants. Prospective tenants are generally similar in nature. Shell buildings are typically retail stores, offices, or a mixture of light to heavy industrial.

Separate Tenant Improvement permits will be required for each tenant.

What is a Tenant Improvement?

A Tenant Improvement permit is needed for the creation of a new tenant or space, the remodel/alteration of a space within an existing building, or for the change of use in a previously occupied space. Plans should be submitted and reviewed for applicable code requirements, a permit will then issued to do the work shown on the plans, and when the work has been completed and inspected, then a Certificate of Occupancy is issued for the tenant.

What is a Certificate of Completion?

Since there is no tenant in a shell building, a Certificate of Occupancy may not be issued when the work on the shell is complete. Instead, a Certificate of Completion will stand-in for the Certificate of Occupancy until the space is filled. A Certificate of Completion is issued upon inspection approval of all required work related to the shell permit. The contractor often needs documentation for the owner or lending agency to satisfy contract or loan requirements, and the Certification of Completion provides that documentation.

What is a Certificate of Occupancy?

A Certificate of Occupancy indicates that a building or individual tenant space has been inspected by the Building Official and no code violations have been found.

When is a Certificate of Occupancy Required?

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.

Can a Shell Building Be Modified?

A building permit (BPCO) is required in order to change an element of the shell building that is not related to any specific tenant. Examples of this include: a new fascia, structural changes to the building, redesign of a stair system, etc. This type of permit does not result in a Certificate of Occupancy nor does it grant approval for a new tenant.

Are Separate Permits Required for Each Tenant?

Yes. Each tenant that moves into a shell building is required to obtain a permit in order to issue a Certificate of Occupancy for that 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.

What are the Requirements for 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.

What is the Permit Process?

The permit process when constructing a new shell building is essentially the same for any new building, with the variable of 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. There are many variations to who is responsible for portions of the work, therefore it is important to develop a shell-building file.

What is a Shell Building File?

The shell-building file is a record of how the building was plan reviewed. Most importantly, 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 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)

For submittal requirements, see the [Commercial Application Checklist](#).

You must make an appointment to submit an application if you wish to apply at the Development Center. Call Donna Zierow 253-798-3291 to schedule. When you apply, you will need a copy of the contractor's current registration. The plan review fee is due at time of application and the remainder when the permit is issued.

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.

Required Documents:

An electrical (PDF) copy of the plans is required, with the complete legal description of the property consistent with the site plan. The plans should consist of:

Cover Sheet

- 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
- Parcel number
- The permit or application number for any permits related to the tenant space or shell (if known)
- 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.)

Architectural Plans. Construction drawings should be drawn to scale and include:

- 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 the International Energy Conservation Code as amended by the State of Washington where any changes are being made to the thermal envelope of the building.

Site Plan. Site plan should match the legal description and include:

- Location of all property boundary lines, buildings, parking and driveways fully dimensioned.
- 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 51-50-009)
- Indication of where the tenant space is that is covered by this permit.

Tacoma Pierce County Health Department

- If any food service/preparation or sales is involved, check with the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department for their requirements at 253-798-3740.
- Changes or modifications to the plumbing system for buildings served by On-Site Sewage (Septic) System require Health Department permit and review.
- When you apply, you will need a copy of the contractor's current registration.
- The plan review fee is due at time of application and the remainder when the permit is issued.
- 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.

Other Permits Which May Be Required:

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

Type I Hood and Suppression Permits: Separate permits are required for the Type 1 Hood and Fire Suppression System. (these are frequently installed in food service uses)

Fire Alarm System Permit: Installation of and revising fire sprinkler systems require separate permits.

Sprinkler System Permit: Installation of and revising fire sprinkler systems require separate permits.

Plumbing Permit: Plumbing riser diagrams and fixture count tables 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.
- This permit is in addition to the plumbing permit(s) issued for any tenant(s).

Plumbing Pretreatment: Review by Pierce County Utilities may be required if the building is on sewer.

