10 key steps to applying for a Commercial Permit in the City of San Diego

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This is an interactive document. Explore buttons and hyperlinks throughout

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Gather the necessary information before applying for a permit

1. Gather the necessary information before applying for a permit

Review the City's zoning, land use, and permitting portals:

Development Services: Zoning & Zoning and Parcel Information portal (ZAPP)

A homepage for the zoning and parcel information portal. The City Council adopted the Official Zoning Map on February 28, 2006. See Report to City Council 06-020 for background information on the development of the Official Zoning Map. The ZAPP link is included in the Development Services Zoning Portal. ZAPP is a tool intended to assist you with determining the City of San Diego's planning, zoning, and/or building regulations that apply to a location. Evaluating this information prior to designing a project can result in early identification of potential project issues, time savings, and reduced processing costs.

Permitting portal

A zoning, business, and residential portal for finding potential locations and permit guidance.

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Plan for your project with a Preliminary Review

2. Plan for your project with a Preliminary Review

Review City of San Diego webpage

> **Development Services Preliminary Review webpage**

- The preliminary review option is a flat, fee-based service tailored to your specific project.

- A preliminary review helps you obtain general information on the regulations that apply to your project, find out which permits you must obtain, the review process that applies to your development, and it helps you obtain interpretations on how the City will apply code provisions to specific situations.

- Staff responses to your specific questions will be documented and provided to you after the review.

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Review the City's municipal code sections for your projects

3. Review the City's municipal code sections for your projects

Links for each Municipal Code Section

Office of the City Clerk: Municipal Code

Ordinances for the City of San Diego—can be searched by chapter

- **Chapter 10** Planning and zoning for Centre City Planned District
- **Chapter 11** Land development procedures
- **Chapter 12** Land development reviews
- **Chapter 13** Zones
- **Chapter 14** General regulations
- **Chapter 15** Planned districts

Development Services: Records

The Development Services Department comprehensively maintains building permits, plans, maps, technical reports, and other related data for land development projects in San Diego. They are available to the public upon request. For more information, read Information Bulletin 110.

Development Services: Permit programs

The Development Services Department offers programs to encourage development in accordance with adopted policies that include Affordable housing, a pilot program for Life Sciences, Sustainability, etc.

Understand the process for project submissions

4. Process for project submissions

Understanding the City's approval process

The decision processes will vary depending on the type and complexity of the project. The subject matter of the development application determines the process that shall be followed for each application.

