



City of Santa Fe Springs

INFORMATION ON BUILDING PERMIT PROCESS

I. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

WHAT IS A BUILDING PERMIT?

A **building permit** is an authorization issued by the Building Division giving the recipient the authority to proceed with the proposed improvements. The permitting process is designed to regulate construction and ensure that all construction in the city is safe.

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 homeowner projects require a combination permit. In addition, the complete demolition and relocation of buildings also requires permits.

Obtaining the permit is the first step in the process. You may need to submit plot plan showing the improvements as well as the type of construction you intend to do.

Once plans have been approved, you will be required to build the project according to those plans. If any changes are made to the plans, they must be made with the City's approval.

The second half of the process involves regular inspections as the work progresses. More is discussed about this half of the process later.

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 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 DO I NOT NEED A PERMIT?

A construction permit is not needed for items such as wallpapering, painting, carpeting 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; structures under 120 square feet in size (an electrical permit is required, if applicable), and in several other cases. However, reviews may be required from other agencies.

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.

To determine if your project needs a permit, please call (562) 868-0511 ext.7560.

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 should not be required. 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. Other approvals may need to be reviewed by specialty zoning or planning staff.

For further zoning related questions, please call (562) 868-0511 ext.7550.

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 will have violated City codes and regulations and you will be subject to fines and penalties. You will be required to obtain permits for the work, which must pass inspection, or you will 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 Neighborhood Code Compliance Department enforces codes on already-built structures.

WHO SHOULD OBTAIN THE PERMIT?

Any contractor licensed by the State of California can obtain a permit. A homeowner can also obtain a permit.

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 someone, you may have to purchase Workers' Compensation Insurance, which is available from a variety of agencies. If you will not be hiring anyone, we will ask you to sign an "Owner-Builder Statement" to this effect. We cannot 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.

WHO DRAWS UP THE PLANS?

Plans for projects such as room additions can usually be drawn up by a qualified individual such as a draftsman. Other projects may require plans prepared and signed by an architect or engineer licensed by the State of California.

For projects such as routine retaining walls, patio covers or carports, the City has standard specifications that can be followed within certain limitations. Those specifications, together with a plot plan showing your project, can be accepted by the Department as plans.

In addition, some kit-type projects come with construction plans. Before you purchase any such kit, please call Building Department at (562) 868-0511 ext.7560 to ensure your kit will be accepted. Please bring the instruction sheet or other documentation along when you apply for your permit, it will serve as plans.

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 that the inspection is made. Inspections are made at various points in the project depending on the work that is being performed. For example, retaining walls require inspections of the footing, after block is laid and steel placed but before grouting, after backfill has been placed and when all work is complete.

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. If this is your case, please call the Building Department at (562) 868-0511 ext.7560. Staff will assist you in reactivating the permit or applying for another permit with as little inconvenience as possible. Our interest is in seeing your project complete... including the final inspection.