

Director's Report and Recommendation

Solid Waste Storage and Access Amendments

February 2025

Background and Purpose

Solid waste storage space is vital for new developments, to allow enough space, accessibility, and capability for regular collection services in compliance with Seattle Municipal Code Title 21, and to support daily living and business activity in a dense city. The Land Use Code's solid waste requirements are critical to ensuring appropriate on-site solid waste collection and disposal that is safe, accessible, and efficient. These standards have not been substantially updated in at least 16 years. Section 23.54.040 does not fully reflect the space and functional needs required to serve increasingly dense housing and non-residential development as Seattle adds more jobs and more residents.

The proposal is meant to:

- 1) Clarify language and provide definitions to assist applicants in determining how to design plans for solid waste service, storage, staging, access, and collection.
- 2) Implement reasonable requirements for solid waste storage, staging, and collection to increase recycling and composting (per Seattle's required waste diversion ordinances, SMC 21.36.080);
- 3) Continue to provide flexibility in application of code requirements to identify the best fit for new development;
- 4) Support more efficient and timely permit reviews; and
- 5) Improve safety.

Proposal

The proposal updates the solid waste storage and access regulations in the Land Use Code, which are primarily addressed in Section 23.54.040. The updated provisions would apply to new development, including new structures and certain-sized building additions and changes-of-use renovation projects.

Seattle Public Utilities (SPU), Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI), and Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) would continue to review development permit applications according to these standards.

The proposal includes:

1. Add definitions and clarify terms

- Add a definition for “solid waste” to include compostable materials, garbage, and recyclable materials in Chapter 23.54, and other definitions for solid waste-related terms to Chapter 23.84A.
- Clarify container sharing capabilities between multiple uses in mixed-use developments for garbage services; this relates to the Solid Waste code and Seattle Solid Waste Collection Contracts.
- Clarify the applicability of solid waste requirements to the evolving range of housing types that will continue to be provided in future developments; this includes clarifying requirements for accessory dwelling units, unit lots, and live-work units.

2. Apply solid waste requirements to new uses in Neighborhood Residential (NR) zones, commercial-space additions 5,000 square feet or greater in size, and changes-of-use 10,000 square feet or greater in size.

The proposal would amend the Land Use Code’s solid waste requirements that would apply to new development in NR zones, certain additions to existing buildings, and renovations in existing building spaces that exceed 10,000 square feet where the type of building occupant would be a substantive change in land use from the prior use. The intent of the amendments to the solid waste requirements is to ensure that new development will provide sufficient space for solid waste storage as required by Solid Waste Code 21.36 and safe and efficient access for solid waste collection contractors. This is important as the city continues to evolve through redevelopment and expansion of existing buildings as well as new buildings in industrial districts like SODO and Ballard-Interbay Manufacturing and Industrial Center. Solid waste storage and service capabilities need to keep up with these trends to support a clean city

3. Allow and provide added flexibility for alternative arrangements to meet solid waste storage and access requirements.

For some sites, it may be difficult to meet code requirements, perhaps due to challenging slope, access, or other development site characteristics. A need for flexibility might also relate to development type, including but not limited to affordable housing, and small apartment units such as small efficiency dwelling units and congregate residences. Applicants would need to demonstrate that suitable collection and staging locations, meeting safety and efficiency standards, can be provided.

4. Update the minimum space requirements for solid waste storage for non-residential uses

The proposal makes the following updates:

- Define the minimum depth and width dimensions of shared storage spaces for non-residential development up to 15,000 square feet as 8x8 feet.

- Define the minimum depth and width dimensions of shared storage spaces for non-residential development greater than 15,000 square feet as 14x14 feet.

These proposed minimum dimensions would ensure that the spaces provided for solid waste storage are deep and wide enough to fit the expected kinds of solid waste containers and allow for functionality like the ability to maneuver the containers within, into, and out of the storage area.

5. Correct the minimum space requirements for solid waste storage for residential uses

The proposal makes the following updates:

- Increase the minimum depth of individual unit storage spaces from 2 feet to 2.5 feet depth.
- Increase the minimum depth and width dimensions of shared storage spaces for residential development up to 15 dwelling units from 7 feet to 8 feet.
- Increase the minimum depth and width dimensions of shared storage spaces for residential development of 16 dwelling units or more from 12 feet to 14 feet.