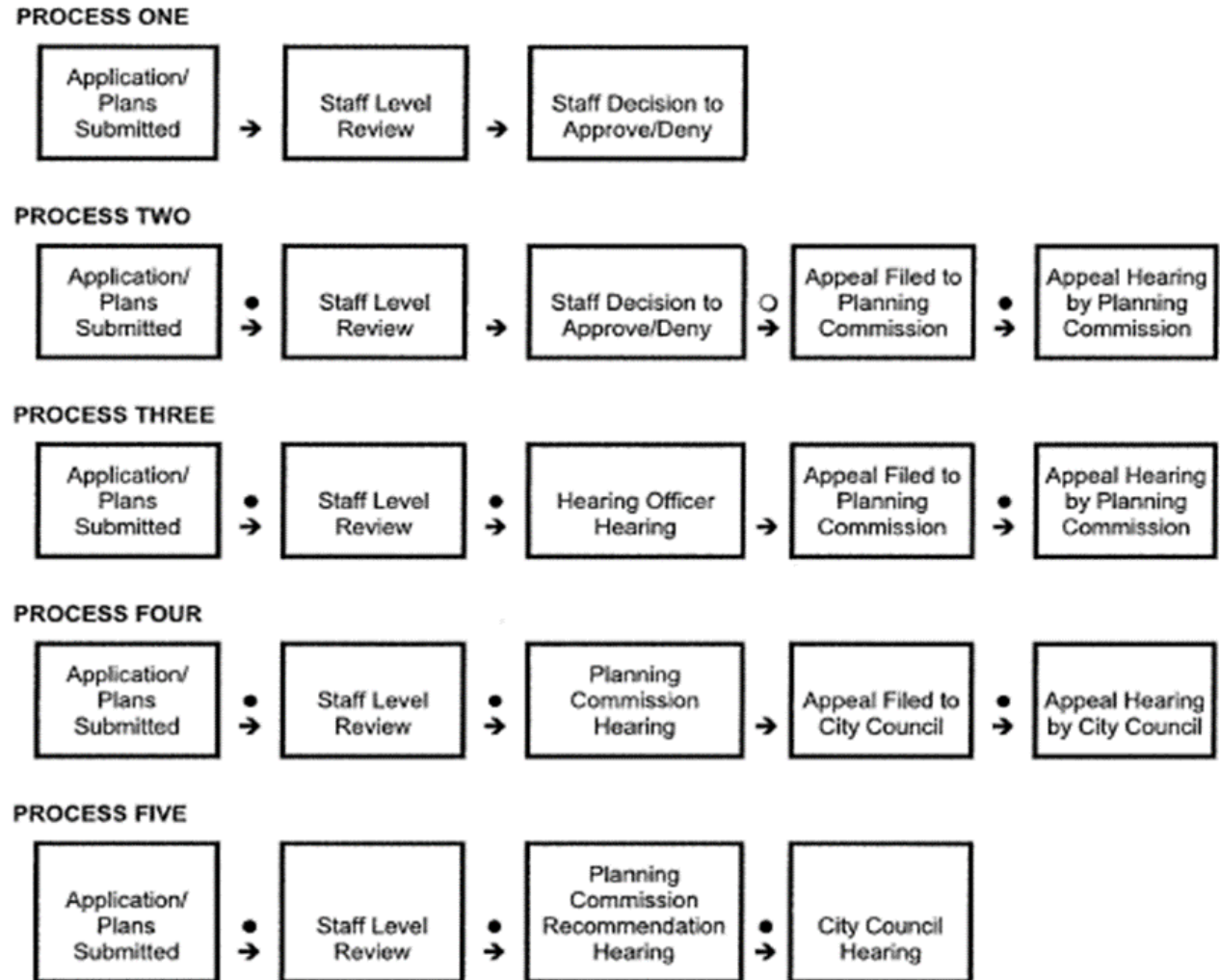## Development Services: Decision Process

Applications for permits, maps, and other approvals are reviewed through one of the five decision processes.

The Decision Process flow chart can help you determine the application process for a project.

Steps in the Development Review Approval Process

Development Services: Decision Process

Decision Process flow chart

PROCESS ONE

Application/Plans Submitted → Staff Level Review → Staff Decision to Approve/Deny

PROCESS TWO

Application/Plans Submitted → Staff Level Review → Staff Decision to Approve/Deny → Appeal Filed to Planning Commission → Appeal Hearing by Planning Commission

PROCESS THREE

Application/Plans Submitted → Staff Level Review → Hearing Officer Hearing → Appeal Filed to Planning Commission → Appeal Hearing by Planning Commission

PROCESS FOUR

Application/Plans Submitted → Staff Level Review → Planning Commission Hearing → Appeal Filed to City Council → Appeal Hearing by City Council

PROCESS FIVE

Application/Plans Submitted → Staff Level Review → Planning Commission Recommendation Hearing → City Council Hearing

4. Understand the process for project submission

Understanding the City's decision process continued

The legal steps that any development project must go through are established in the San Diego Land Development Code § 112.0501 entitled Overview of Decision Process.

Ministerial and discretionary decisions:

- The five-decision process shown in the last slide fall into two primary categories, ministerial decisions and discretionary decisions. Projects reviewed and decided by **Process 1** are ministerial decisions

- These decisions are based solely on whether a project complies with regulations of the Municipal Code and, where applicable, any prior approved discretionary decision

- If a project complies, the City must, by law, issue a permit

- **Process 2-5** decisions are discretionary decisions

- While these projects are also subject to regulations, there is some level of discretion given to the assigned decision maker to approve or deny these projects

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4. Understand the process for project submission

Understanding the City's decision process continued

Community Planning

Community Planning Groups review and provide project approval or denial recommendations for those projects subject to discretionary decisions.

- Receive copies of plans provided by customers, once project plans and documents have been deemed complete.

- Planning groups receive training on how to review projects in relationship to community plans and City regulations.

- Projects that are subject to ministerial decisions are reviewed by City staff and are not distributed to Planning Groups.

