

## The Building, Development and Planning Department Building Permits FAQ.

### **I am planning a remodel of my home. Why should I get a building permit?**

This is a question many people may ask themselves when planning alterations to their home. A decision not to get a permit could be very costly. Some homeowners are finding when they try to sell or refinance their home, prospective buyers or lending institutions want proof that alterations are in compliance with local codes. Without a permit and inspection on record, there is no proof. The homeowner must then apply for a permit with no guarantee that the remodel will meet the codes, and they face the possibility that the remodel must be redone or removed. This is costly and frustrating and could cause delays in refinancing or a lost sale of their home.

### **Do I need a permit for everything I do to my home?**

No, not all items require permits. The following is a list of items that do not require a permit.

Permits are **not required for the following** when related to single family homes and do not encroach over a subsurface drain system, public utility easement, or into required setbacks from property lines:

#### *Building:*

1. Accessory structures, provided the floor area does not exceed 200 square feet (18.58 m<sup>2</sup>) or a height of 10 feet (3048 mm) measured to the highest point. Please note that accessory buildings shall be in a rear yard only, and shall not occupy more than thirty-five percent (35%) of a required rear yard. Accessory buildings shall be distant at least six feet from any dwelling situated on the same lot, at least six feet from any other accessory building and at least three feet from all lot lines of adjoining lots.
2. 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.
3. Concrete sidewalks, slabs, and driveways not more than 30 inches (762 mm) above adjacent grade and not over any basement or story below. (Driveway approaches require a Street cut Permit)
4. Painting, papering, tiling, carpeting, cabinets, counter tops, interior wall, floor or ceiling covering and similar finish work.
5. Swings and other playground equipment accessory to a one-or two-family dwelling.
6. Window awnings and patio covers supported by an exterior wall not over 120 square feet in area.
7. Replacement or repair of siding not required to be fire-resistant.
8. Retrofitted insulation.
9. Masonry repair.
10. Porches and decks, where the floor or deck is not more than 30 inches above grade and where the edge of the porch, deck or floor does not come closer than 3 feet (914 mm) to property lines. *Exception: Structural repairs*
11. Gutters and downspouts. *Exception: Box gutter replacement.*

#### *Electrical:*

Repairs and maintenance: A permit shall not be required for minor repair work, including the

replacement of lamps or the connection of approved portable electrical equipment to approved permanently installed receptacles.

*Mechanical:*

1. Portable cooking or clothes drying appliances.
2. Replacement of any minor part that does not alter approval of equipment or make such equipment unsafe.
3. Portable heating appliance.
4. Portable ventilation appliances.
5. Portable cooling unit.
6. Steam, hot or chilled water piping within any heating or cooling equipment regulated by this code.
7. Portable evaporative cooler.
8. Self-contained refrigeration systems containing 10 pounds (4.54 kg) or less of refrigerant or that are actuated by motors of 1 horsepower (746 W) or less.
9. Other portable appliances such as freezers, washing machines, refrigerators, portable barbecue grills, etc.

*Plumbing:*

The stopping of leaks in drains, water, soil, waste or vent pipe; provided, however, that if any concealed trap, drainpipe, water, soil, waste or vent pipe becomes defective and it becomes necessary to remove and replace the same with new material, such will shall be considered a 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.

*Emergency Repairs:*

Where mechanical equipment replacements and repairs must be performed in an emergency situation, the permit application shall be submitted within the next working business day to the building official.

*Repairs:*

Application or notice to the building official is not required for ordinary repairs to structures, replacement of lamps or the connection of approved portable electrical equipment to approved permanently installed receptacles. Such repairs shall not include the cutting away of any wall, partition or portion thereof, the removal or cutting of any structural beam or load bearing support, or the removal or change of any required means of egress, or requirements; nor shall ordinary repairs include addition to, alteration of, replacement or relocation of any water supply, sewer, drainage, drain leader, gas, soil, waste, vent or similar piping, electric wiring or mechanical or other work affecting public health or general safety.

