



Regulatory Streamlining

Unpredictability, delay and excessive process in project review and approval can drive up the cost of housing. Regulatory complexity or rigidity can also restrict a jurisdiction's ability to attract certain types of desired development or may discourage developers from building in a community. To ensure that local regulations are supportive of adopted development and housing goals, jurisdictions should consider reviewing, streamlining, and prioritizing their permitting processes and development regulations. This will help to eliminate unnecessary costs and barriers and facilitate development of affordable or innovative housing types.

BACKGROUND

The state of Washington's Local Project Review law ([RCW 36.70B](#)) requires a predictable and timely review process by setting time limits on application review and permit decisions, providing public notices and consolidating hearings.

In addition to implementing permit procedures consistent with the state law, jurisdictions can also establish other streamlined permitting techniques such as:

- **Centralized counter services.** Minimizes coordination time.
- **Pre-application conferences.** Allows applicants to understand the rule upfront before submitting expensive permit applications.
- **Permit checklists.** Helps the jurisdiction make timely determinations on the completeness of a submitted application.
- **Reducing the number of residential zoning districts.** Allows the jurisdiction to simplify development standards and reduce the potential for interpretations.

TOOL PROFILE

Objectives

[Housing in Centers and Near Transit](#)

[Housing Options in Expensive Markets](#)

[Missing Middle Density](#)

Type of Tool

Other Regulatory Tools

Project Type

Single family

Multifamily

Ownership

Rental

Affordability Level

Market-rate incentives and tools



- **Reducing complicated administrative procedures.** Minimizes the number of persons involved in reviews, the number of rounds of review, or allows more permits to be administrative rather than discretionary if standards are clear and specific.
- **Permit expeditors.** A “team” can be assembled to review permits of a certain type or certain location.
- **Fast tracking routine applications.** For example, issue routine building permits over the counter or online.
- **Permitting priority.** Permits for affordable, dense, or other types of housing that meet local housing goals could automatically be granted priority for review. This could be made contingent on affordability covenants or other demonstrated measures to ensure the development’s affordability.

Projects that trigger review by multiple divisions should have a coordinated review process that allows a project to move efficiently through approval, avoiding duplicate work. As new policies aimed at increasing housing choices and affordable housing are added to the building and zoning codes, bear in mind the administrative load that can add time to a project’s approval. When constructing incentive programs like [density bonuses](#) or increasing regulatory flexibility through [flexible development regulations](#), make sure that additional review involved with these programs fits in with other approval processes. Jurisdictions may also use additional permit expediting as an incentive for affordable housing development through an [incentive zoning](#) program.

Alternative zoning codes suggested in this toolkit, including [form-based zoning](#) and [performance zoning](#), take longer to implement, but can provide means of streamlining regulations themselves. Traditional zoning codes may also be streamlined through the permitting of suitable uses, such as affordable and [missing middle](#) housing choices, which reduces the need for a property owner to obtain a conditional use permit or variance. This may be done through an overlay district or a global change to a zone’s permitted uses.

