



## INTERAGENCY PERMIT REFERRALS

### GENERAL PLANNING INFORMATION HANDOUT

March 2022

Overview of Interagency Permit Referrals that Planning Department Receives, Reviews, and Processes.

For questions, you can call the Planning counter at 628.652.7300 or email [pic@sfgov.org](mailto:pic@sfgov.org) where planners are able to assist you.

**Español:** Si desea ayuda sobre cómo llenar esta solicitud en español, por favor llame al 628.652.7550. Tenga en cuenta que el Departamento de Planificación requerirá al menos un día hábil para responder.

**中文:** 如果您希望獲得使用中文填寫這份申請表的幫助，請致電628.652.7550。請注意，規劃部門需要至少一個工作日來回應。

**Filipino:** Kung gusto mo ng tulong sa pagkumpleto ng application na ito sa Filipino, paki tawagan ang 628.652.7550. Paki tandaan na mangangailangan ang Planning Department ng hindi kukulangin sa isang araw na pantrabaho para makasagot.

### Introduction

San Francisco's City agencies work together to ensure that businesses in our City are operating safely and legally. When some City departments and California State agencies receive applications for permits or licenses that require additional review, these interagency operational permit referrals (also known as "Miscellaneous Permits,") are referred to the Planning Department (Planning). After reviewing these permits, Planning staff make a recommendation which helps inform the referral agency's final decision. This interagency permit process allows the City to ensure that proposed changes maintain health standards and public safety in a manner that is consistent and compliant with San Francisco's land use regulations.

### Referral Process

A referring agency, such as the Department of Public Health, the Police Department, or the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, sends one of their permit applications to Planning for review. That permit application is then assigned to a Planner, who will make a recommendation to approve or deny the operational permit to the referring agency.

#### Proposition H: Save Our Small Businesses Initiative

Passed in 2020, Prop H streamlines the process for interagency permit referrals in some zoning districts. Through Prop H, business owners are eligible for faster and more flexible processes when establishing a new business or a new use at an existing business. Some businesses are eligible for permit approval within 30 days.

To learn more about how your business may benefit, [visit the Prop H website](#).

## Typical Referral Process Workflow

### Pre-Process

#### Applicant

Acquire all Building Permits necessary for proposed changes.  
Go to Permit Center if needed to clarify process.  
Apply for desired operational permit/license directly with appropriate City or State agency.

### Referral

#### Referral Agency

Receives operational permit and determines if additional review is necessary per the Planning Code.

#### San Francisco Planning Department

Intakes referral and assigns to Planner for a recommendation.

- Recommend Approval or Denial: Permit is sent back to referral agency with a recommendation; or
- Follow Up is needed with applicant or referral agency before a recommendation can be made; or
- Permit is put on hold as needed and/or Building Permits must be processed first.

### Returned Referral

#### Referral Agency

Receives recommendation from San Francisco Planning and informs applicant with a decision on referral.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why did my permit get referred to the Planning Department?

When a permit requires additional review against the Planning Code, usually to confirm that a business use is allowed at a specific location, City and State agencies refer them to the Planning Department. If applicable, applicants opening new businesses should have already applied for a Building Permit before this step. Applicants are encouraged to inquire about this process at the Permit Center.

### What is the difference between a Building Permit, a Change of Use permit and an Operational permit?

Building Permits are required when someone wants to construct a new building, alter

an existing building, or start or move any business. A Building Permit is initiated at the Department of Building Inspection (DBI), but that same permit gets reviewed by Planning, DBI, Fire, Public Works, and other applicable City agencies before it is issued and returned to the applicant.

Change of Use Permits establish a new land use on a lot or in an individual tenant space. They are often required when a business wants to open in a new location. For example, if a restaurant moves into a former retail store, it will need a Change of Use Permit. Floor plans and other materials may be required to confirm that the new business use meets any physical, land use, or life safety requirements.

Operational Permits are required by some specific State or City agencies, and usually pertain to specific types of businesses. These

permits ensure a particular type of business is operating according to required standards.

**When should I expect to hear back about my referral?**

The Planning Department targets a 30-day turnaround for interagency permit referrals. This may vary due to staff capacity and complexity of referrals. Planning staff may pause the 30-day timeline if more information is needed from applicants or the referral agency to complete review.

This 30-day review goal is only for the Planning Department and does not include processing by any other City or State agency.

**Does this apply to my permit?**

Please see the table below for common types of interagency referrals that the Planning Department receives.

**I have some questions, how do I get in touch?**

If your permit is referred to the Planning Department, you may look up your address on the [San Francisco Property Information Map](#) (PIM). PIM has information and reference materials for all addresses in San Francisco, including any Building Permits associated with a new or existing business. If your referral has been sent to the Planning Department, you can also find the contact information for your assigned Planner under the “Other Permits” tab in the left hand column.

