



The Framework to Project Success

Section 5.1 – Permits & Approvals

What you Need to Know about Permits and Approvals

Permits and approvals are tricky because everywhere you build has different requirements. The purpose is for these permits and approvals is to ensure that construction adheres to local building codes. They cover safety, structural integrity, environmental regulations, and zoning. Skipping or delaying permits can result in fines, project delays, or even mandatory changes to finished work. Additionally, permits protect you and the builder by confirming that the work has been inspected and deemed safe. These are the most important things to understand...

- **Timelines and Deadlines for Applications**

- Permit and approval applications often involve reviews by government departments or review committees. This can take weeks or even months, depending on the scope of work and local processes.
 - Plan ahead and start the applications earlier than you think to avoid delays.
- Expect the applications to not get approved on the first submission.
 - Even experienced architects and builders often need minor revisions to applications.
 - This means waiting for a second round of department or committee reviews.
- Permits and approvals have a limited lifespan. Most projects take long enough to require renewing them.
 - Be aware of the expiration dates and confirm with your builder and architect who is renewing them and that they have been renewed.

- **Different Permits and Approvals are Needed for Specific Purposes**

- Permits and approvals are generally divided by categories, governing the particular function of your project, like land use, zoning, plumbing, electrical, etc.
- Each type ensures compliance with safety and building codes specific to its area, so multiple permits and approvals are required for a single home build.
- City, county, state, federal, and even international codes can affect how your house gets built.

- **Inspections are Required Throughout the Process**

- After a permit is issued, inspections are required at various stages (e.g., electrical, plumbing, and completion).
- Passing inspections is necessary to earn a Certificate of Occupancy. It is the final stamp of approval from your local government that deems your house safe and ready for habitation.

- **Price and Complexity Change based on Location**

- Building in an affluent city often requires very different permitting and fee structures than building in a rural area.
- Many rural areas we build in are only governed by the county. There can be significantly fewer hoops to jump through than when we build within the city limits of a place like Bozeman, Montana. But luxury subdivisions will be restrictive wherever they are located.

What you Need to Apply for Permits and Approvals

- **Permit and Approval Application Forms**

- The completed form provides all necessary project information in a standard format.
- Fees support the cost of review and inspections.

- **Contractor and Owner Information**

- Licensing and contact information verify that qualified professionals are involved and can be contacted alongside owners if there are questions or issues during the review process.
- Some permits must be pulled by a licensed contractor--specifically plumbing and electrical.
- You will also need to provide mailing and contact information that you check regularly in case there are issues to address during the approval process.

- **Project Description and Scope**

- This written description of the work being done includes the type of construction (e.g., new build, addition, renovation), intended use, and an overview of the project's size and scope.
- This helps the permitting authority understand the nature of the work and assess which codes and regulations apply.

- **Plans**

- You are usually required to submit detailed drawings that may include floor plans, elevations, framing details, and roof plans. These often need to be stamped by a licensed architect or engineer, depending on local requirements.
 - A site plan is the standard requirement to show the location of the new construction on the property in relation to property lines, existing structures, utilities, and access points. It typically includes dimensions, setbacks, and lot coverage to ensure compliance with zoning laws.
 - Architectural and structural plans are usually required to ensure code compliance and construction guidelines regarding design and safety.

What's the Difference between Permits and Approvals?

- **Permits**

- These are official authorizations issued by a governing body (like a city or county) allowing the homeowner and contractor to proceed with construction.
- Permits are required for various aspects of the work (e.g., land use, building, electrical, and plumbing) to ensure that the project meets safety and code standards.
- Each permit requires inspections throughout various stages of building to verify compliance.

- **Approvals**

- These are endorsements or clearances from various regulatory bodies (such as zoning boards, environmental agencies, or homeowners' associations) that confirm the project complies with broader regulations or specific land-use guidelines.
- Approvals are typically obtained before certain permits are issued and might involve public hearings or additional documentation.
- Approval bodies often only get involved at the beginning and completion of your project.

How to Find Permit Requirements for Your House

• Consult with a Licensed Contractor or Architect

- Licensed contractors and architects are familiar with local permit requirements and can guide you on the specific permits needed for your project. They can also help you navigate the application process efficiently.
- Often, architects or contractors can submit plans on your behalf and ensure they comply with local codes.

• Check Local Government Websites

- **City or County Building Department:** Most cities or counties have a building department or planning division responsible for issuing permits. Visit their official website, where you'll often find a list of required permits, downloadable applications, and fee schedules.
- **Online Permit Portals:** Many areas now offer online portals where you can submit applications, check requirements, and review project guidelines.
- **Example Search:** Type in your county or city and terms like "Building Permits," "Planning Department," or "Development Services".

• Consult Zoning and Planning Departments

- **Zoning Department:** Know the zoning classification for your property. This may impact building height, setback requirements, and allowable land uses. Many cities provide zoning maps and zoning ordinances online.
- **Planning Division:** The planning division can provide information on whether any special permits or approvals are needed, such as environmental clearances or historical preservation reviews.
- **Contact Local Zoning Office:** Call or email if you're unsure about specific zoning requirements or application processes.

• Use State or Regional Permit Resources

- **State Department of Building Standards:** Some states provide a centralized resource or guidelines that apply across counties and cities, covering statewide building codes, energy efficiency requirements, and other regulatory standards.
- **State Contractor License Board:** They often provide permit and licensing information that applies to contractors and homeowners.
- **Example Search:** Type "[Your State] building permits" or "[Your State] contractor licensing requirements" to find applicable codes and standards.

- **Visit or Contact the Local Building Permit Office**

- **Find Contact Information:** Call or email the office if you need to clarify certain permit requirements or if your project has unique considerations that require direct guidance.
- **In-Person Visit:** If your local building office is accessible, plan a physical visit. Staff can answer specific questions and provide printed materials or checklists for your project.

Go to our next section to download a guide and checklist of the required permits.