**Note: Even though a permit is not required, the project must still comply with all applicable construction and zoning codes. If you do not see your project listed it may require a permit. Just give us a call at 513-242-7770.**

### **Don't permits cost thousands of dollars?**

Not necessarily. Building permit fees are based on the value (construction costs including materials and typical labor costs) of the work to be done. As an example, an alteration with a value of \$10,000.00 would have a building permit fee (including plan review) of around \$84. Each person will have a different view of what is and is not expensive; however, a few hundred dollars now may save thousands in the future. Other permits such as plumbing, electrical and mechanical (heating and cooling) have fees based on the number or type of installations.

### **What if I have made an alteration to my home without realizing I needed a permit and I want to correct the situation - will I be subject to a fine? Do I have to tear the whole project down and start over?**

Penalties can be levied for those who refuse to comply with the law. The Building Department would rather see a building conform to the code than punish a homeowner. If a homeowner discovers that they did not obtain a permit when required, they do not necessarily have to tear the project down and start over. If the alteration can meet the applicable codes, it can be approved. Our inspectors won't necessarily approve something they cannot see and may require small sections of wall or roof covering be removed to verify the construction meets the code. There can be no guarantee that some changes may need to be made, and some may not be easy to accomplish.

### **What is the purpose of permits and codes?**

The purpose behind building codes is to give reasonable assurance that a home is safe from structural failure, fire hazards from electrical and heating systems, electrical shock, and health risks. The permits provide a permanent record of the work performed and inspections conducted on the project.

### **A Few Tips:**

Involve your Building Department early in the project. Our Building Department is staffed with professionals with years of experience in all phases of construction. They will be able to help you better understand the positive or negative impacts of your proposal.

If your project is complex or involves a number of proposed alternate methods, you may want to engage the services of a design professional. While not required by law for residential projects, architects and home designers have experience dealing with inspectors and plans examiners, and speak their language.

Remember, it is your responsibility to convince the Building Official of the merits of your proposal. Do your research. Surf the net. Find as much information as you can. If you can show that the material, design or method has been used safely elsewhere, even in another country, your chances for approval are much greater.

Don't assume that, just because your alternate method or design is environmentally friendly, it will automatically be approved. Building inspectors and plans examiners are dedicated to the safety of your home and family. If your proposed alternate could create a potentially hazardous situation, you need to know as early as possible so you can make a safer choice.

Zoning regulations may need to be considered if your proposal involves an alternate type of exterior siding or roofing. Be sure to involve your local Planning Department as well.

**If I take out a permit to remodel a home built ten years ago, do I build to the code in effect when the home was originally built?**

No. The new portion must meet the current codes unless the remodel creates a hazard for the existing building, such as overloading an existing beam.

**Do I have to have a license to do work on my own home?**

No. A homeowner \*(who owns and occupies the house) may do any or all of the work (building, plumbing, mechanical, heating and air conditioning, and electrical). But you will need to get the proper Permits for the work. If you are not sure of your abilities to do any or all of the work, it is recommended that you hire a licensed professional.

*\*This does not apply to plumbing and electrical work done by renters, landlords, their employees, or other persons who do not own and occupy the home (they must have an appropriate license).*

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

Simple residential projects involving only interior work will typically be reviewed within 2-3 days. Additions and projects involving exterior alterations may take up to two weeks before they are reviewed.

**Do I have to have my plans drawn by a Professional Designer, Architect, or Engineer?**

No. If this is a residential one or two family, the owner or anyone they choose may draw the plans as long as they are clear and detailed enough to indicate what and how the project will be built. In some cases, the complexity of the project may require the skills of a professional. If the plans include the need for new beams, lateral support (earthquake or wind resistance), and they are not designed using standard software or prescriptive designs obtained from the building code, an engineer or architect will need to provide calculations for those items.

**Why do I need inspections? Do I have to pay for these inspections?**

Inspections are required at various stages of the project to see that the work is following the approved plans and codes. There is no additional charge for the inspections; they have been paid for with the permit fees.

**How do I get an inspection?**

To get an inspection, you can call the Village of St. Bernard, Building Development and Planning Department at 513-242-7770.

Please have the following information:

- Name
- Contact phone number
- Permit number
- Job site address
- Type of inspection you are requesting
- Any special instructions you may need