

6/25/25

MEMORANDUM

To: Land Use Committee
From: HB Harper, Analyst
Subject: Subdivision Procedures

The Land Use Committee is considering a bill to update Seattle's subdivision procedures at a briefing on July 2, 2025. Council Bill (CB) 121009 would amend Subtitle II of Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) Title 23 to delegate decision-making authority on final plats to the City Departments that currently review subdivision applications such that final action by City Council would no longer be required.

This memo includes an overview of subdivision application procedures and decision-making authority.

Background

City review of subdivision applications is guided by Chapter 58.17 Revised Code of Washington (RCW), which regulates the subdivision of land to promote the public health, safety and general welfare. Subdivisions occur in two phases—preliminary and final.

A decision on a preliminary subdivision application occurs after review and recommendation by directors of multiple departments, by either the Director of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) or the Hearing Examiner, depending on subdivision type. The preliminary decision includes a set of requirements that must be met before a final plat is approved.

Final plats for subdivisions creating ten or more lots are submitted to the City Council for final approval. Applications for final subdivision require the Director of the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and the Director of SDCI to confirm all requirements are met before forwarding to the City Council. The purview of the City Council is therefore limited. If final plats are in any way deficient, they are required by code to be returned to the applicant for modification or correction before being forwarded to Council. Consideration of final plats is generally constrained by the fact that buildings and/or infrastructure have typically already been built at this stage. The Council has considered and made determinations on 23 final subdivisions in the past 10 years.

Summary of Legislation

This bill amends the City's subdivision regulations in order to delegate the Council's role in approving final subdivision plans to the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT). Because review of final subdivisions is limited to review that conditions imposed on the subdivision are included in final subdivision plans, final approval of a subdivision is a ministerial act with little to no discretion on the part of the Council.

RCW 58.17.100 and .170 were amended in 2017 to allow the Council to delegate authority to review and approve final subdivision plans to the Seattle Planning Commission, a City agency, or other City administrative personnel. CB 121009 delegates authority to SDOT, which currently leads review of final subdivisions. It updates references to standards for subdivision plans and removes references to filing the plan. It also removes Subchapter IV of Chapter 23.22 of the Seattle Municipal Code, a section of the code related to “reserved land,” that has never been utilized, and may conflict with other regulations.

Next Steps

A public hearing is scheduled on July 30, 2025, at 2:00 PM.

cc: Ben Noble, Director
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