WELCOME HOMEOWNER!

Many people coming to the Planning and Community Development Department for building permits are homeowners like you. Whether your residential project is a minor improvement or a brand new home, building permits provide important documentation that the City authorized your construction and then inspected your home for compliance with applicable safety standards and local laws. You will often need to show this information to potential buyers and lenders if you sell or refinance your home.

City staff developed this handout to help answer questions that frequently arise as homeowners proceed through the permit process for single-family home improvement projects. We hope it offers you introductory information as you plan your next home improvement project. For additional information, City staff is available to assist you at the public counter of the Building & Safety Division on a first-come, first-served basis, or you may call the appropriate staff for an appointment.

Building & Safety Counter  
Santa Monica City Hall  
1685 Main Street, Room 111  
Santa Monica CA, 90401  
310-458-8355

Hours  
Monday through Thursday ............ 7:30 am to 5:30 pm  
Alternate Fridays .......................... 8:00 am to 5:00 pm
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR MAJOR HOME IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Which home improvement projects require permits?

Building permits are typically required for any home improvement, repair, alteration, construction or demolition project, including pool or spa installations, sandblasting, most excavation and the erection of temporary structures such as temporary power poles. Permits are also required for re-roofing projects and improvements to plumbing, mechanical and electrical systems. When some portion of the proposed work includes construction or alteration of the sidewalk, alley or public street, a construction permit is also required from the City’s Environmental and Public Works Department.

Some common improvements are exempt from building permit requirements. These include:

- One-story detached tool and storage sheds, playhouses and similar uses if they do not contain utilities, and are less than fourteen feet in height and one hundred twenty square feet in floor area
- Exterior freestanding walls and fences not over six feet high, when measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall
- Retaining walls measuring less than four feet from the top of the wall to the bottom of the foundation, with level backfill and not supporting an adjacent building, pool or driveway
- Finish work including carpentry, wall papering and painting
- Addition of window awnings
- Replacement of toilets
- Fixing stoppages and leaks in pipes, valves or fixtures without replacing materials
- Concrete or asphalt patios or driveways constructed on natural grade
- Decks less than 30 inches in height when constructed on level grade

Although some common improvements are exempt from building permit requirements, the work must comply with applicable City municipal laws including building codes, zoning regulations and parking design standards. For a complete list of exceptions and building permit requirements, see Santa Monica Municipal Code Section 8.08.050 at http://pen.ci.santa-monica.ca.us/municode/codemaster/Article_8/08/050.html.

What kind of permit is required for my home improvement project?

To help make getting minor permits simple, the City created an express permit type called the Single Trade Permit (STP) for simple improvements involving only one type of trade such as:

- Door or window replacement
- Electrical (i.e. wiring, lighting and service panels)
- Fences and block walls over six feet high, measured from the top of the wall to bottom of the footing
- Mechanical (i.e. furnace or air conditioner replacement, replacing ductwork or fans)
- Stucco/Plastering
- Plumbing (i.e. hot water heater change outs, sink replacements, and re-piping)
- Re-roofing with no structural alteration
- Sandblasting
- Seismic Retrofit (i.e. foundation bolting and bracing of cripple walls with the City’s Standard Plan)
- Installation of patio covers which do not result in the addition of a roof deck

For more complex projects that do not qualify for Single Trade Permits, the City uses the Combination Permit that accommodates multiple trades. The Combination Permit allows you to pull one permit for the entire project avoiding the requirement of pulling separate permits for building, electrical, mechanical and plumbing trades.

Application forms for both permit types are available at the Building & Safety public counter or you may download them at http://pen.ci.santamonica.ca.us/planning/buildingsafety/forms.html.
✔ Do I need construction drawings (plans) to obtain a permit?

Often, Single Trade Permits do not require plans. Plans are usually required for:

- Door and window replacements
- Fences and block walls
- Roofing with heavier roofing materials
- Installation of patio covers
- Foundation bolting and bracing of cripple walls*

* The City Of Santa Monica has a standard plan you can use for this purpose. If your home was built prior to 1950 with raised floor construction, it likely needs additional bolting and bracing of its crawlspace walls to prevent collapse during an earthquake. Doing this work can lower your homeowner’s insurance premiums.

Combination Permits usually require plans. Depending on your project type, required drawings may include a site plan, foundation, floor, framing, and roof plans, building elevations and sections, construction details and structural calculations. When new floor area is added, an energy efficiency report is also required.

✔ Am I required to hire an architect or engineer?

When plans are required, it is usually best to have an experienced design professional, such as a licensed architect or engineer assist you. Plans for nonstructural alterations, such as door and window replacements, can be drawn by anyone. For projects involving structural modifications, plans and calculations are typically required and must be prepared, signed and stamped by an architect or engineer licensed in the state of California.

✔ When do I need to provide a soils report?