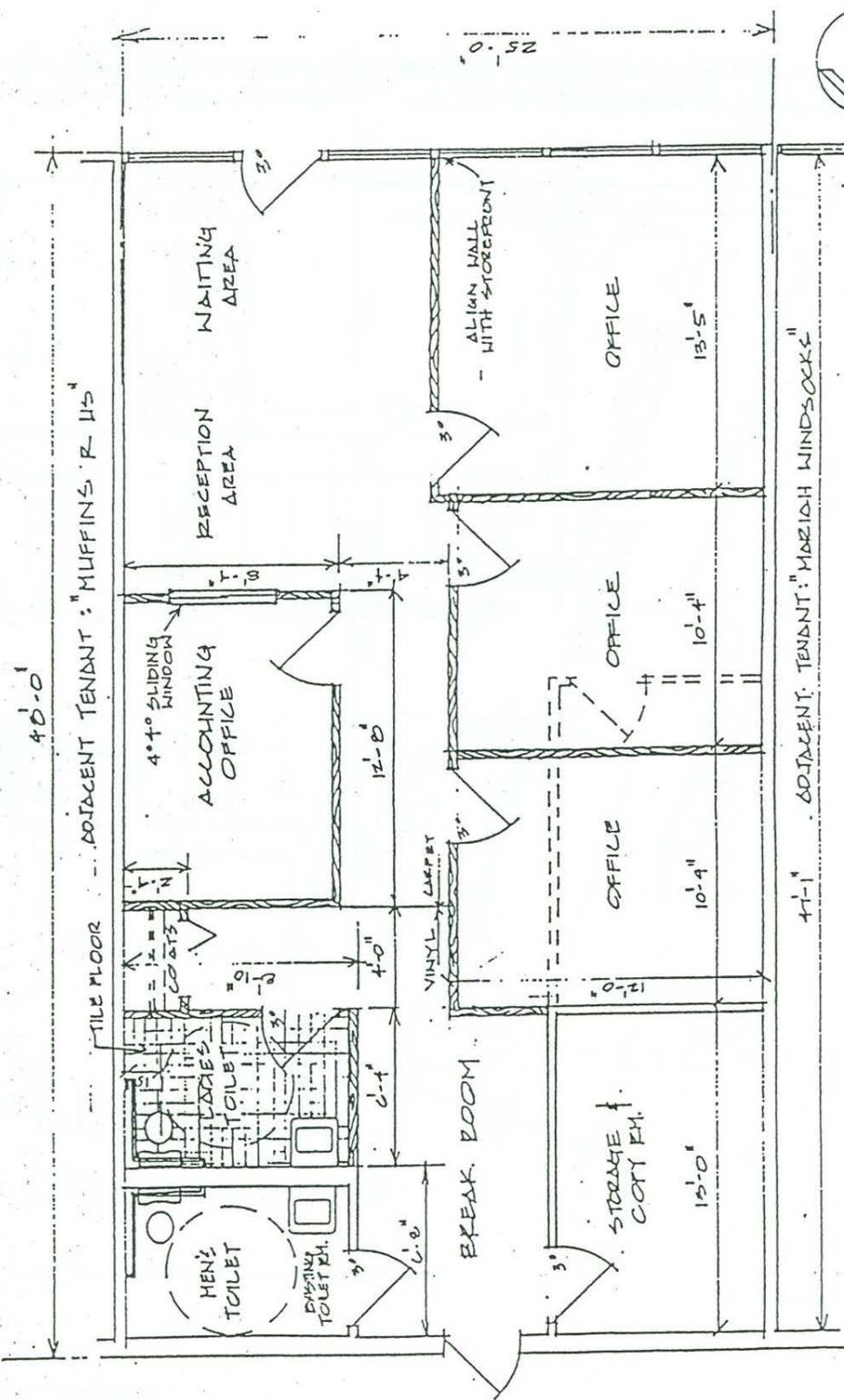
Sign Permit: Sign permits are separate permits and must be specifically applied for.

Awning Permit: Awnings are sometimes considered signs and require separate permits. Call Zoning information at 253-798-3739.

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

Electrical Permit: Washington State Department of Labor and Industries or Tacoma City Light issues the electrical permits depending on where your project is located.

EXISTING WALLS
 ===== NEW HALLWAYS
 ===== WAYS TO BE REMOVED



Tenant Improvement Floor Plan Sample Drawing