



Frequently Asked Questions

New Permit Fees Effective March 1, 2009

Q Why did Thurston County change permit fees?

Thurston County adjusted permit fees effective March 1, 2009 to keep pace with inflation and to meet a mandate that requires the permitting department to fully recover the cost of processing permit applications.

Q What are the key changes?

A complete list of the new permit fees is available on www.co.thurston.wa.us/permitting/fees.htm. Examples of key changes are listed below.

Building plan review fees (a percentage of the building fee): These fees cover the cost to the county of checking whether a building plan meets existing codes. This step also helps protect developers from building a project, only to find out later that it is not up to code.

- **What's new:** Plan review fees are now 65% of the building fee – a standard set by the International Code Council (ICC) and adopted by most jurisdictions nationwide. Fees in 2008 were set at 35% of the building permit fee. (See next page for an explanation of building permit fees.)

Land use fees (based on hours of review time):

Land use fees cover the cost to the county of verifying that land will be used in compliance with existing regulations. For example, staff may check to see whether the project is in a correctly zoned area, whether it encroaches on any environmentally sensitive areas, and whether it is in a flood plain or high-groundwater area.

These fees reward people who submit complete and thorough applications by offering a low “base fee” that pays for a minimum number of hours of review time. Once the base number of hours is exhausted, the applicant is billed monthly for additional review time. The idea is that straightforward projects will not exceed the initial fee and more complex applications will pay for the actual time spent to process the application.

- **What's new:** Hourly fees were adjusted to keep pace with inflation, including rising costs for labor, materials, and facilities. This affects the base land-use fees (which are built around an assumed number of hours to process an average application) as well as the hours paid for additional review time. For the site plan review process for a single-family residence, the new base fee is \$540 as compared to the \$165 base fee in 2008.

So What is the ICC?

The International Code Council is a membership association dedicated to building safety and fire prevention. The council develops the codes used to construct residential and commercial buildings, including homes and schools. Most U.S. cities, counties and states choose the codes developed by the International Code Council.



The Pros of Permitting

The permit process is more than just procedure and paperwork – it's a way to ensure structures are safe for you and the people you love. Inspectors make sure buildings comply with important building codes, including checking the foundation, framing, insulation, roofing, plumbing, door locks, sheetrock and grading. The permits also help ensure that people build correctly in environmentally sensitive or hazardous areas – such as floodplains – and comply with land-use and zoning plans that preserve the quality of life here in Thurston County.

Building fees (a formula based on average construction costs): Building fees cover the costs to the county of processing permits and applications, and inspecting structures to ensure that buildings are actually built to code. Building fees are calculated based on the estimated construction cost per square foot as published by the International Code Council. The estimated costs vary depending on the type of construction. For example, in July and August 2008, the council estimated construction costs at \$96.83 per square foot for a single family home, but only \$37.72 for a garage.

➤ **What's new:** Thurston County's new permit fees reflect the July/August 2008 ICC estimates, with the cost of building a single family residence valued at \$96.83 per square foot. (The county's 2008 rate was based on \$65.28/ft for less than 2,000 square feet, and \$89.63/ft for 2,000 square feet or more.) For an example of how the new building fees are calculated, please see the back page.

Q What is a “cost-recovery model”?

Thurston County's fees are based on a “cost recovery model” – meaning that they must cover the true cost of processing permit applications. The 2009 fees are now comparable to fees charged in similar-sized counties.

Q Does the permitting department receive funds from other sources?

The permitting department does not receive funding from any other sources. Fees must fully cover the cost to review applications.

Q How were number of hours determined?

Staff enters time spent on each project in a database. By downloading this basic data, staff was able to determine the low minimum number of review hours spent by project type.

Q How is the hourly rate determined?

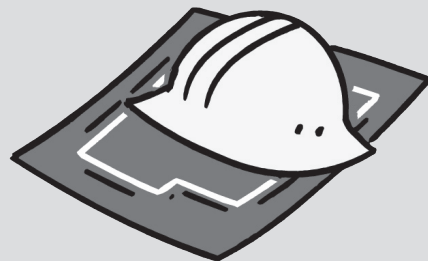
Hourly rates were determined by reviewing budgeted staff costs along with other identifiable costs that were related to the review and processing of applications.

Q How often are fees reviewed?

Fee schedules will be reviewed annually as part of the budget preparation process. The Building Safety Journal (a publication of the International Code Council) publishes the square foot construction cost data each July and August. This will be reviewed as part of the budget process, too.

About the process...

To understand permit fees, it helps to understand the process. All applications are routed to various enforcing agencies, depending upon the extent of the project. A minor project may only need to be routed to one or two places, while a larger project may be required to go to more departments, such as the Environmental Health Division, and the Development Review Division of Public Works.