These proposed minimum dimensions would ensure that the spaces provided for solid waste storage are deep and wide enough to fit the standardized size of solid waste containers and allow for functionality like the ability to maneuver the containers within, into, and out of the storage area.

6. Define or increase minimum width and depth dimensions for:

- Access door width of 6 feet;
- A minimum dumpster transport pathway width of 6 feet;
- Increase collection vehicle access route and gates' minimum widths from 10 feet to 12 feet to accommodate the 10.1-foot width of collection vehicles.

7. Set new slope maximums in places where smaller dumpsters are staged and collected.

The proposal would clarify a maximum of 6% slope at staging locations and collection locations for dumpsters that are two cubic yards in volume or smaller, with uncompacted material. For larger dumpsters, the proposal clarifies a 2% slope requirement. These additions and clarity ensure safe and stable positioning of the containers for their collection service and reflects existing contractor practices and requirements to protect the public and collection drivers.

8. Update minimum clearance heights to overhead utilities

The proposal adds one additional overhead minimum clearance height of 16 feet, for solid waste services involving roll-off dumpsters of standard height. This joins other clearance heights already in the code requirements, of 14 feet, or 24 feet for front-loading dumpster service.

9. Facilitate more efficient reviews and provide clarity for applicants about standards by including additional detail on plans

Applicants would demonstrate the location and conditions of solid waste staging (the setting out of containers) and the collection location (if not shared with the staging location), in addition to the dimensions of containers being serviced. These additional details, already planned for by applicants, will ensure clarity of collection conditions, contributing meaningfully to safe, efficient, and affordable solid waste collection.

Analysis

Intent of Solid Waste Standards in Land Use Code

The overall intent of the City's solid waste standards in Section 23.54.040 of the Land Use Code is to help ensure sufficient accessibility and space for storage and collection of solid waste in new or renovated buildings, in support of Seattle's Zero Waste goal and State Department of Ecology-required Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan. Solid Waste service is an essential utility requiring regular service to remove site users' waste materials that accumulate through our daily living and business activities.

The proposal would help support solid waste regulatory intent and policy objectives by:

- Extending the solid waste requirements to NR zones where much new development of housing is expected going forward; and to larger non-residential building additions, live-work unit additions, and certain building improvements involving changes of use in spaces larger than 10,000 square feet. This would increase the parity among requirements in residential zones, and result in safe and efficient solid waste services for a wider variety of development or renovation improvement projects for non-residential uses.
- Providing flexibility for alternative arrangements that will best achieve disposal, collection, and accessibility.

Comparison of Existing and Recommended Solid Waste Code Standards

The existing Land Use Code on solid waste, last significantly updated in 2011, does not fully reflect SPU's current policy objectives or standard safety practices for solid waste collection. These include: fostering more effective gathering of residential solid waste; optimal sizing of waste storage spaces; and ensuring effective dimensions, slopes, and safe conditions at waste collection locations.

Seattle's Solid Waste Management Plan and its authorizing Council resolution directs Seattle to recycle or compost 70% of our waste by 2022. However, the City is not currently on-target to meet the goal. Furthermore, Seattle's solid waste code requires residents and businesses to separate recycling and composting from garbage.

The solid waste plan also highlights that as Seattle grows denser, ensuring sufficient space is becoming a challenge inside buildings and at collection points such as curbs and alleys. This Land Use Code proposal includes additional detail about minimum solid waste storage space

dimensions, access for collection trucks, slopes, and staging location sufficiency, so that containers can be safely and efficiently moved and placed for pick-up on collection days. SPU already reviews new development proposals according to these principles, and the proposed amendments more accurately provide the minimum requirements.

The proposal also newly specifies industry-norm overhead clearance minimums for solid waste trucks to service specific containers, as follows: stating 16' and 18' height minimums for trucks to service large, "roll-off" dumpsters, if such service is proposed by the applicant). These clearances would help ensure enough vertical space is available for collection trucks to safely drive into collection locations.

