

BUILDING PERMITS 101

Homeowners contemplating a major renovation are often unsure of the permit process. Before any construction on any major home improvement project has begun, it is wise to first contact the Building & Safety Division to see what, if any, permits you may need. Please visit our city website at www.cityofbrea.net. Here are answers to the most frequently asked questions regarding building permits:

WHAT IS A BUILDING PERMIT?

A building permit is an official approval to proceed with a construction project. It is intended to ensure that the project plans comply with local standards for land use, zoning and construction. These standards are intended to ensure the safety of current and future owners and occupants, and the enforcement of zoning and land use policies.

Specific issues that the building permit process may address include structural integrity, sanitation, energy, water and sewer lines, fire resistance and electrical service.

If construction without a permit is discovered, it could be costly with regards to time and money. For example, if and when the homeowner tries to sell a house, the potential buyer's home inspection may reveal remodeling or additions that were not properly permitted, and may not be code-compliant. This can prevent or delay the sale of the house. It may also require that the previously completed construction work be removed, revised, replaced, altered, modified, or demolished and then completed with a proper building permit and subsequent building inspections according to the currently adopted building code.

WHEN IS A BUILDING PERMIT REQUIRED?

A building permit is required for new construction, an addition or major renovation of an existing building. It is often difficult to know when you need a permit for your remodeling project. Many homeowners want to know, "Do I need a permit for this project?" Depending on your locality, here are some instances when you may or may not need a permit.

You will need a permit when:

- Building a new patio cover or enclosing an existing patio cover
- Installing a new pool and/or barbeque island
- Installing a new landscaping system that include electrical, drainage or plumbing (including sprinkler systems)
- Converting the use of a garage to an office, gym or non-garage use
- Demolishing a load-bearing wall
- Changing the roofline of a house
- Installing a new roof
- Installing or replacing a new window or door
- Altering the footprint (exterior outline) of the house
- Installing new electrical wiring, or upgrading electrical panel
- Installing or replacing heating and air conditioning units
- Clearing or replacing sewer lateral line
- Upgrading or relocating plumbing fixtures
- Parking a roll-off storage bin or dumpster on a public street.
- Replacing, upgrading, or adding a water heater

WHEN IS A BUILDING PERMIT NOT NEEDED?

Building:

- One-story detached accessory structures used as tool and storage sheds, playhouses and similar uses, provided the floor area does not exceed 120 square feet (11 m²).
- Fences not over 6 feet high (1829 mm) (constructed of materials other than concrete block, concrete, or masonry).
- Retaining walls that are not over 4 feet (1219 mm) in height measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall, unless supporting a surcharge.
- Sidewalks and driveways not more than 30 inches (762 mm) above adjacent grade, and not over any basement or story below and are not part of an accessible route. *It may be necessary for the homeowner to obtain a Public Works Permit for sidewalks and driveways in the public right-of-way.*
- Painting, papering, tiling, carpeting, cabinets, counter tops and similar finish work.
- Prefabricated swimming pools accessory to a Group R-3 occupancy that are less than 24 inches (610 mm) deep, do not exceed 5,000 gallons (18 925 L) and are installed entirely above ground.
- Shade cloth structures constructed for nursery or agricultural purposes, not including service systems.
- Swings and other playground equipment accessory to detached one- and two-family dwellings (not allowed in front yard).
- Window awnings supported by an exterior wall that do not project more than 54 inches (1372 mm) from the exterior wall and do not require additional support of Groups R-3 and U occupancies.
- Non-fixed and movable fixtures, cases, racks, counters and partitions not over 5 feet 9 inches (1753 mm) in height.

- **Electrical:**
- **Repairs and maintenance:** Minor repair work, including the replacement of lamps or the connection of approved portable electrical equipment to approved permanently installed receptacles.
- **Radio and television transmitting stations:** The provisions of this code shall not apply to electrical equipment used for radio and television transmissions, but do apply to equipment and wiring for a power supply and the installations of towers and antennas.
- **Temporary testing systems:** A permit shall not be required for the installation of any temporary system required for the testing or servicing of electrical equipment or apparatus.

Gas:

- Portable heating appliance.
- Replacement of any minor part that does not alter approval of equipment or make such equipment unsafe.

Mechanical:

- Portable heating appliance, portable ventilation/cooling equipment.
- Steam, hot or chilled water piping within any heating or cooling equipment regulated by this code.
- Replacement of any part that does not alter its approval or make it unsafe.
- Self-contained refrigeration system containing 10 pounds (5 kg) or less of refrigerant and actuated by motors of 1 horsepower (746 W) or less.

Plumbing:

- The stopping of leaks in drains, water, soil, waste or vent pipe, provided, however, that if any concealed trap, drain pipe, water, soil, waste or vent pipe becomes defective and it becomes necessary to remove and replace the same with the new material, such work shall be considered as new work and a permit shall be obtained and inspection made as provided in this code.
- The clearing of stoppages or the repairing of leaks in pipes, valves or fixtures and the removal and reinstallation of water closets, provided such repairs do not involve or require the replacement or rearrangement of valves, pipes or fixtures.

HOW DO I OBTAIN A BUILDING PERMIT?

Before applying for and submitting plans for the permit, you may be required to receive approval for your project from the City of Brea Planning Commission or City of Brea Planning Division.

Obtaining a building permit begins with completing an application and submitting four (4) sets of 24" x 36" plans (minimum.) The Construction Permit Application is available online at cityofbrea.net or at the front counter of the Building & Safety Division on the 3rd floor of the Civic Center.

Structural addition or alteration plans will need to be submitted along with a site plan to the Building & Safety Division for plan check. Standard plumbing, electrical, mechanical and some demolition permits may be issued over-the-counter

HOW LONG WILL I HAVE TO WAIT TO GET A BUILDING PERMIT?

A typical turn-around time for plan check is 10 - 14 working days, depending on the type of project and scope of work. However, if the house or neighborhood has some type of "historic" designation, the review process can be longer and the project may be subject to more restrictions.

WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO WITH A BUILDING PERMIT?

Once you have obtained your building permit, you are authorized to begin work on your project. Generally you will be required to keep the inspection job card at the construction site, and make it available to a building inspector upon request. If your project required the submittal of plans and specifications, you should receive an "Approved Field Copy" set of plans, which should also be kept at the construction site.

HOW LONG IS A BUILDING PERMIT VALID?

Building permits are temporary documents. In the City of Brea, it is a common rule that a permit will expire if the work it encompasses does not begin within 6 months (180 days) and inspections are not requested, or if it is not completed within one year of building permit issuance. Under special circumstances, the permit may be renewed or extended. The building official is authorized to grant, in writing, one or more extensions of time, for periods not more than 180 days each. The extension shall be requested in writing and justifiable cause demonstrated. It is a good policy, however, to plan on obtaining your permit as close as possible to when work will begin.