



Shell Building Process (Commercial Partial Permitting)

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Building Official

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This establishes the policy and procedure for coordinating the submission and issuance of partial permits for the construction of new commercial buildings and existing buildings converted to Shells for future tenants.

Phased approval for new buildings: The Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (VUSBC) states:

“Phased approval. The Building Official is authorized to issue a permit for the construction of foundations or any other part of a structure before the construction documents for the whole building or structure have been submitted, provided that adequate information and detailed statements have been filed indicating compliance with the pertinent requirements of this code. The holder of such permit for the foundation or other parts of a building or structure shall proceed at the holder's own risk with the building operation and without assurance that a permit for the entire structure will be granted.”

Phased approval for existing buildings: Alteration/Repair Permit applications for conversions of existing buildings to a Shell Building for multiple tenants shall follow this Policy and the following guidelines:

1. The building complies with the VUSBC for allowable height and area of the existing building for proposed Uses identified on application and plans.
2. The building complies with the VUSBC/VCC Chapter 9 for the required sprinkler and fire alarm systems.
3. The building complies with the VUSBC for required electrical, mechanical, and plumbing codes for a building with multiple tenants.
4. Tenant plans and permit applications will be submitted for approval to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy.



DEFINITIONS – The following definitions will apply to this policy and procedure:

Alterations/Repair Permit – A permit for an existing building with a Certificate of Occupancy or a Shell Building with all approved Final Inspections that is issued for additional work and shall not result in a new Certificate of Occupancy.

Shell Permit – A permit that includes construction plans for a portion of the building but does not include any tenant plans and shall not result in a Certificate of Occupancy. The owner or owner's agent must submit a request [Shell Building Request Form](#) to the Building Official for approval to use the Shell Building Process for Commercial Partial Permitting.

Cold Dark Shell – A building that has footings, foundation, exterior walls, and roof. The building may also include slab and groundwork only (e.g., plumbing, gas, electrical, fire protection, and mechanical-in slab radiant heating). A Cold Dark Shell shall be limited to Types I and II construction, and Type III construction with a minimum fire separation distance of 30 feet.

White Box Shell – A building that, in addition to those items provided for the Cold Dark Shell, provides the minimum code required: lighting for normal and emergency egress lighting, heating, and fire protection systems. The building may also include additional work constructed by the owner in advance of the tenant layout work.

Tenant Layout Permit – A permit issued for a single finished tenant space for occupancy. This includes the installation of floor materials and drop ceilings, and may include the construction of partitions/walls. Construction plans include structural details and architectural features, plus electrical, plumbing, gas, and mechanical installations.

Footing and Foundation Permit – A building permit that is issued for the construction of the footings, foundation, and can include the slab of a building. Note: associated trade permits may be issued for groundwork only (e.g., plumbing, gas, electrical, fire protection, and mechanical in-slab radiant heating).

Certificate of Occupancy – A Certificate of Occupancy is issued to each tenant upon completion and final inspection approval of all permits issued to the tenant layout work and all permits issued on the Shell building have Final Inspection approval.

Final Inspection Approval – A completed project determined to be in compliance with the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code.

Superseded Projects – A project granted special permission by the Building Official at the time of Shell path approval to allow Tenant Layout Plans to supersede the Shell



Plans for scope of work only. This approval will require the Designers of Record for the Tenant Layout Plans to assume responsibility for the changes to the design of the Shell Building. Superseded Project designation also allows Tenant Layout inspections to be scheduled sequentially with Shell Building inspections; however, tenant inspections can never advance ahead of shell approved inspections. Superseded projects require a statement on both the shell request and tenant request forms.

Groundworks – Building systems installed under the building floor slab (e.g., plumbing, gas, electrical, fire protection, and mechanical in slab radiant heating). The work may be associated with the Shell Building or tenant build-out. **The permit holder is proceeding at their own risk, and any work that does not comply with the final approved plans shall be removed.**

Shell Building Request Form to Building Official

The owner or the owner's agent shall submit a request to use the Commercial Partial Permitting Process to the Building Official before submitting a Building Permit Application. The [Shell Building Request Form](#) shall include, but is not limited to:

1. Proposed Scope of Work – The request must identify the proposed Shell Building type (for example, the project size), the proposed uses, the type of construction, and if the building will be a White Box Shell or a Cold Dark Shell.
2. Proposed Project Schedule – The proposed schedule must identify the proposed sequence of design, permitting and construction for the Shell Building and the tenant spaces. Owners shall provide the name and phone number of the project person who will coordinate all phases of the new shell.
3. Acknowledgement of Requirements – The request must include the following statement, "I have read the Policy and Procedure for Commercial Partial Permitting Process for Shell Buildings and understand and agree to all of the requirements. I further agree to inform all prospective tenants of the requirements of this process."
4. A statement indicating if Superseded Project status is being requested
5. A statement indicating if Footing and Foundation option is being requested

Pre-Submission Meeting

The purpose of the Pre-Submission Meeting is to ensure consensus and understanding between all parties on the process and requirements and to review preliminary plans. After the Building Official's approval of the Shell Building request, the owner or owner's agent will be contacted by the County's Development Project Manager for a Pre-Submission Meeting. The project designers and Building Plan



Review staff shall attend the meeting. The County's Development Project Manager shall prepare meeting minutes and submit them to the meeting attendees for concurrence within five (5) business days of the meeting. Shell, Alteration/Repair and Tenant Layout plans, permits and inspections procedures will be discussed at the Pre-Submission Meetings with the owner/owner's agent and design team.

