

# Permits Guidelines

## Remodeling or adding improvements to your home?

Home owners thinking about remodeling their home or adding other improvements, such as decks, spas or retaining walls, many times have a number of questions about building permits.

This information is designed to give home owners basic knowledge of when construction permits and other approvals are required by the city.

## What are permits and why do I need one?

Permits are the way the city regulates construction. This is designed to ensure that all construction in the city is safe. The safety of the occupants of buildings is the primary reason for having construction codes. The city has adopted several codes, among them the Uniform Building, Mechanical and Plumbing, and National Electrical codes. In addition, there are federal, state and local laws that govern construction, such as those covering energy conservation.

There are several different types of permits, based on the type of construction: structural, plumbing, mechanical, electrical and combination (used for single-family home construction and other small projects). Most home owner projects require a combination permit. In addition, the complete demolition and relocation of buildings also requires permits.

Obtaining the permit is just the first step in the process. In this step, you may need to create plans to submit to the department, make a plot plan for your property showing the improvements, and show the type of construction you'll be using.

## When do I need a construction permit?

A construction permit is needed for all new construction. In many cases, a permit is needed for repair or replacement of existing fixtures, such as replacing windows. A plumbing, electrical or mechanical permit may be needed for any addition or changes to a building's existing system; for example, moving or adding an electrical outlet requires a permit.

## When don't I need a permit?

A construction permit is not needed for items such as wallpapering, painting or similar finish work; fences six feet high or lower; platforms, decks and walks 30 inches high or less over grade or not over basement; and in several other cases. However, reviews may be required from other agencies; be sure to check before building.

For plumbing, mechanical and electrical work, replacement or repair of fixtures (such as changing water faucets or replacing switches) does not normally require a permit. Replacing a water heater or adding a permanently wired light fixture does however require a permit.

# Permits Guidelines

## How long does it take to get a permit?

Permit issuance periods vary. Some projects can be fully permitted over-the-counter, meaning a return trip won't be needed. Some projects however require that plans be left for additional review.

## What about zoning?

Zoning sets up within a defined area, the types of buildings and what they will be used for. For example, a residential area may be zoned R1-20000, which means that the lots can contain one single-family home and the lots are a minimum of 20,000 square feet.

Zoning is regulated based on maps approved by the City Council. A variance may be obtained in some cases if a property owner wants to build something not allowed in the property's zone.

Some questions and approvals for zoning can be issued over-the-counter by the same staff that reviews your building plans. Others need reviews by specialty zoning or planning staff.

## What about other approvals or permits?

Other government agencies may need to review and approve your project. The city will inform you of these reviews at the time plans are submitted.

## What if I don't get a permit?

If a permit when needed is not obtained before construction, you have violated city codes and regulations; you'll be subject to fines and penalties. You'll be required to obtain permits for the work and it must pass inspection, or you'll have to return the structure or site to its original condition.

Remember... construction codes were created for safety reasons. Work built without a permit can be unsafe no matter how good it looks.

The city's Code Enforcement Division enforces codes on already-built structures.

## Who should obtain the permit?

Contractors licensed by the state can obtain permits. The home owner can also obtain the permits.

# Permits Guidelines

## Can I do the work myself or do I have to hire a contractor?

You can do the work yourself, but you must follow certain regulations. Among them:

- **Workers' Compensation:** If you will be hiring anyone, you may have to purchase Workers' Compensation Insurance, which is available from a variety of agencies. If you won't be hiring anyone, we'll ask you to sign an "Owner-Builder Statement" to this effect. We can't issue you a permit without either insurance or the completed Owner-Builder Statement.
- **Build to the plans:** Be sure to follow your approved plans, whether they are drawn by an architect or designer or are standard construction requirements given to you by the city. If you change the plans while building the structure, this will cause problems when the project is inspected. If you do decide to make changes, check with the city's plan review staff or your field inspector.
- 

## What about a contractor?

The city recommends that you deal only with a contractor licensed by the State

## What about inspections?

It is your responsibility to call us for inspections at specific times during construction. You may have your contractor make the call, but it is still your responsibility, as the property owner to make sure the inspections are made. Inspections are made during certain points in the project depending on the work that's being performed. For example, retaining walls require inspections of the footing, after block is laid, and steel placed, before grouting, after backfill has been placed and when all work is finished.

Remember... the project is not complete for legal purposes until it has passed the final inspection.

## What if I have a permit but never called for an inspection?

Generally, permits expire after 180 days if no inspections have been made. In order for the project to be complete, it must pass final inspection. If a permit expires before final inspection, the project is in violation of city codes.