



Critical Area Alteration Exception: Instructions and Information

General Information

The following is a summary of the Critical Area Alteration Exception (CAAE) process and a description of the application submittal requirements. The information for a Critical Area Alteration Exception application is necessary in order to evaluate the merits of a proposal with applicable county and state regulations and to assess the potential community environmental impacts.

An application will be evaluated on the basis of the information provided by the applicant, the King County Comprehensive Plan, pertinent provisions of the King County Code (KCC), site inspection, and comments submitted by citizens and interested public agencies. If the subject property is located within an identified landslide, erosion, steep slope, seismic, avalanche or coal mine hazard, wetland, aquatic area wildlife habitat conservation area, wildlife habitat network and/or critical aquifer recharge area, the applicant may be required to submit a special study produced by a qualified professional to address the identified critical area features on the subject property.

Copies of the KCC and Comprehensive Plan are available for inspection at the Department of Local Services Permit Service Center and at the main branch of the Seattle Public Library. KCC and other development regulations are also available on the Internet via the King County Web site at www.kingcounty.gov.

Questions related to Critical Area Alteration Exceptions may be answered by calling or contacting:
Department of Local Services, Permitting Division
919 Southwest Grady Way, Suite 300
Renton, WA 98057 Telephone: 206-296-6600 TTY Relay: 711

Pre-Application Conference

A pre-application conference with Permitting staff is required prior to filing a CAAE application. Pre-application request forms and instructions for filing a pre-application conference request are available at the Permitting Services Center, from the Permitting Web site at www.kingcounty.gov/permits, or by calling 206-296-6600. A filing fee is required at the time a request is made with the amount to be determined at the time of filing and based on the latest adopted fee ordinance. Permitting staff will schedule the pre-application conference within thirty (30) days from the date of the request.

Filing an Application

A Critical Area Alteration Exception application must be submitted electronically. Email the completed submittal package to PermitCenter.DPER@kingcounty.gov. Guidance can be found in the [Customer Service Bulletin](#). The minimum submittal requirements necessary to file the application are described below.

Permitting staff has twenty-eight (28) days from the date of filing to determine whether the application is complete. An application that fails to meet the submittal requirements described herein will be deemed incomplete.

Notice of Application

Public Comment Period: After the Permitting staff determines that the application is complete, a Notice of Application is issued as specified below. The minimum public comment period is 21-days, although public comments may be submitted and considered until the time of the decision.

1. Permitting staff sends out a notice of the application to property owners within a 500-foot radius of the subject property.

If the area is rural or lightly populated, the notice must be mailed to at least 20 different property owners; or, in other appropriate cases, the division may determine it is necessary to notify additional property owners.
2. A notice of the application will be published by Permitting staff in the official county newspaper and another newspaper of general circulation.
3. The applicant is required to install a notice board that must be placed in a conspicuous place on the property throughout the permit process so that it is visible to people passing by the property. Additional notice boards may be required as determined by Permitting staff.

The cost of the board is the applicant's responsibility. Permitting staff will send the applicant written instructions regarding the specific requirements for the notice board.
4. Notice of the application is also provided to anyone who writes to the division requesting information regarding the Critical Area Alteration Exception request.

Method for Processing

The Director of Permitting has appointed a staff representative to make final decisions regarding Critical Area Alteration Exceptions. This process generally takes 120 days provided no appeals are filed or substantial additional information is required. Upon conclusion of review of the application materials, the representative issues a written decision based on the written record. A copy of the decision is mailed to all parties who have written to the department. There is an appeal period, as identified in the written decision, whereby an aggrieved person can file an appeal together with an appeal filing fee to the King County Hearing Examiner.

In those cases where a proposed action for a Critical Area Alteration Exception also requires county permits, the following procedures shall apply:

1. When other permits require a public hearing before the Hearing Examiner, the review of the Critical Area Alteration Exception shall be combined with the other permit(s), and the Examiner shall act on behalf of the Permitting Director for the purpose of the Critical Area Alteration Exception decision.
2. When other permits are administratively approved, review of the application may be combined with other permits dependent on the granting of a Critical Area Alteration Exception. If not combined, other permits may proceed prior to review and approval of such Critical Area Alteration Exception.
3. In those cases where the Hearing Examiner is presiding, the Examiner will also act as the decision-maker and rule on the Critical Area Alteration Exception.
4. In all cases of combined review, the most informative provisions for notification and processing shall govern the review of Critical Area Alteration Exception requests.
5. No permit shall be approved without prior review and approval of any required Critical Area Alteration Exception.

