

Preliminary Review

INFORMATION BULLETIN

513

May 2025

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What is Preliminary Review?

Preliminary Review is a voluntary service offered before formal submittal to the City for required permits and reviews. It is limited and has a fixed number of hours to answer your questions. This service is designed to help you determine project feasibility by obtaining responses to project-specific questions and documenting staff responses.

Preliminary Review is not a comprehensive plan review. It is not intended to replace services provided by design professionals (architects, engineers, land use attorneys, code consultants, etc.). It is designed to answer specific project questions only.

Before considering the preliminary review service, you should begin your project planning by obtaining information regarding zoning and overlays for your property. Zoning information is available via the [Zoning and Parcel Information Portal \(ZAPP\)](#). ZAPP will help you determine the City of San Diego's planning, zoning and building regulations that apply to your project. Additional information is referenced in the [Land Development Manual, Project Submittal Requirements, Section 1 \(Guide to Project Submittal Process\)](#). By evaluating this information **BEFORE** designing your project, you can avoid mistakes, save time, and reduce processing costs.

For information regarding the Land Development Code and Zones, visit the Development Services Department [Codes & Regulations](#) webpage or The San Diego Geographic Information Source ([SanGIS](#)). If you have additional questions regarding the Preliminary Review process, you can schedule a [virtual appointment](#) with a planner.

Preliminary Review Options

There are four Preliminary Review options:

- 1. Single Discipline Preliminary Review**

When your questions are best answered by only one review discipline, you should request a single-discipline preliminary review. For example, steep hillside issues would be addressed by Planning Review; means of egress by Structural; grading questions by Engineering Review, etc. The Preliminary Review questionnaire and all documents will be routed to the discipline you select during the application process, so it's important to make the right selection. Up to ten questions are allowed. When formulating your questions, keep in mind that Preliminary Review is a limited service, is not a plan check, and staff has a fixed number of hours to answer your questions.

Your project will be assigned to a reviewer who will prepare a written response to your questions approximately 20 business days after the date of submittal and payment of the invoice. Use this service for historical determinations. For more complex projects, additional charges and extended review times will be applied. The discipline supervisor will contact the applicant to inform them of additional fees and extended turnaround times for complex projects.
- 2. Multiple Discipline Preliminary Review**

When your questions involve more than one review discipline, the application is considered a multiple-discipline preliminary review where coordination of the review between disciplines is necessary. A Development Project Manager (DPM) is assigned to all multiple-discipline preliminary reviews. Up to ten questions are allowed. When formulating your questions, keep in mind that Preliminary Review is a limited service, is not a plan check, and staff has a fixed number of hours to answer your questions.

Based on the information provided and specific questions asked, the DPM selects the staff team to answer your Preliminary Review questions. The DPM coordinates the reviewers' comments and provides a response approximately 20 business days after the date of submittal and payment of the invoice. For more complex projects, additional charges and extended review times will be applied. The DPM will contact the applicant to inform them of additional fees and extended turnaround times for complex projects.

Please note that all communication on a Multiple Discipline Preliminary Review **MUST** go through your DPM, regardless of reviewer consent. Conversations that do not include your DPM cannot be considered part of the official City response.
- 3. Senate Bill (SB) 330 Preliminary Review**

Effective as of Jan. 1, 2020, and expiring on Jan. 1, 2034, [California Senate Bill \(SB\) 330](#), otherwise referred to as "The Housing Crisis Act of 2019," allows for eligible housing development projects (as defined below) seeking approval enhanced streamlining and vesting opportunities, such that the project is only subject to the ordinances, development regulations, policies, standards, and fees at the time the Preliminary Review application is deemed submitted. Fee increases resulting from an automatic annual adjustment based on an independently published cost index referenced in the ordinance establishing the fee will be applied at final inspection.

A housing development project, as defined per SB 330, includes any of the following:

- Residential units only (two or more units);
- Mixed-use developments consisting of residential and nonresidential uses with at least two-thirds of the square footage designated for residential use; or
- Transitional or supportive housing.

