

Washington State Department of Licensing

Preparing and sealing documents: Architects

Who can prepare and seal architectural documents submitted for a building permit?

It will depend on the scope of the work for which a building permit is sought. The practice of engineering, architecture, landscape architecture, and land surveying are regulated professions and, except for limited exceptions, the type of work described in the documents being submitted for a building permit will need to be prepared and sealed by the applicable professional. The practice of architecture is defined in and regulated through [RCW 18.08](#).

Only an architect registered to practice architecture in the State of Washington under RCW 18.08 can practice architecture and prepare and seal architectural documents submitted for a building permit. The practice of architecture means the rendering of services in connection with the art and science of building design for construction of any structure or grouping of structures and the use of space within and surrounding the structures or the design for construction of alterations or additions to the structures, including but not specifically limited to predesign services, schematic design, design development, preparation of construction contract documents, and administration of the construction contract. Architectural documents are the drawings and specifications prepared in the course of the practice of architecture depicting, among other things, the art and science of building design for construction of any structure or grouping of structures and the use of space within and surrounding the structures. [RCW 18.08.320\(12\)](#)

Can plans prepared and sealed by an architect registered outside of Washington State be submitted for a building permit in Washington?

Yes but only if the plans are also sealed by a Washington registered architect who has reviewed the plans in a manner consistent with the definition of “review” as outlined in [RCW 18.08.320\(16\)](#). The Washington registered architect must secure written permission of the owner and preparer of the original plans to adapt and reuse the plans and otherwise complies with all required elements of [RCW 18.08.370\(3\)\(b\)](#). The architect must conduct an examination and evaluation, of the documents, for compliance with applicable laws, codes and regulations affecting the built environment that includes the ability to control the final product. The architect is then responsible to the same extent as if he or she prepared the documents. [RCW 18.08.370\(3\)\(c\)](#)

May a building official accept documents for permitting that have been sealed by an architect who has not personally prepared the documents but has reviewed them?

Yes, but only if the architect has reviewed the documents in a manner consistent with the definition outlined in Question #2 above. [RCW 18.08.320\(16\)](#)

May anyone other than a Washington state registered architect prepare building permit documents for submittal to Washington State building officials?

Yes. Washington State law, [RCW 18.08.410](#), lists categories of design work that may be prepared by any person, subject to the State Building Code. International Building Code gives Building Officials authority to require and define submittal documents prepared by registered design professionals. IBC Section 107.1

These categories of "exempt" work allow any person to prepare building permit submittal documents and provide project administration for:

1. any structure that is to be used for a residential building of up to and including 4 dwelling units or a farm building or is a structure used in connection with or auxiliary to such residential building or farm building such as a garage, barn, shed, or shelter for animals or machinery;
2. construction, erection, enlargement, alteration, or repairs of or to a building of any occupancy up to a total building size of 4,000 square feet;
3. alteration of or repairs to a building where the project size is not more than 4,000 square feet in a building greater than 4,000 square feet and when the work contemplated by the design does not affect the life safety or structural systems of the building. The combined square footage of simultaneous projects allowed may not exceed 4,000 square feet. [RCW 18.08.410 \(5\),\(6\), and \(7\)](#)

Exempt services and structures: Architects

[State laws and rules](#) recognize that certain areas of expertise are common to professionals other than architects. They provide the following exemptions in:

- [RCW 18.08.410: Application of chapter](#)
- [WAC 308-12-340: How do I apply the exemptions in RCW 18.08.410?](#)

Naval architecture, landscape architecture, and engineering

Application of the law doesn't prevent the practice of naval architecture, landscape architecture, engineering, space planning, or interior design services not affecting public health or safety.

Contractors

Application of the law doesn't prevent registered contractors, or superintendents employed by contractors, to construct, alter, or supervise the construction of buildings or structures, or to prepare shop drawings connected to the project.

Supervising a construction project

Application of the law doesn't prevent owners or registered contractors from engaging individuals who aren't architects to observe and supervise construction of a project.

Residential design work

Application of the law doesn't prevent any person from doing design work, including preparing construction contract documents and administering the contract, for the erection, enlargement, repair, or alteration of a structure or any appurtenance to a structure, regardless of size, if the structure is to be used for a:

- Residential building of up to and including 4 dwelling units.
- **or**
- Farm building.
- **or**
- Structure used in connection with or auxiliary to the residential building or farm building, such as a garage, barn, shed, or shelter for animals or machinery.

Design work up to 4,000 square feet for occupancies other than Residential

Application of the law doesn't prevent any person from doing design work, including preparing construction contract documents and administering the contract, for the construction, erection, enlargement, alteration, or repairs of or to a building of any occupancy, up to a total building size of 4,000 square feet or less.

Design work in an area up to 4,000 square feet in structures greater than 4,000 square feet for occupancies other than Residential

Application of the law doesn't prevent any person from doing design work, including preparing construction contract documents and administering the contract, for alteration of or repairs to a building when:

- The project size is not more than 4,000 square feet in a building greater than 4,000 square feet. (The combined square footage of simultaneous projects may not exceed 4,000 square feet.)
- **and**
- The work contemplated in the design doesn't affect the life safety or structural systems of the building.

For the purpose of this exemption:

- **Project size** is defined as the cumulative square footage of all spaces that contain altered construction in the design under consideration.
- **Simultaneous projects** are projects that have an open permit in the same building, designed or prepared by non-architects, the total of which may not exceed 4,000 square feet.
- **Life safety** is affected if the work contemplated includes, but isn't limited to alteration of:
 - Any fire rated construction.
 - Any means of egress including barrier free provisions defined by the building codes.
 - A building so the number of occupants in the affected spaces would be increased.

<https://www.dol.wa.gov/business/designproguidelines/architectexempt.html>