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**NAVIGATING ENTITLEMENT
PROCESSES IN THE
PACIFIC NORTHWEST**

Robin Murphy

Owner & Senior Principal
Jackson | Main Architecture

**STANDARDS OF SUCCESS
I'VE LEARNED WORKING
FOR THE TECH GIANTS**

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NAVIGATING ENTITLEMENT PROCESSES IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST:

Insights from a Seattle Architect's Perspective

Welcome to the breathtaking Pacific Northwest, where lush landscapes, thriving urban centers, and a vibrant culture converge. As an architect, understanding the intricacies of the entitlement processes in the region is vital when dealing with residential, commercial, and industrial projects. This article will delve into the key aspects architects and developers need to know to successfully navigate the entitlement processes, ensuring a smooth and efficient project development experience.

For those unfamiliar with entitlements, they refer to the legal rights and permissions granted by local government authorities to develop a property or undertake a specific project. These permissions include requested zoning deviations, land use approvals (CUP SUP, MUP, SEPA, Design

Review), building permits, and more. Entitlement processes involve working closely with government agencies and regulatory bodies to obtain the necessary approvals and permissions to proceed with a project.

ARCHITECTS PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THE ENTITLEMENT PROCESSES FOR VARIOUS REASONS:

A) EXPERTISE IN DESIGN AND PLANNING:

Architects possess a deep understanding of design principles, spatial organization, and project planning. They translate clients' visions into tangible designs that comply with local regulations and zoning requirements. Their expertise helps ensure that proposed projects align with the objectives of the entitlement process. It is frequently the case that negotiations and compromises need to be made in order to satisfy all of the regulatory departments. Negotiating this process is a soft skill that should not be undervalued.

B) KNOWLEDGE OF BUILDING CODES AND REGULATIONS:

Design professionals are tasked with the responsibility of interpreting life safety codes. They are also responsible for local zoning ordinances, and other regulatory requirements. They have the technical expertise to ensure that projects meet all necessary standards, such as fire safety, structural integrity, accessibility, exiting, separations, and energy efficiency. Compliance with these regulations is instrumental in obtaining entitlement approvals.

C) COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION:

Architects serve as a bridge between various stakeholders involved in the entitlement process. They effectively communicate project details, design intent, and compliance measures to government officials, community members, planning boards, and other relevant parties. Architects facilitate coordination and collaboration to address concerns and gather support, increasing the likelihood of a successful entitlement process.

D) DESIGNING WITH CONTEXT AND COMMUNITY IN MIND:

Architects need to consider the unique context and characteristics of the region when designing projects. They take into account environmental

sustainability, community needs, and cultural values. By incorporating these elements, architects demonstrate how their projects positively contribute to the local community, which is crucial for gaining support during the entitlement process.

E) PROBLEM-SOLVING AND ADAPTABILITY:

Entitlement processes can be complex, with potential challenges and evolving regulations. Architects excel at problem-solving and adapting designs to meet changing requirements. They anticipate and address concerns related to traffic, environmental impact, infrastructure, and public input. Architects' ability to navigate these challenges ensures a smoother

“It's imperative to engage with the local planning departments, review comprehensive plans, and become familiar with zoning ordinances to ensure compliance from the outset”

entitlement process. Each jurisdiction within the Pacific Northwest has its own set of regulations governing land use, zoning, and building codes. It's imperative to engage with the local planning departments, review comprehensive plans, and become familiar with zoning ordinances to ensure compliance from the outset. Understanding the nuances of each jurisdiction will help you effectively navigate the entitlement process.

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COLLABORATE WITH STAKEHOLDERS:

Engaging stakeholders early on is crucial for a successful entitlement process. Establish relationships with local community organizations, neighborhood associations, and relevant interest groups. By involving them in the early stages of your project, you can address concerns, gather valuable feedback, and foster community support, ultimately enhancing the likelihood of a smooth entitlement process.

CONDUCT A FEASIBILITY (YIELD) STUDY:

Before proceeding with a project, undertake a thorough feasibility study to assess the viability of your design within the Pacific Northwest's unique context. Consider factors such as environmental impact, infrastructure requirements, and potential constraints. This study will help you identify potential challenges and devise appropriate solutions, ultimately streamlining the entitlement process.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The Pacific Northwest is renowned for its commitment to environmental sustainability. When dealing with entitlement processes, be prepared to address concerns related to natural resource conservation, stormwater

management, energy efficiency, and sustainable design practices. Incorporating environmentally friendly elements into your project will not only enhance its marketability but also align with regional priorities.

ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITY DESIGN REVIEW BOARDS:

Many jurisdictions in the Pacific Northwest have community design review boards or architectural review committees responsible for evaluating project proposals. Familiarize yourself with the specific review processes and engage with these boards early in the design phase. Proactively addressing their concerns and incorporating their suggestions will enhance the chances of a successful entitlement process. Each jurisdiction has a different process and a different board make up. It is important to approach the board with respect and understand what their intended process goals might be.

ANTICIPATE PUBLIC INPUT:

In the Pacific Northwest, public input is highly valued and often required during the entitlement process. Be prepared to host community meetings, open houses, and public hearings to gather input, address concerns, and demonstrate how your project will positively impact the community. Actively incorporating public feedback will foster community trust and support for your project.



“Architects and other design professionals play a vital role in successfully obtaining entitlement approvals by leveraging their expertise in design, planning, regulatory compliance, and communication.”

MITIGATE TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION IMPACT:

Traffic congestion and transportation infrastructure are key concerns in urban areas of the Pacific Northwest. Work closely with transportation agencies to conduct traffic impact studies, propose mitigation measures, and address access issues. By actively engaging with transportation stakeholders, you can ensure that your project complies with local requirements and minimizes any adverse impact on the existing transportation network.

MONITOR AND ADAPT TO CHANGING REGULATIONS:

Regulations and entitlement processes are subject to change over time. Stay informed about evolving policies, code updates, and zoning changes within the Pacific Northwest. Regularly review local government websites, attend public hearings, and maintain open communication channels with planning departments to ensure your projects remain

compliant with the latest regulations. Understanding when a project vests to a specific code edition is important in order to avoid unpleasant surprises. Navigating entitlement processes in the Pacific Northwest requires a comprehensive understanding of local regulations, stakeholder engagement, and adherence to environmental and community considerations. Architects and other design professionals play a vital role in successfully obtaining entitlement approvals by leveraging their expertise in design, planning, regulatory compliance, and communication. Their involvement ensures that projects align with the region's unique characteristics, creating spaces that harmonize with the Pacific Northwest's landscapes and values. Embrace the challenges and embrace the beauty of the Pacific Northwest as you embark on your architectural endeavors. It's important to note that while the project type can influence the complexity of the entitlement process, other factors, such as the project's location, scale, and potential impacts, also play significant roles. Additionally, specific local regulations

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and the jurisdiction's planning policies can further shape the complexity of the process for different project types.

RESIDENTIAL PROJECTS:

Residential projects, including mixed use projects, single-family homes, multi-family developments, or affordable housing, typically involve considerations such as density, zoning, neighborhood compatibility, and infrastructure impact. The complexity of the entitlement process for residential projects can vary depending on factors such as the scale of the development, the location within a community, and the potential impact on the existing neighborhood. Red flags for this use are proximity to residential zoning, particularly single-family residential zones. This impact includes view blockage and privacy concerns. Many residential neighborhoods are looking for an accessory commercial use that provides an amenity available to the local community. Parking and traffic impacts are also important topics.

COMMERCIAL PROJECTS:

Commercial projects, such as retail or office buildings, often require more extensive entitlement processes due to their potential impact on traffic, infrastructure, and land use.

