

City of Sebastopol

Planning Department
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What You Need to Know About Deposit Accounts

Under the regulations established by the Sebastopol City Council, some development permit charges for Planning, Engineering and Public Works are paid by the applicant in the form of a minimum “deposit” rather than a flat fee. The reason that the City uses deposits is to accurately recover the City’s costs for complex or large projects so that, to the extent possible, the general taxpayers of the City are not subsidizing direct services provided to project applicants.

The fees and deposits charged by the City are for processing applications regardless of outcome. *There are not refunds of costs if your project is not approved.*

Deposits are paid for a number of major permit types, including Subdivisions, Annexations, Environmental Review, General Plan and Zoning Ordinance amendments, Use Permits, Variances, various types of Design Review applications, and other projects, as well as some types of Public Works and Engineering plan checks and field checks. Most other Planning permits, supplies costs for processing applications, and mailing list preparation charges for Planning applications are paid via a flat fee.

In those cases where the minimum deposit is exceeded, the applicant will be billed on a monthly basis by the City Finance Department for excess processing costs. Each bill will include a list of charges.

Deposit Account charges may include City staff time to review and process permits, such as clerical and professional staff, as well as the City’s consulting City Engineer, City Traffic Engineer, and City Arborist. Staff time will include applicant meetings with staff, including meetings leading up to an application, time to analyze the completeness of applications, time spent analyzing the project for conforming to applicable laws, regulations and policies, staff report preparation time, time spent staffing public hearings for the project, time devoted to preparing project approval letters, and field inspection time. In addition, other costs, including, but not limited to, publication of legal notices, document copying charges and mileage to attend off-site meetings will also be charged, if incurred.

Processing costs associated with most applications will usually not exceed the minimum deposit amounts. However, complex projects, projects requiring multiple reviews, large projects, most subdivisions, and projects requiring environmental review will generally have processing costs which exceed the minimum deposits.

In addition to monthly billing for charges in excess of the initial deposit amount, a final billing will be conducted prior to issuance of applicable permits or approvals. Where an outstanding amount has not been paid, permit approval will be conditioned upon payment. Likewise, payment of outstanding charges is required prior to issuance of a Building Permit, Certificate of Occupancy, or

acceptance of improvements, as applicable. If the deposit amount has not been exceeded, the applicant will receive a refund of the unexpended balance.

Charges for permit processing can be minimized by applicants in the following ways:

- **Provide a complete application.** Include all information requested by the permit application form. Include all supplemental materials listed on the application form. Provide fully-dimensioned plans, which show the site prior to the improvements, as well as with the improvements. Submit the plans as specified in the application forms. Provide a written narrative explaining the nature and intent of the application, as well as justification for any exceptions from normal standards or normal application requirements. Before filing an application, check with City staff to determine if it is necessary to provide any special additional information.
- **For Engineering Review, make sure all submittals are complete.** Do not submit unfinished, or “progress” plans for plan check. Make sure that submittals include all required supplemental materials (calculations, deeds, titles, etc) and address all of the applicable conditions of approval for the project. Checklists for Engineering Review are available from Public Works staff. *When submitting for second or subsequent plan check, be sure all comments from prior check prints are addressed.*
- **Provide the number of copies of plans and documents necessary for City processing.** If inadequate numbers of copies are provided, the City will charge the applicant for copying costs.
- **Meet code requirements.** Exceptions to code requirements will require additional processing time; and, in addition, may not be granted. Provide a table or narrative listing how the project conforms or does not conform to key code requirements.
- **Understand the process in which you are engaged.** Read the applicable code sections. Discuss the process and policy issues raised by the project with City staff. Communicate with neighbors of the project to understand and possibly address any concerns they may have about the project. Respond to direction from City boards and address issues that have arisen in the review process.