To utilize the development regulations, policies, standards, and fees at the time the application is deemed submitted, the application must be "deemed complete" – meaning, the application must provide all criteria specified per [California Government Code Section 65941.1](#) (see [Section 8 of Form DS-375](#) ), and the Preliminary Review application fee is paid.

There are limited instances when a housing development project is subject to ordinances in effect after the preliminary application is submitted, as outlined per California Government Code Section [65589.5\(o\)](#).

To utilize the regulations that were vested as part of this Preliminary Review application, the applicant has six months (180 days) to respond to City comments and submit a complete application for a development or construction permit.

- 4. Complete Communities Now Focused Preliminary Review**

Projects participating in the Complete Communities Housing Solutions (CCHS) program must obtain a focused preliminary review. See the [CCHS Now webpage](#) for more information. CCHS Now reviews are not discussed further in this Information Bulletin.
- 5. Preliminary Fee and Exaction Estimate**

Pursuant to [Assembly Bill 1820 \(2024\)](#), an applicant may request a preliminary fee and exaction estimate for information about expected project fees and exactions. To obtain such an estimate, applicants must include the request as a question in a Multiple Discipline Preliminary Review and select the following reviewers:

 - Planning Facilities-Financing (for development impact fees);
 - DSD-Planning Review (or DSD-Downtown, if the project is located within the Downtown area) (for any applicable inclusionary housing fees); and
 - DSD-Combined (for water and sewer impact fees).

The application must include all of the information specified in [California Gov. Code Section 65941.1\(a\)](#) (see [Section 8 of Form-375](#) .

Per California Government Code Section 65941.1(b)(5), a preliminary fee and exaction estimate shall be for informational purposes only and shall not be legally binding or otherwise affect the scope, amount, or time of payment of any fee or exaction that is determined by other provisions of law.

More information about project fees can be found in the following resources:

- [Impact Fees Webpage](#) (includes links to the Citywide Development Impact Fee (DIF) Calculator and the Fee Schedule)
- [Water and Sewer Fee Schedule](#) 
- [Information Bulletin 146](#)  – School Fees
- [Information Bulletin 532](#) – Requirements for Inclusionary Affordable Housing
- [Information Bulletin 501](#) – Fee Schedule for Construction Permits-Structures
- [Information Bulletin 502](#) – Grading/Public Right-of-Way Permits and Mapping Actions
- [Information Bulletin 503](#) – Fee/Deposit Schedules for Development & Policy Approvals/Permits
- [Information Bulletin 103](#) – Fee Schedule for Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing/Gas Permits

What Do I Need to Submit for Preliminary Review?

All forms, documents and applications are now submitted electronically. Visit the [Online Permitting Portal](#) to create an account and begin the submittal process. A detailed [user guide](#)  is also available. For a Preliminary Review Submittal, please provide the following:

- Completed Preliminary Review Questionnaire** ([Form DS-375](#) )
Please list each question separately and make them as specific as possible, keeping in mind that preliminary reviews are not a full plan check. For multiple discipline reviews, please indicate which review discipline you want to answer each question. You may select up to ten.
- Documents**
Submit documents that you believe will help staff to understand your proposed development and the current condition of your property. The completeness and depth of our response to your specific questions will depend mainly on the amount and detail of the information that you provide to us. You should carefully consider the information you are seeking and adjust the documents and level of detail provided accordingly (e.g., for exiting questions, provide a fully dimensioned and detailed exiting analysis).