Criteria for Critical Area Alteration Exception Approval

KCC 21A.24.070: Alteration exception. The director may approve alterations to critical areas, critical area buffers and critical area setbacks not otherwise allowed by this chapter as follows:

1. Except as otherwise provided in subsection A.2. of this section, for **linear alterations**, the director may approve alterations to critical areas, critical area buffers and critical area setbacks only when all of the following criteria are met:
 - a. there is no feasible alternative to the development proposal with less adverse impact on the critical area;
 - b. the proposal minimizes the adverse impact on critical areas to the maximum extent practical;
 - c. The approval does not require the modification of a critical area development standard established by KCC 21A.24;
 - d. The development proposal does not pose an unreasonable threat to the public health, safety or welfare on or off the development proposal site and is consistent with the general purposes of KCC 21A.24 and the public interest;
 - e. The linear alteration:
 1. connects to or is an alteration to a public roadway, regional light rail transit line, public trail, a utility corridor or utility facility or other public infrastructure owned or operated by a public utility; or
 2. is required to overcome limitations due to gravity.
2. In order to accommodate the siting of a regional light rail transit facility under RCW 36.70A.200, the director may approve alterations to critical areas, critical area buffers and critical area setbacks not otherwise allowed by this chapter and may impose reasonable conditions to minimize the impact of the light rail transit facility on the critical area and its buffer; and
3. For **nonlinear alterations** the director may approve alterations to critical areas except wetlands, unless otherwise allowed under KCC 21A.24.070.A.3.h of this section, aquatic areas and wildlife habitat conservation areas, and alterations to critical area buffers and critical area setbacks, when all of the following criteria are met:
 - a. There is no feasible alternative to the development proposal with less adverse impact on the critical area;
 - b. The alteration is the minimum necessary to accommodate the development proposal;
 - c. The approval does not require the modification of a critical area development standard established by this chapter, except as set forth in subsection A.2.i. of this section;
 - d. The development proposal does not pose an unreasonable threat to the public health, safety or welfare on or off the development proposal site and is consistent with the general purposes of this chapter and the public interest;
 - e. For dwelling units, no more than five thousand square feet or ten percent of the site, whichever is greater, may be disturbed by structures, building setbacks or other land alteration, including grading, utility installations and landscaping, but not including the area used for a driveway or for an onsite sewage disposal system;
 - f. To the maximum extent possible, access is located to have the least adverse impact on the critical area and the critical area buffer;

- g. The critical area is not used as a salmonid spawning area; and
- h. The director may approve an alteration in a category II, III and IV wetland for development of a public school facility; and
- i. The director may approve an alteration to the elevation or dry flood proofing standards in KCC 21A.24.240.F.1 or 21A.24.240.F.2 for nonresidential agricultural accessory buildings that equal or exceed a maximum assessed value of sixth-five thousand dollars if the development proposal meets the criteria in subsection A.2 of this section and the standards in KCC 21A.24.240.F.2 through 21A.24.240.G..

Submittal Requirements for Filing a Critical Area Alteration Exception Application

Unless otherwise noted, the following items are required to be submitted at the time of application. Permitting forms referenced below are online at www.kingcounty.gov/permits or call 206-296-6600.

1. Application for Land Use Permit
2. Legal Description: The legal description of the property may be obtained from the King County Department of Assessments. **Be absolutely sure the description is correct and agrees with the property outlined on the Assessor's map.** A current legal description is necessary before the application is acceptable. If the legal description is written from a survey map, the map should accompany the description.
3. Assessor's Parcel Numbers: Submit a list of the Assessor's parcel numbers for all parcels that are included in the request for a Critical Areas Alteration Exception.
4. Application for Critical Area Alteration Exception
5. Site Plan – drawn to a standard engineer scale: Submit on 24" x 36" or 11" x 17" page size.
 - a. Map scale and north arrow
 - b. Vicinity map: show sufficient area and detail to clearly locate the project in relation to surrounding roads, parks, rivers, and municipal boundaries, together with its scale
 - c. Property boundaries dimensioned and clearly and accurately delineated by a heavy line or color
 - d. Locate, name and dimension all existing and proposed streets and other public ways, easements, utility and railroad rights-of-way within and adjacent to the proposed development
 - e. Existing and proposed topography on separate drawings showing at least 5-foot contours to be extending at least 100 feet beyond project boundaries
 - f. Location of any major physical features such as railroads, lakes and rivers, including those within 500 feet of the subject property
 - g. Locate all critical areas and associated buffers on plans. A critical area includes erosion hazards, landslide hazards, steep slope hazards, avalanche, floodplain, wetland, aquatic area, wildlife habitat conservation area, wildlife habitat network and/or critical aquifer recharge area. Indicate if streams are intermittent: 100-year floodplain for rivers, 100-year floodplain for streams, and delineate top and toe of 40% slopes. See KCC 21A.24 for Critical Area Standards and Development Limitations.
 - h. Accurate dimensions, location, and use of all existing and proposed structures on the subject property indicating porches, eaves, fences and signs. Identify any structures to remain or to be removed; identify existing wells and/or septic tank and drain fields

