

# How to Get a Residential Building Permit for Projects that Require Plans

BPC-021

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Building permits for a new house, addition to an existing house, a new garage or other new residential accessory building(s) are issued by the Permit and Resource Management Department (PRMD) for any property located within the unincorporated areas of Sonoma County (outside the city limits of the nine cities). If your property is located within a city, you should contact the appropriate city planning or building department for assistance.

The building permit process involves a number of steps that are necessary to ensure compliance with a variety of development regulations. It is very important to understand the applicable regulations in advance of designing construction plans for a new house or other new residential building(s). This handout provides important information to guide applicants through the building permit process.

1. **Gather information before designing construction plans.** Bring your Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) or street address to PRMD and consult with staff at the following cubicles in advance of designing construction plans.

- a. **Zoning.** A planner will identify the zoning of the property and explain the applicable zoning regulations such as required setbacks from property lines, building height, parking standards and if a zoning permit or other review is required.
- b. **Building and Grading.** A building inspector or building plans examiner will answer questions about building codes, building plan requirements and whether or not a separate grading permit is required (see number 5 below).
- c. **Public Sewer and Road Encroachment.** If the proposed house will be connected to a public sewer system, engineering staff will determine if the system is within the County sewer system or a city sewer system, and whether a utility certificate is required. A utility certificate is issued by the applicable city and must be submitted prior to the issuance of a building permit. The applicant will also be advised of the amount of sewer fees that must be paid prior to the issuance of a building permit.

If the proposed house will have access from a public road, the applicant may be required to obtain an Encroachment Permit, and to pave the driveway entrance where it connects to the public road.

- d. **Well and Septic.** If the proposed house or addition to existing house will be connected to a private sewage disposal system, a registered environmental health specialist will explain the septic regulations that will affect the design of the house and explain the process for obtaining a septic system permit and/or well permit.
- e. **Fire.** A fire inspector will explain fire safe standards which may require that improvements be made to an existing or proposed driveway, the installation of a water storage tank and fire sprinklers. All new houses in Sonoma County require the installation of fire sprinklers.  
**NOTE:** A separate permit is required for fire sprinklers.

2. **Apply for a building site evaluation prior to finalizing the design of the proposed new building.** A building site evaluation is conducted by a building inspector for all proposed new buildings and additions to existing buildings. The purpose of the building site evaluation is to determine site conditions that could affect proposed new buildings or additions that require further review.

**Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department**

2550 Ventura Avenue ❖ Santa Rosa, CA ❖ 95403-2829 ❖ (707) 565-1900 ❖ Fax (707) 565-1103

Site conditions that may require further review include, but are not limited to, flood zones, steep slopes, slides, soft or expansive soils, overhead power lines, wind exposure, seismic zones and areas of poor drainage.

It is very important to follow the procedures for a building site evaluation (see form CNI-002). The building inspector must be able to locate the property and the area on the property where the new building or addition to existing building will be constructed. Therefore, the address must be posted at the road, visible from both directions, at any forks in the road and at the site. The area of proposed new construction must be staked out. If the building inspector cannot locate the property and the area of new construction, a re-inspection fee will be charged and the building project delayed. Applications for a building site evaluation may be submitted to PRMD in advance of submitting building plans for a new building or addition to existing building. After the site evaluation is completed, the building inspector will determine whether additional reports or studies are required and will notify the applicant in writing. The building site evaluation is valid for one year from the time of submittal. An application for a building site evaluation is not required to be submitted in advance of submitting construction plans (see number 7 below).

3. **Prepare the site and construction plans for the proposed building or addition.** It may not be necessary to hire a professional to design and draw building plans. However, unless you are familiar with the preparation of house plans and development regulations, consider hiring a qualified person to assist with the design and development of the project (see form BPC-022 for an example of the required elements of typical building plans.)
4. **Submit the application for a building permit.** Applications for building permits that require plans are accepted Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 7:30 am to 3:00 pm and Wednesday from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. The application package must be complete or it will not be accepted. The following materials must be included:
  - a. The completed building permit application (see form CIS-007) signed by either the property owner of record, a licensed building contractor or other licensed professional. PRMD staff will verify that a contractor has a valid license and proof of insurance prior to issuing a building permit to a contractor. Other individuals may submit the application on behalf of the property owner if a letter of authorization signed by the property owner is attached.
  - b. Four (4) **Complete** sets of building plans. Two (2) additional sets of site and floor plans are required if the property is served by private well or septic system. The following items are mandatory to consider the building plans complete:
    - Site plan (see form CSS-019 Minimum Standard Site Plan) **NOTE:** Must include contours
    - Floor plan (electrical, plumbing and mechanical)
    - Foundation plan (footing details)
    - Elevations
    - Framing plan
    - Cross sections
    - Structural details
    - Signature of plan preparer (must be stamped by engineer if plans are engineered)