Regarding solid waste utility services, SPU is proposing these code amendments to facilitate more efficient and timely permit reviews, outcomes, and service arrangements that will best suit utility customers, solid waste collection contractors and provide for long-term effectiveness of the utility, consistent with its policies and practices.

Comprehensive Plan Goals and Policies

The proposal is consistent with the following relevant goals and policies in the *Seattle 2035* Comprehensive Plan and will also support continuing promotion of improved recycling and composting, and waste reduction objectives in the proposed One Seattle 2024 Comprehensive Plan.

Seattle 2035 Comprehensive Plan, Utilities Element – service delivery

Goal U G1

Provide safe, reliable, and affordable utility services that are consistent with the City's aims of environmental stewardship, race and social equity, economic opportunity, and the protection of public health.

The proposal would ensure that safe and reliable solid waste facilities are available in newly developed uses, by updating details about physical clearances, storage area sizing and accessibility. Providing more convenient collection methods for apartment and congregate residential uses in new buildings would improve equity in solid waste service provision, and improve the City's environmental stewardship by supporting recycling, composting, and waste reduction efforts.

Policy U1.5: Ensure that new private development provides adequate investments to maintain established utility service standards.

The proposal is consistent with this goal due to the new residential requirements, and by ensuring that new industrial development, and commercial buildings with substantial additions of space, provide adequate on-site solid waste storage. Without this provision, the frequency of collection service would need to increase, with related detrimental effects of trucks adding to traffic, greenhouse gas emissions, and more expensive solid waste bills for business owners.

Utilities Element – Utility resource management

Policy U2.5 Pursue the long-term goal of diverting most of the city’s solid waste away from landfills by increasing recycling, composting, and promoting products that are made to be reused, repaired, or recycled back into nature or the marketplace.

The proposal supports innovative approaches meant to boost the city’s performance in recycling and composting. It would ensure that future new development invests in accommodating the solid waste utility with facilities that support good solid waste collection, including composting and recycling practices by residents and businesses. This is important as the city continues to grow denser. Sufficient space and safe service arrangements are needed to ensure the continuation of an effective solid waste utility system.

One Seattle Comprehensive Plan (proposed)

The One Seattle Comprehensive Plan includes solid waste-related policies addressing accessibility for solid waste collection, solid waste reduction and promotion of recycling and composting. These are relevant to this solid waste code proposal.

Transportation policy themes related to solid waste:

Policy T2.8 To resolve potential conflicts in the right-of- way, employ the following tactics

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- *Meet critical access needs of establishments to ensure parcels, goods, services, passenger, and solid waste services can be done safely and efficiently.*

Policy T2.16 If a building does not have off-street loading access, whether on-property or via an alley, it should have its critical access needs provided for at the curb, achieved by maintaining curb space for commerce, solid waste pick-up, building maintenance, and accessible pick up/drop off.

Waste reduction policy themes:

Policy CE 6.1 Reduce the amount of waste generated by the residents, businesses, and other public and private organizations in the city.

Policy CE 6.2 Increase the amount of recoverable waste that is diverted from garbage to recycling and composting.

Public Outreach and Notice

SPU and SDCI conducted stakeholder outreach in approximately seven meetings, beginning in 2018 and through 2024, which addressed how the recommended changes may affect building design and solid waste utility services. Stakeholders included architects, developers, multifamily building managers, low-income housing providers, and other members of the public that took an interest in solid waste operations. More recently, SPU discussed proposed code updates at the Master Builders Association of King County/Seattle, and twice at the city-convened Homebuilders Working Group. In addition, comments on a recent draft ordinance were solicited directly from the development community and a draft ordinance was posted on SPU’s Website

for 6 weeks. Comments were considered and incorporated where possible. The SEPA environmental review for the proposal included additional opportunities for public comment.

SPU and SDCI will notify stakeholders when the proposal goes before Council, and will be available to answer stakeholder questions as necessary. Additional opportunities to provide input will occur as the City Council deliberates on the proposal.

Recommendation

The Directors of SPU and SDCI recommend that the City Council adopt the proposed ordinance to update solid waste storage and access requirements in the Land Use Code.