- In general, the more complex the issue, or the more discretion that is involved in a decision, the "higher" the process.

A typical permit approval type is identified in the Municipal Code and the decision process is required for each type.
The specific decision for any given project is established by Chapter 12 of the Land Development Code.

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Project Submittal manuals before applicant submission

5. Review Project Submittal manuals before applicant submission

Project Submittal manual

Land Development manual

Design guidelines & templates

The Project Submittal Manual ensures that all submitted projects contain sufficient information to allow a quality City staff review of the project for conformance with the Land Development Code, City policies, and with state and federal regulations.

The Land Development Manual provides information to assist in the processing and review of applications and establishes requirements for the submittal of applications, including the identification of required fees and deposits. This section is for construction permits – structures of commercial, industrial, multi-dwellings, etc.

Templates and format/instructions that can be used for submitting plans, but not in replacement of the Project Submittal Requirements contained in the City's Land Development Manual.

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Understand the current permit processing timeline

6. Understand the current permit processing timeline

Current timeline to aid with project schedule timeline

Permit application processing timeline

- The City of San Diego Development Services Department is committed to processing applications for permits as expeditiously as possible.

- This timeline provides a snapshot of the approximate number of days for applications to be reviewed by staff or for permit issuance.

Permit or Application	Type	Approximate Business Days*	Currently Processing
Building Permit	Intake	10	4th Week of August
Building Permit Rapid Review	Intake	10	5th Week of August
Building Construction Change - (Hybrid Process PTS/Accela)	Intake	6	5th Week of August
Building Construction Change	Intake	3	1st Week of September
Demo, Stand Alone Mechanical, Plumbing and Electrical Permits	Intake	9	5th Week of August
Discretionary Projects	Intake	1	Current
Grading, Public Improvement, Mapping	Intake	16	3rd Week of August
Sign Permit	Intake	9	5th Week of August
Plan Review (All Application Types)	Review	*Varies based on review type.*	
Building Permit	Permit Issuance	4	1st Week of September
Building Permit Rapid Review	Permit Issuance	12	4th Week of August

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Set up an appointment with Development Services Department

7. Set up an appointment with Development Services Department

Before submitting your project to the City of San Diego, visit the Development Services webpage:

> **Book a virtual or in-person appointment**

If you need help getting started to plan, permit, or build a project in the City of San Diego, the Development Services Department (DSD) will help. DSD provides a Preliminary Review service.

For more information on this service, please review [Information Bulletin 513](#).

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Status of your project

8. Check the status of your project

Review the City of San Diego's DSD Permit Records Portal

- The City of San Diego stores all information related to your project on their website.

- To see the status of your project, use the City's Portal.

- Enter in your project information.

Permit records portal

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Know who to contact

9. Who to contact at City of San Diego for Project Submissions support

Links for who to contact at City of San Diego

- City Development Services staff if a project is missing review deadlines
  - Reach out to your discipline reviewer and copy the reviewer's supervisor as you make your way up the staffing chain
  - Applicants can ask for a second opinion from reviewer's supervisor.
  - Applicants can ask to set up an appointment with the reviewer before resubmitting to ensure applicant is addressing reviewer's comments.

Staff lookup	DSD Management Team org chart	Citywide organizational structure
Development Services	**Development Services**	**All City Functions**
A staff directory of all Development Services Department employees.	An organizational chart of the management and unclassified staff of the development services department.	An organizational chart of the City of San Diego staff.

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9. Who to contact at City of San Diego for Project Submissions support

Economic Development Department: Project support

Customer service 619 236 6700

Contact Economic Development Department with the following criteria:

- PRJ numbers associated with the project:
  - Type of permit
  - Project address
  - Total project square footage
- Brief description of the project
- Project attachments – conceptual drawings, project schedule etc.
- Main challenge
- Property owner

- Employment headcount of company
- Capital investment of project
- Details on submission timelines
  - Date of first application submission to the City
  - Date of most recent application submission to City
- Applicants involved (developer, architect, broker – contact & email)
- Main point of contact at the City (Reviewer or DPM – email address)

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Thank you!

EDC's expert team is also available, free of charge,
to San Diego companies in need of assistance with permitting.

Connect with us on social @SDregionalEDC
and visit our website sandiegobusiness.org

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