Two (2) sets of the following:

  - Title 24 energy calculations (signed and stamped)
  - Engineering calculations (if engineered) (signed and stamped)
  - Geotechnical report (if required) (signed and stamped)
5. **Complete the Grading Permit Questionnaire.** The applicant will be required to complete a questionnaire to determine if a grading permit is required for the proposed new building or addition (see form BPC-017). Staff at the Storm Water Cubicle will verify that the questionnaire is completed correctly as compared to the construction plans for the proposed new building or addition.

They will also address any potential drainage issues that may exist. If a grading permit is required, a separate grading permit application and plans will need to be submitted.

**NOTE:** The building permit for the proposed new building cannot be issued until the required grading permit is issued. Staff are available at the Building and Grading cubicle to assist you with this important step of the process.

6. **Meet with a permit technician to start the application.** A permit technician will review the application materials to verify that the submittal package is complete. If the submittal package is complete, the building permit application will be processed. A new building or addition may require a street address assignment or correction. The permit technician will assign or correct the street address, if necessary. Building plan review and permit procedures, as well as all required fees, will be explained. All fees, except school fees, are paid directly to PRMD. School fees are paid to the applicable school district. A school fee form with the name and address of the applicable school district will be given to the applicant who will pay the fees prior to the issuance of a building permit.

The permit technician will provide the applicant a checklist of PRMD approvals required for building permit issuance. The applicant will be directed to various cubicle stations to meet with staff who will conduct a preliminary review of the construction plans. It is important to meet with the staff at each of the required cubicle stations to determine what, if any, requirements need to be completed prior to the issuance of a building permit.

After meeting with staff at each of the cubicle stations on the checklist, the applicant will be directed to the cashier for the payment of certain fees required to submit the building permit application for building plan review. This initial payment is only a portion of the total building permit fees. The balance of fees is due when the building permit is issued. The permit technician can provide an estimate of the total building permit fees.

7. **Site evaluation and plan review.** Unless a building site evaluation application was submitted in advance of submitting building construction plans, a PRMD building inspector will conduct a site evaluation of the property within approximately 15 days (see number 2 above). After the building site evaluation has been completed, a PRMD building plans examiner, or sometimes an outside plan review consultant, will begin the building plan review process. During the course of the building plan review, the applicant will be advised in writing of any necessary corrections or “redlines” that need to be made. It is very important that the applicant respond promptly to any notice of corrections so that the building plan review process is not delayed. After completion of the building plan review, the submittal package will be routed back to a permit technician who will contact the applicant.

**NOTE:** A building plan check approved submittal package is valid for one (1) year. If the building permit is not issued within that one year time period, the approved submittal package will expire. An building plan check submittal package can be renewed one time.

8. **Issuance of the building permit.** After the building plan review has been completed, a permit technician will review the application and building plans to verify that all required PRMD approvals have been issued (e.g. Well & Septic, Zoning, etc.). If there are any outstanding approvals, the permit technician will work with staff and the applicant to facilitate the issuance of those approvals. The applicant will be notified by a telephone call when the building permit is ready to be issued. If school fees are required, the applicant will be reminded that they must be paid prior to permit issuance and to bring the school fee form back to PRMD to verify payment. The applicant will be provided an invoice listing the total amount of building permit and development fees and directed to the cashier for payment. Permit fees may be paid by check or credit card. After payment of fees, the applicant will be given one set of building plans to be maintained on the job site for use by the PRMD building inspector, a field inspection record card and instructions detailing how to call for inspections during the course of construction.

9. **Complete the work in stages and call for inspections.** All work must be inspected by PRMD throughout the course of construction (see form CNI-004). It is important to call for inspections before concealing any work, (e. g., call for inspection prior to pouring concrete for the foundation.) If the building inspector identifies work that needs to be corrected, the applicant will receive a “correction notice” detailing the required work and must call for another inspection to verify those corrections have been completed. Building permits are valid for three (3) years. If the work is not completed, including a final inspection, within that three year period, the applicant must apply for a new permit to finish the work started under the original building permit.