You may submit general questions by email:

The Permit Center team  
[PermitCenter@sfgov.org](mailto:PermitCenter@sfgov.org)

Planning Department staff  
[PIC@sfgov.org](mailto:PIC@sfgov.org).

| Referring Agency  | Typical Interagency Permit Referrals   |
|---|--|
| <a href="#">California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC)</a> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Beer/Wine Importer</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Beer/Wine Wholesaler</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">On &amp; Off Site Sale - Beer/Wine/Liquor</a></li> </ul>  |
| <a href="#">California Department of Social Services (CDSS)</a>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Childcare Facility</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Residential Care Facility</a></li> </ul>  |
| <a href="#">San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH)</a>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Bar</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Massage (including accessory &amp; outcall)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Medical Cannabis Dispensary</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Restaurants</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Retail Beverage Shop</a></li> </ul> |
| <a href="#">Entertainment Commission (ENTCOM)</a>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Limited Live Performance</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Extended Hours</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Place of Entertainment</a></li> </ul>   |
| <a href="#">Fire Department (SFFD)</a>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Auto Repair</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Parking Lot</a></li> </ul>   |
| <a href="#">Police Department (SFPD)</a>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Auto Rental</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Auto Wrecker</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Second Hand Dealer</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Parking Lot</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Towing Operator</a></li> </ul>                                      |
| <a href="#">San Francisco Board of Supervisors</a>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Public Convenience of Necessity Determination (Certain Liquor Licenses)</a></li> </ul>  |

**We are changing the ownership of an existing business. What should I do?**

If you are taking over an existing business or are transferring ownership to a new person and you are not changing the business use, this often does not need Planning Department review. However, [Formula Retail](#) businesses and some types of referrals or uses with more regulations or stricter State controls do require review for changes of ownership. If business ownership is changing and the business operations are changing this may require additional review.

**Do I have to pay the Planning Department a fee in addition to the original fee I paid for my permit or license?**

All fees for interagency permit referrals are assessed and collected by the referring agency, including any fees associated with Planning Department review.

**Do I need public notice?**

Depending on what you are applying for, the initial Building Permit application may require additional review, neighborhood notice, or a Conditional Use Authorization (CUA).

For instance, the Planning Code makes a distinction between food-serving establishments that serve alcohol (a “Restaurant”) and those that do not serve alcohol (a “Limited Restaurant”). When a Limited Restaurant would like to start serving alcohol, this is considered a Change of Use, and could require neighborhood notice for the Building Permit application. The interagency permit referral process itself does not trigger neighborhood notice.

Please visit the [BUILD for Business zoning check tool](#) to determine whether your proposed business is permitted in a specific location.

| No Notice  | Neighborhood Notice/<br>Discretionary Review  | Conditional Use<br>Authorization Required   |
|--|---|---|
| <p>The proposed business use is already operating on site, or the new use is allowed and does not require public notice.</p> <p>Prop H: New businesses and Change of Use permits can now be approved over the counter (OTC) in some zoning districts.</p> <p><a href="#">Visit the Prop H website for more details</a></p> | <p>Public notification for Changes of Use are required in some Residential, Neighborhood Commercial, and Eastern Neighborhoods Mixed-Use zoning districts. This will trigger neighborhood notice.</p> <p><a href="#">Please read here for more information on public notice.</a></p> <p>After public notice has been posted, a concerned neighbor, property owner, or community group may file a Request for Discretionary Review (DR) to protest a Building Permit. This may require a public hearing and review by the Planning Commission.</p> | <p>Conditional Use Authorizations (CUA) are needed when the new use is conditionally permitted (in other words, not automatically allowed or permitted) in a specific zoning district. CUAs require public notice, a public hearing, and approval by the Planning Commission.</p> |

## Example of Referral Process

A café owner wants to start serving wine, and she needs an alcohol license. The owner first visits the Planning Information Counter to consult a Planner. The Planner confirms that the existing business is a “Limited Restaurant” and that they are allowed to become a “Restaurant” and serve alcohol.

The business owner then obtains a “Change of Use” Building Permit to establish the Restaurant use, which will allow her to get an alcohol license and sell wine. Occasionally, additional Planning processes like neighborhood notification are required, but most permits to establish a new use can be reviewed in-person and approved quickly at the Permit Center.

Once the Change of Use Building Permit is issued, the business owner applies for an alcohol license from the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC). ABC staff review her application and refer it to the Planning Department to confirm that alcohol service is allowed at the business location.

A Planner is assigned the ABC referral and checks the property records, permit history, and zoning to know if alcohol service is allowed at the business location. In this case, it is allowed and the Planner makes a recommendation to approve the alcohol license. The referral is sent back to ABC, and staff there complete the review and issuance process. Now that the change-of-use is complete and the alcohol license has been issued, she can start serving wine at her café.

## Additional Resources

### Further Information:

- [Prop H: Save Our Small Business Initiative](#)
- [San Francisco Planning Contact Information](#)
- [San Francisco Planning Permit Counter](#)
- [San Francisco Property Information Map](#)
- [BUILD for Business Zoning Check](#)
- [Community Business Priority Processing Program](#)
- [Zoning Administrator Bulletin 4: Public Notification for Building Permits in Residential and Neighborhood Commercial Districts.](#)

### Application Resources:

- [Permits for Small Businesses](#)
- [Project Application \(PRJ\)](#)
- [Conditional Use Authorization \(CUA\) Supplemental](#)



**San Francisco  
Planning**

FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
Contact San Francisco Planning

**San Francisco Planning Reception**  
49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1400  
San Francisco CA 94103

TEL: **628.652.7600**  
WEB: **www.sfplanning.org**

**Planning Counter at Permit Center**  
49 South Van Ness Avenue, 2nd Floor  
San Francisco CA 94103

EMAIL: **pic@sfgov.org**  
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