Santa Monica is located in an area that has substantial earthquake activity. In order to decrease the potential for damage to your home, a soils report (geo-technical report) with proposed mitigation measures is required for many project types:

- New homes or additions greater than 750 square feet or exceeding 50% of the existing floor area
- Remodels or additions less than 750 square feet and in a Geologic Hazard Zone or hillside area
- Swimming pools and spas greater than 24 inches deep and in slope or foundation setback areas

For your information we have provided a detailed guide to Geo-technical Reports on our website located at [http://pen.ci.santa-monica.ca.us/planning/buildingsafety/Santa%20Monica%20Geotechnical%20Guidelinev1.2.pdf](http://pen.ci.santa-monica.ca.us/planning/buildingsafety/Santa%20Monica%20Geotechnical%20Guidelinev1.2.pdf)

✔ When is my project required to have fire sprinklers?

Did you know that no loss of human life has ever occurred from a fire in any building fully protected with fire sprinklers? To protect your family, possessions and home and assist the Fire Department with reducing damage and potential loss of life due to fire, automatic fire sprinkler systems are required for the following:

- New homes and accessory buildings except for detached one-story garages
- Residences that result from renovation of garages or other buildings
- Existing residences when an addition of more than 50% of the existing floor area is added
- Existing residences when more 50% of the floor area is remodeled in a 3-year period
- One-story homes or accessory buildings when more than 50% of the roof structure is exposed
- Homes or accessory buildings when more than 50% of the interior and exterior walls are exposed
- Homes where a story is added resulting in an increase of floor area more than 33.3% of the existing permitted floor area

For your use we have additional residential fire system suppression system requirements available at our website: [http://santamonicafire.org/fpd/planreviews/13d%20WEB.pdf](http://santamonicafire.org/fpd/planreviews/13d%20WEB.pdf)
How long does it take to obtain a permit?

Plans for minor projects are reviewed over-the-counter the same day you submit your application. Sometimes you may have to return for your permit if plan corrections are required. Examples of over-the-counter projects are:

- One story additions adding less than 50% of the home’s square footage and no more than 500 square feet.
- Re-roofing with changes to rooflines that remove or exposes less than 50% of the roof structure.
- Modifications to interiors that are non-structural and do not increase the building’s square footage.
- Construction of accessory buildings less than 500 square feet, 14 feet tall and with no plumbing.
- Construction of swimming pools and spas with standard plans.
- Repairs to chimneys.

Projects that cannot be thoroughly reviewed at the counter require submission for formal plan check. This allows qualified staff from all required City Departments to review the plans and provide your architect or engineer with written correction comments. Depending on the thoroughness of submittals and project complexity and scope, most applications receive final approval and are ready for permit issuance in approximately 4 to 6 months.

Formal plan check applications expire in 180 days. One extension of another 180 days may be granted if no pertinent laws or standards have changed, the delay is due to circumstances beyond your control, you submit a written request prior to expiration and pay the appropriate fee. To complete plan review in a timely manner, we suggest that your design professional submit corrected plans no later than 30 days after receiving written comments from staff and make any final submission of plans and documents at least 30 days prior to expiration.

Plan Check application and extension forms are available at the Building and Safety public counter or you may download the application at [http://pen.ci.santa-monica.ca.us/planning/buildingsafety/forms.html](http://pen.ci.santa-monica.ca.us/planning/buildingsafety/forms.html)

How much will the building permit cost?

Permit fees depend on project scope and complexity. Basic permit fees reflect the estimated reasonable cost to provide any necessary plan review and inspection services and maintain City records. More complex projects include additional permit fees that reflect the community's need for long-term capital improvement projects like water and sewer facilities, public schools and parks.

To encourage homeowners to obtain inspections that help ensure their safety, the City charges a reduced fee for Single Trade Permits. This fee represents approximately one-half of the true cost to provide inspection service and record maintenance for these permits. The permit entitles you to a maximum of three (3) site visits by inspection staff.

Fees for Combination Permits vary according to the size, type and complexity of the project. Partial fees are collected at the time you submit plans for review. The balance of permit fees is due prior to permit issuance.

Staff is available to assist you with fee calculation at the Building and Safety Division public counter. Please provide them with any project plans to allow for calculation of permit fees. City fees are generally available at [http://pen.ci.santa-monica.ca.us/finance/treasury/fees/toc3.htm](http://pen.ci.santa-monica.ca.us/finance/treasury/fees/toc3.htm).

Do I need to hire a contractor?

Homeowners can act as their own contractor (owner-builder) on their residence but we recommend that you hire a licensed and properly insured contractor unless you are experienced in construction work and intend to do the work yourself. You can verify the status of a contractor’s license and find excellent information on how to select the contractor from the Contractor’s State License Board at [http://www.cslb.ca.gov](http://www.cslb.ca.gov). Informative handouts on contractor selection are also available at the Building and Safety public counter.
Who can get a building permit?

Either the property owner or a properly licensed contractor may obtain a permit.

Contractors must provide proof of identification, current California State Contractors License, current City Business License, proof of valid and current Worker’s Compensation Insurance and a Letter of Authorization if the applicant is not the license holder. Contractors must also complete and submit a Licensed Contractor Declaration Form.