Shell Plan Submission Process and Requirements

1. **Shell Building Request Form** –The approved [Shell Building Request Form](#) shall be submitted with the initial application and will be attached to the Building Permit Case.
2. **Quality Control Review** – The Building Plans Intake staff shall conduct a Quality Control Review to ensure that the project has been approved for this process by the Building Official; the Pre-Submission Meeting has been conducted; the meeting minutes have been completed and attached to the Project Case; and the plan submission is complete.
3. **Code Analysis Requirements** – The Code Analysis shall be provided on the Plan Cover Sheet in accordance with Attachment A of this policy.
4. **Cold Dark Shell** – The [Building Permit Application](#) shall include a cover sheet with a complete building code analysis; plans for footings, foundation, slab, walls, and roof details; structural calculations for actual loads and assumed loads; energy envelope design parameters to include materials with thermal envelope ratings; a copy of the proposed or approved site plan; and a completed [New Structures and Additions Commercial Plans Checklist](#). The plans may also include groundwork for all trades. Multi-story buildings shall require the sprinkler standpipe to be installed at one level below the highest level of construction as required by the Building Code.
5. **White Box Shell** – The [Building Permit Application](#) shall include the same items required for Cold Dark Shell, as well as plans for electrical, mechanical, gas, plumbing, and fire protection systems.
6. **Groundworks**—The Trade Permit Application(s) shall include a copy of the approved Site Plan and building floor plans with the location of bathrooms, kitchens, drinking fountains, electrical rooms, and mechanical equipment rooms. Additionally, the plans shall include all plumbing riser details, electrical duct bank details, and mechanical piping systems.
7. **Special Inspections Program** – If the proposed building is subject to the Special Inspections Program, a Special Inspections Meeting is required prior to the issuance of the Building Permit. This may apply to footing and foundation permit scopes, shell permit scopes, and tenant layout permit scopes.



8. **Shell Building Plan Revisions Prior to Final Inspection Approval** – If changes are proposed prior to the final inspection approval of the Shell Building, revisions to the approved Shell Building Plans shall be submitted and approved. Revisions to establish tenant spaces (demising walls) can be submitted as a single plan view identifying the location of the wall(s) along with the proposed wall details.
9. **Footing & Foundation** – A Footing and Foundation permit is generally for fast-tracking construction at the owner's risk. Footing and Foundation Permit applications are independent submissions for a limited scope of work identified by the definition of Footing and Foundation. The scope authorized under a Footing and Foundation permit shall be shown as existing on the Shell Building Permit submission.

Tenant Layout Permits and Alteration/Repair Permits

1. The [Building Permit Application](#) for Tenant Layout Permits may only be issued after the Shell Building Permits and Fire Protection Permits have been approved for Final Inspections unless the entire project is approved as a Superseded Project. Tenant permits will be issued after the Tenant Layout Plans are approved. All Tenant spaces will be properly identified by the designers for each tenant space on the plans for inspections.
2. ~~SUSPENDED Expedited Plan Review has to meet all requirements of Policy: Expedited Plan Review Program and this policy.~~
3. [Framing and Rough-In Permit](#) for Tenant Plans can be issued in an approved existing building with a Certificate of Occupancy, a completed Shell Building with a Permit Status *Final*, or a Shell Building with approved final inspections (i.e., 146 FMO Shell Final, 150 Building Inspection Final) with the building owner's approval.
4. Alteration/Repair Plans can be accepted for review and permitting provided all Shell Permits have been approved for Final Inspection, including all Fire Protection Permits.
5. The Tenant Layout Permit application must be space-specific and clearly define the scope of work. Adjacent spaces shall be shown on the cover sheet as a key plan. However, for review and inspection clarity, all references to adjacent spaces must be removed or crossed off all other detailed construction documents and plans.
6. Occupancy loads shall be assigned at the Tenant(s) Layout Permit submission only.

Superseded Projects



1. A Superseded Inspections Project requires special permission. These projects will be identified on the [Shell Building Request Form](#) sent to the Building Official and shall be pre-approved before plans are submitted.
2. All Plans submitted for both the Shell Building and the Tenant(s) will identify this project as a Superseded Inspection Project with the statement below.
3. These projects require a Pre-Submission Meeting with Building and Fire Marshal Office Plans Review Staff, a Pre-Construction Meeting with Special Inspections Staff for plan submission and Building Permit issuance.
4. The Shell Building owner shall sign the [Shell Building Request Form](#) and will be responsible for notifying all designers and all contractors for the Shell and Tenant Plans/Permits for this Superseded Status, including the Fire Marshal's permits.
5. Superseded Projects will require a Pre-Inspections Meeting with Building Construction Inspections/Fire Marshal Inspections Staff and all contractors on the Shell Building to coordinate the Inspections on the Shell Building.
6. The special permission for Superseded still requires all permits issued to all contractors for the Shell Building and tenant construction to have Final Inspection approvals before a Certificate of Occupancy is issued.
7. Tenant Permit applications and plans shall identify the Project as a Superseded Project. The tenant or tenant's representative shall submit a Superseded Application form for approval with the plan submission.

Superseded Inspections Project: The Designer(s) of Record have read the Prince William County Commercial Partial Permitting Process for Shell Buildings Policy and agree to the conditions and responsibilities of the policy as it relates to plans and permits for Shell and Tenant Buildouts for Superseded Projects.

Attachments/Hyperlinks

- [Code Analysis Requirements – Attachment A](#)
- [Process Overview Flowchart – Attachment B](#)
- [Shell Building Request Form](#)
- [Superseded Project Request Form](#)
- SUSPENDED Policy: Expedited Plan Review Program
- [Building Permit Application](#)
- [New Structures and Additions Commercial Plans Checklist](#)