- i. General size, location, and uses of all existing structures within 100-feet of boundaries of the subject property
 - j. Show elevations and/or sections of all existing and proposed buildings depicting general character of the structures, relationship between floors, entrances, building height, and grades
 - k. If any new streets are proposed (public or private), show street construction section or reference to suitable King County Department of Transportation standards (reference "King County Road Standards").
 - l. Location, dimensions, and design of off-street parking facilities showing points of ingress and egress (see KCC 21A.18 and King County Road Standards)
 - m. Boundaries of proposed common open space land, if any; indicate proposed use.
 - n. Proposed public dedications, e.g., school sites, parks, etc. if any, within the site
 - o. Easements, deed restrictions, or other encumbrances restricting the use of the property
6. Reduced Site Plan: Submit a copy of a reduced site plan on an 8-1/2" X 11" page size.

7. Water Availability Certificate:

Final approval of a new private well, or for connection with an existing private well from the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health, **or**

The King County Certificate of Water Availability form concerning water availability to the site must be given to the appropriate existing water purveyor to complete (water district, city, water association) and returned with this application. At the top of the form, a space is provided for a description of the site. In this space, the legal description of the site should be inserted or attached on a separate sheet if it is too lengthy.

Note: For sites located in the Urban Growth Area, if the development is not proposing to be served by an existing or new Group A water system at the time of construction, a Certificate of Future Connection must be given to the appropriate Group A water purveyor to complete and then returned with this form.

8. Sewer Availability Certificate:

Preliminary approval for individual or community on-site sewage disposal systems from the Seattle- King County Department of Public Health must be submitted with this application; **or**

The King County Certificate of Sewer Availability form concerning sewer availability to the site must be given to the appropriate agency to complete (sewer district) and then returned with this application. At the top of the form a space is provided for a description of the site. In this space, the legal description of the site should be inserted or attached on a separate sheet if it is too lengthy.

9. Interim Certificate of Future Water/Sewer Connection:

If the site is located in the Urban Growth Area, and an interim on-site sewage system is proposed, consistent with the provisions of KCC 13.24.136, the following information is also required:

- A. The Certificate of Availability form must be submitted to the most logical sewer purveyor to complete (sewer district) and returned with this application along with a letter which demonstrates to the satisfaction of the Director of Permitting that the requirement to receive sewer service from the purveyor is unreasonable or unfeasible at the time of the construction; and
- B. A Certificate of Future Connection must be given to the appropriate agency to complete and then returned with this application.

10. Environmental Checklist: (only if required by KCC 20.44)
Please refer to instructions on the Environmental Checklist form. The applicant will be contacted by Permitting staff if additional information or clarity is required. Failure to respond may cause postponement of consideration of the request. If another agency is the SEPA lead agency for this project, also submit the threshold determination. If an EIS has been prepared for this proposal, submit with this application.
11. Proof of Legal Lot Status: Documentation of the date and method of segregation of the subject property.
12. Certificate/Affidavit of Critical Areas Compliance
13. Applicant Status Form
14. Any variance decisions required per KCC 21A.
15. List of other issued or pending permits or decisions related to the proposal.
16. Permit Review Fees.
17. Applicable Critical Areas Reports: Based on the critical areas encumbering the proposed project, submit technical reports addressing these areas in accordance with KCC 21A.24. These may include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Wetland/Stream Report
 - b. Wildlife Study
 - c. Impact and Mitigation Report
 - d. Geotechnical Evaluation
 - e. Arborist Report
18. Other Documents: (Optional at time of application submittal – Permitting staff may request or require submittal after application has been filed):
 - a. Special studies or reports (e.g., traffic studies, drainage reports).
 - b. Photographs, charts, petitions, letters, models, etc., may be submitted at the discretion of the applicant. Submittals should fit within an 8-1/2" x 14" legal-sized file folder.