Owner/Builders must provide proof of ownership if recent transfer or if the owner is a company, corporation or trust. A notarized Letter of Authorization from the owner is required if the applicant is an authorized agent. Homeowners must provide proof of identification and complete, sign and submit an Owner/Builder Declaration Form. The form must be notarized if the owner’s signature does not occur in the presence of City permit staff. The Owner/Builder Declaration Form is available on our website www.santa-monica.org (http://pen.ci.santa-monica.ca.us/planning/buildingsafety/PermitDeclarationsOwnerBuilders.pdf).

What time of the day is construction work allowed?

Upon issuance of the permit, you will be provided with a construction job sign indicating the allowable days and hours of construction as shown below. You must post this sign at all job entrances during construction.

- Monday through Friday ............... 8 am - 6 pm
- Saturday ........................................ 9 am - 5 pm
- Sundays and Holidays* ............ No Work Permitted
- Noise exceeding 90dBA** .......... 10 am to 3 pm
  (**Such as jack hammering, pile driving, or pavement breaking)

How long do I have to complete the work?

Single Trade and Combination Permits have time limits based on project valuation as shown below with a couple of limitations: you must begin construction and receive an inspection within 180 days of permit issuance and if you do not receive an inspection within 180 days, the permit will automatically expire. Expired permits can be renewed with payment of additional fees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valuation</th>
<th>Maximum Time Allowed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to and including $300,000</td>
<td>12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$300,001 to $1,000,000</td>
<td>24 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,000,001 to $20,000,000</td>
<td>36 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over $20,000,000</td>
<td>48 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For additional information see: http://pen.ci.santmonica.ca.us/municode/codemaster/Article_8/08/070.html.

What if I want to make changes to my project after the permit is issued?

City staff must approve changes to permit and plans prior to scheduling related inspections. If the scope of the proposed change is outside the scope of work shown on your permit, you will need to have your building permit revised and reissued. If plans were originally required with your permit, the changes will need to be shown on a new set of plans and submitted for review. After approval, you will be given new approved plans to show the City inspection staff at the construction site that your changes are authorized.
How do I schedule inspections?

Before covering any work, you need to call and obtain inspection approval. In an effort to simplify scheduling of inspections, the Building and Safety Division has an automated inspection request line, the **Interactive Voice Response System**, available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. To schedule, cancel, or get inspection results, dial **310-458-2202** and you will be guided through the automated system. Please be prepared to enter your permit number and the code of the inspection type. For further information on the Automated Inspection Line please see the handout “**Automated Inspection Request Line**”.

To provide excellent customer service on inspections, we need you to provide our construction inspectors the following items upon his/her arrival:

- Yellow inspection card given to you with your permit
- Required plans, stamped “Approved for Construction” including changes
- Work to be inspected is complete and uncovered
- Authorized representative to allow access to the private portions of the property
- Safe and accessible construction site that poses no hazards to inspectors and construction workers

**Should you need assistance scheduling inspections please call Building and Safety at 310-458-8355.**

What happens if I do not request and receive final inspection approval?

A permit that does not receive final approvals expires. You are legally obligated to either renew the permit and complete the work or return things to their former state. Failure to do so may result in criminal and civil liabilities. Expired permits become a part of your property’s historical record. Sale of residential property in Santa Monica requires sellers to provide a Residential Building Record from the City to buyers. This document informs the potential buyer of the approved use and permits for the property and any expired permits.

What other approvals are required?

- **California Coastal Commission** approves construction of new buildings and additions that change the building envelope or footprint when these projects are located in the Coastal Zone. California Coastal Commission information is available at [www.coastal.ca.gov](http://www.coastal.ca.gov) or by calling 562-590-5071.
- **CAL-OSHA** approves construction safety plans for trenches or excavations five (5) feet or deeper and constructing or demolishing a building or scaffolding more than thirty-six feet in height.
- **Architectural Review Board** approves plans, elevations, and landscaping in residential districts other than R-1 for construction of new buildings and exterior alteration of existing buildings.
- **Landmarks Commission** reviews demolition applications for homes 40 or more years old and any applications for exterior alterations to designated City Landmarks and contributing structures located in designated historic districts. Commission review requires a minimum sixty-day waiting period.
- **City Planning** provides final inspection of projects requiring discretionary review such as variances or Architectural Review Board approval.
- **Fire Prevention** inspects and approves residential fire sprinkler systems.
- **City Business License** verifies that all project contractors have obtained the required City business licenses and approves the Contractor’s City Business License Release form submitted by the permit holder.
- **Environmental and Public Works Management** (EPWM) approves the construction of urban run off mitigation measures, utilities, waste reduction and recycling requirements and necessary improvements or maintenance of City’s streets, sidewalks and alleys.
- **Transportation Management** approves plans for driveways and parking spaces.

If you have any further questions, please contact us. City staff is committed to providing your excellent customer service while insuring that your project meets community standards. Working together, we can make Santa Monica “a better community.”