Guidelines for Preliminary Review Applications

- 1. Ask specific questions**

Open-ended/vague questions or questions designed to gather a lot of information at once (such as, "Will this project work?" or "Does this project comply with the zone?") cannot be answered during a preliminary review. Staff will attempt to clarify questions prior to review when possible, but it is the applicant's responsibility to be precise; staff may not answer (or may not provide a precise answer to) vague questions. This does not qualify you for a refund.
- 2. No Multiples**

Only ten questions are allowed. Questions with multiple parts, questions that are asked in list form, and questions that otherwise attempt to bypass this limit will have each separate part treated as a separate question. Depending on staff workload, applications asking more than ten questions may be returned to you for clarification or may have only the first ten questions answered. The latter does not qualify you for a refund.
- 3. Not a substitute for code knowledge or due diligence**

Applicants are responsible for knowing City regulations. A Preliminary Review can only supplement this knowledge, it cannot provide all the information required for an applicant to design a project.
- 4. Single Discipline Preliminary Reviews – Make sure you select the correct reviewer**

Single Discipline Preliminary Reviews are routed to reviewing disciplines based on your selections during the application process; they are not screened by a person. If you route to the wrong discipline or ask questions not relevant to the discipline you have selected, some or all of your questions may not be answered. This does not qualify you for a refund.
- 5. Multiple Discipline Preliminary Reviews – Who do you want to answer?**

For each question, please state which reviewing discipline you want to answer.

Preliminary Review Procedure

- 1. How Many Questions Can I Ask?**

Preliminary Reviews may only ask ten questions, which must be asked with your application. Additional questions may not be asked during the review, even if you did not initially ask ten questions. Questions should be as specific as possible, understanding that preliminary reviews are not a full plan check. For multiple discipline Preliminary Reviews, please indicate which review discipline you want to answer each question.
- 2. What Type of Preliminary Review Should I Apply For?**

A. If you have questions for only one review discipline, submit a Single Discipline Preliminary Review with a maximum of ten questions. If you submit more than one single discipline review for the same project, please note that reviewers cannot coordinate.

B. If you have questions that require coordination between multiple review disciplines, submit a Multiple Discipline Preliminary Review with a maximum of ten questions.
- 3. When Do I Get My Comments, and What Happens Next?**

You will be provided comments within 20 calendar days by your reviewer (single discipline) or your project manager (multiple discipline).

A. Single Discipline Reviews

Once your comments are sent to you, you have 30 calendar days to respond with any questions. *Applicants who do not respond within 30 days will have their projects automatically finalized and closed.* Closed preliminary reviews cannot be reopened.

 - If you accept comments as given, you do not need to do anything else.
 - If you do not believe that staff has adequately answered your submitted questions, work with the reviewer to clarify and update comments. After that, they will finalize your comments and close the review. Staff reserves the right to finalize comments if further clarification is not possible.
 - You may not ask additional questions during this period; you may only clarify responses to existing questions.
 - Preliminary Reviews do not allow resubmittals, scope changes, or redesigns. This is true even if staff comments say that a "submittal" or "resubmittal" is needed. Therefore, applicants should clarify with staff what their comments mean as necessary.

B. Multiple Discipline Reviews

Once your DPM sends you draft comments, you have 30 calendar days to respond with any questions. *Applicants who do not respond within 30 days will have their preliminary reviews automatically finalized and closed, and a response letter will be sent.* Closed preliminary reviews cannot be reopened.

 - If you accept staff's comments as given, let the DPM know they can finalize your comments and close the review.
 - If you do not believe that staff has adequately answered your submitted questions, work with the DPM to clarify and update comments. After that, they will finalize your comments and close the review. Staff reserves the right to finalize comments if further clarification is not possible.
 - You may not ask additional questions during this period; you may only clarify responses to existing questions.
 - Preliminary Reviews do not allow resubmittals, scope changes, or redesigns. This is true even if staff comments say that a "submittal" or "resubmittal" is needed. Therefore, applicants should clarify with staff what their comments mean as necessary.

4. Can I Meet with Staff?

Yes. The Preliminary Review fee does not include meetings, but you may request one from the reviewer (single discipline) or the project manager (multiple discipline) to discuss/clarify the results of the preliminary review. Each preliminary review is allowed one meeting. An additional fee is required based upon an hourly rate for each staff person requested to attend. The fee must be paid prior to the meeting with a minimum increment of 30 minutes of each reviewer's time. Multiple Discipline Preliminary Reviews must have all requested staff members in the same meeting. Meetings will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams. You may not ask additional questions during this meeting; you may only clarify responses to existing questions.