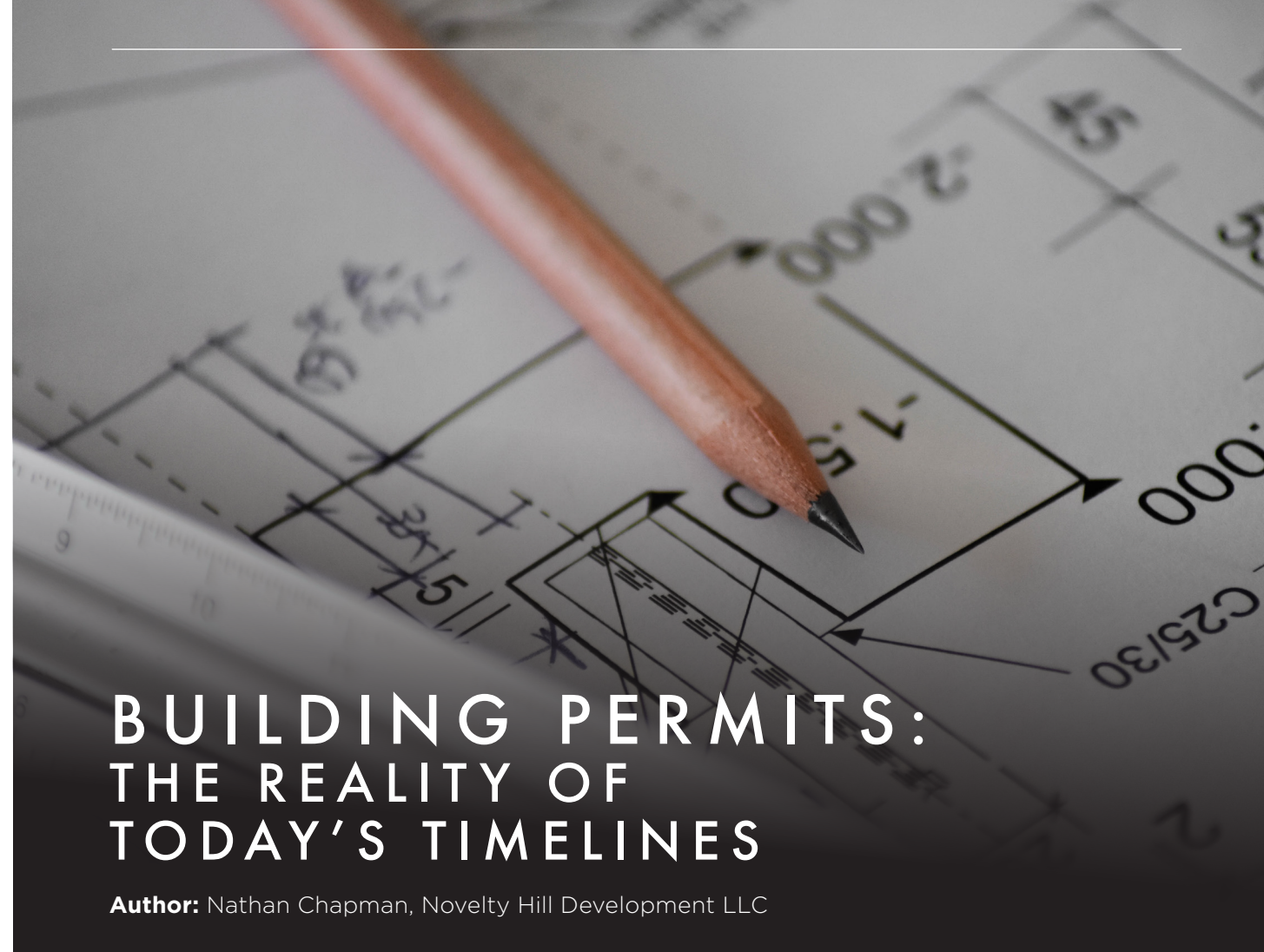
Commercial projects may involve additional studies, such as traffic impact assessments, parking studies, and economic impact analyses. The complexity can also increase if the project involves historic preservation or adaptive reuse of existing structures.

INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS:

Industrial projects, including manufacturing facilities, warehouses, or industrial parks, can introduce unique challenges during the entitlement process. These projects often require careful consideration of environmental impacts, transportation infrastructure, and compatibility with adjacent land uses. Environmental assessments, such as environmental impact statements, may be necessary to evaluate potential effects on air quality, water resources, and nearby ecosystems. Engaging with experienced architects, planners, and other design professionals who are familiar with the specific project type and local requirements is ESSENTIAL to navigate the complexities of the entitlement process successfully. Their expertise will help address the unique considerations associated with each project type, ensuring compliance with regulations and maximizing the chances of a smooth entitlement process.

Robin Murphy is the owner and senior principal of Jackson | Main Architecture, P.S., an award-winning, integrated design firm focused on helping clients achieve their unique project goals. With over three decades of experience in architectural design and firm management, and licensure in 19 states and provinces, Robin's leadership has led to the successful completion of an extensive range of projects, including mixed-use residential developments, townhomes, high-rise and mid-rise structures, theaters, retail spaces, institutional buildings, and industrial facilities. He is also a LEED-accredited professional, signifying his expertise in sustainable design practices, and is a member of the American Institute of Architects. Furthermore, Robin serves as a member of the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards.

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BUILDING PERMITS: THE REALITY OF TODAY'S TIMELINES

Author: Nathan Chapman, Novelty Hill Development LLC

If you are currently developing or building in the Puget Sound area, I'm sure you are feeling the pain of permit timelines. We are single-family developers, and most of our projects are in unincorporated King County (not within City limits and permitted through King County Department of Permitting and Environmental Review "DPER").

King County DPER for 2018 there were 232 permits for single family homes taking on average 121 days to get approved.

In 2022 there were 158 applications (32% less) taking on average 322 days (166% longer). So far in 2023 there have been 143 applications

taking 368 days to receive a single-family permit. It's hard to believe it now takes over a year to obtain a simple single family building permit. King County DPER is not alone. Most Cities and Counties have significant delays in their permits, trying to implement

new codes and development guidelines. In addition, we have heard almost every jurisdiction has issues finding and keeping qualified staff to process permits. Senior staff retiring, planners and engineers moving to other jurisdictions and funding issues are also part of the problem. We have come to accept this as part of the cycle, like everything real estate, and expect things to get better over the next few years. In the meantime, be patient and expect lengthy delays in applications being processed for all permit types.