Q Is the public allowed to participate in fee setting?

There is always an opportunity to provide public comment on fee amendments. These can be submitted by e-mail, by regular mail, or in person at a public hearing.

The permitting department posts fee proposals on the web and provides printed copies at the permit center. Staff members are also available to answer questions. Contact information is listed on the next page.

Q Is there a way the public can be involved at the permit center?

In 2008, a Business Process Advisory Committee was convened at the request of the Board of County Commissioners. The committee consists of stakeholders and citizens that use services provided by the permitting department. The purpose of this committee is to help ensure that the permit process is operating efficiently. This helps reduce the number of hours used to process a permit, which in turn affects fees. Suggestions and questions can be e-mailed to permit@co.thurston.wa.us. This email box is checked regularly and forwarded to staff.

Q What other cost-control measures have been taken?

Thurston County developed clearer up-front checklists to help keep applications at the base rate, and created a “master application” designed to make the application process – and staff data-entry work – more efficient and consistent. The office is now closed from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. to give staff members time to process applications quickly, and the number of staff positions has been reduced to reflect a declining demand for building permit applications. The cost recovery model requires the permitting department to work like a business; increase staff as workload increases and reduce staff when workload declines.

Contact Information

Permitting Department
Thurston County Courthouse
Building 1, Second Floor
2000 Lakeridge Dr. SW
Olympia, Washington 98502

Phone: (360) 786-5490
E-mail: permit@co.thurston.wa.us
Web: www.co.thurston.wa.us/permitting



– See reverse side for more information –

Thurston County Residential Building Fee Guide, 2008 and 2009

(This is an example only. For a complete list of fees, visit www.co.thurston.wa.us/permitting.)

Fee Type	2008 Fee	2009 Fee (Information source for fee is Building Safety Journal – Building Valuation Data July/August 2008)
Plan Review Fee	35%	65% (as allowed in the adopted building code)
Residential Square Foot Construction (R-3 1 & 2 family)	If <2000 sq ft = \$65.28/ft If >2000 sq ft = \$89.63/ft	\$96.83/ft
Unfinished space for residential structures	If <2000 sq ft = \$32.64/ft If >2000 sq ft = \$44.81/ft	\$15.00/ft
Remodel or Build-out of existing space for residential structures	If <2000 sq ft = \$32.64/ft If >2000 sq ft = \$44.81/ft	\$48.42 (50% of bldg permit sq foot construction costs (same formula as 2008))
Garage, private wood frame	\$23.57	\$37.72
Metal Buildings	\$26.13	\$37.72
Pole Buildings	\$14.70 - closed on any side \$4.83 – open on all sides	\$37.72
Fences	\$8.74/lineal foot	\$75.00
Decks & Porches (over 30in above ground)	\$18.72	\$37.72
Carports	\$16.10	\$37.72
Foundation	Based on valuation	No change

The following example is a proposal to build a new single family dwelling with a main floor of 1200 square feet, a second story of 400 square feet, a bonus room of 400 square feet, an unfinished basement of 1200 square feet, and 500 square feet of deck.

Valuation Calculation: 2000 finished (1200 main floor + 400 second floor + 400 bonus room) + 1200 unfinished = 3200 ft)

2000 all finished space @ \$96.83/sq ft = \$193,660.00

1200 – unfinished basement 1200 @ 15.00/sq ft = \$18,000

500 – deck 500 @ 37.72/sq ft = \$18,860

Total Valuation = \$230,520

- **Building Permit Fee = \$1,753.85 (old fee = \$1,727.35)**
- **Plan Review Fee = \$1,140.00 (old fee = \$604.57)**
- **Land Use Fee = base fee of \$540.00 (old fee = \$165). This assumes a standard application that does not require extra review time.**

Sample building fee permit table used to assign fees based on valuation

Building Permit Fee Table			2009 Bldg Permit	2008 Bldg Permit	2009 Residential Plan Review (65%)	2008 Residential Plan Review
\$228,001.00	to	\$229,000.00	\$1,742.65	\$1,716.15	\$1,132.72	\$600.65
\$229,001.00	to	\$230,000.00	\$1,748.25	\$1,721.75	\$1,136.36	\$602.61
\$230,001.00	to	\$231,000.00	\$1,753.85	\$1,727.35	\$1,140.00	\$604.57
\$231,001.00	to	\$232,000.00	\$1,759.45	\$1,732.95	\$1,143.64	\$606.53
\$232,001.00	to	\$233,000.00	\$1,765.05	\$1,738.55	\$1,147.28	\$608.49
\$233,001.00	to	\$234,000.00	\$1,770.65	\$1,744.15	\$1,150.92	\$610.45