5. Formal Response

After staff provides their initial response, a meeting takes place if requested, and clarification is provided if necessary:

A. Single Discipline Reviews

Staff's response is final and no further information will be provided. The project will be closed.

B. Multiple Discipline Reviews

Your DPM will provide you with a Preliminary Review letter and close the project.

6. Can I Ask Additional Questions/or Reopen My Review After I Receive a Response?

No. All the questions you intend to ask must be submitted when you first apply. Even if you do not originally ask ten questions, you may not ask more questions later. Staff's response is final, and the review may not be altered. Resubmitting a redesigned project and/or asking additional questions will require a new Preliminary Review or a project submittal.

7. Good for One Year:

The information provided during the Preliminary Review expires one year from the deemed complete date. The information may expire earlier if:

A. The Municipal Code or any other local, state, or federal code on which Preliminary Review responses are based is changed.

B. City Council enacts emergency legislation; or

C. There is a change in the project scope, regardless of cause.
- ## Fees
- Most Development Services fees change at least once annually; please make sure you have the most recent copy of this Information Bulletin. If the effective date of this Bulletin is prior to the current fiscal year, the fees below may not be correct.
- The following fees are required at the time of Project Submittal:
- Single Discipline Preliminary Review (*Flat Fee / Mapping Fee*)**

This fee includes up to four hours of staff time for the initial review of your project. Meetings with staff and additional staff review time exceeding four hours per discipline will be billed an additional hourly fee.

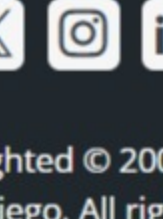
Single Discipline Review Flat Fee	\$1,481.33
Mapping Fee This fee is charged when plans, drawings, maps or other geographical documents are utilized for project review.	\$11.34
DSD Staff Time, Hourly	\$164.87, with a minimum half-hour charge

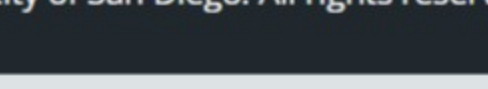
• Multiple Discipline Preliminary Review (*Flat Fee / Mapping Fee*)

This fee includes up to four hours of staff time per discipline for the initial review of your project only. Meetings with staff, additional staff review time exceeding four hours per discipline, and follow-up questions will be billed an additional hourly fee.

Multiple Discipline Review Flat Fee	\$12,106.28								
Mapping Fee This fee is charged when plans, drawings, maps or other geographical documents are utilized for project review.	\$11.34								
DSD Staff Time, Hourly	\$164.87, with a minimum half-hour charge								
Planning Department Review Fees Preliminary Review fees do not include the Planning Department. If a review from the City Planning Department disciplines is requested, these hourly fees will be added to the project.	<table><tr><td>Public Spaces Planning:</td><td>\$196.75</td></tr><tr><td>Community Planning:</td><td>\$198.16</td></tr><tr><td>Heritage Preservation Planning:</td><td>\$177.66</td></tr><tr><td>Biodiverse SD Planning:</td><td>\$201.66</td></tr></table>	Public Spaces Planning:	\$196.75	Community Planning:	\$198.16	Heritage Preservation Planning:	\$177.66	Biodiverse SD Planning:	\$201.66
Public Spaces Planning:	\$196.75								
Community Planning:	\$198.16								
Heritage Preservation Planning:	\$177.66								
Biodiverse SD Planning:	\$201.66								
- ## Previous Versions of this Information Bulletin
- This section contains previous versions of this Information Bulletin by the last day they were effective.
- [2025-05-02 | IB-513](#) 
 - [2025-02-10 | IB-513](#) 
 - [2024-12-31 | IB-513](#) 
 - [2024-10-25 | IB-513](#) 
 - [2024-06-30 | IB-513](#) 
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Councilmember Henry Foster III (District 4)

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City Attorney Heather Ferbert

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Office of the City Auditor

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Office of the Independent Budget Analyst

Personnel Department

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