

# How to Get a Building Permit



## How permits and inspections protect and benefit you

- **SAFETY** Your project is reviewed and inspected by experts to ensure it meets current safety standards.
- **QUALITY** Our reviews and inspections help assure the quality of your remodeling investment.
- **LEGAL** They are required by state and local laws. Unless voluntarily corrected, illegally conducted work may incur citations and reconstruction costs. And insurance companies will not cover damages to or caused by construction done without permits.

We'll answer your questions about permits and inspections.

Contestaremos sus preguntas referente a permisos en Español.

Chúng tôi sẽ trả lời thắc mắc về giấy phép của quý vị bằng tiếng Việt.

## Development Services Permit Center

San José City Hall  
200 E. Santa Clara St.  
San José, CA 95113  
408-535-3555

[www.sanjoseca.gov/permitcenter](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/permitcenter)

If you are planning to improve your property, you may need a building permit. Any change to the structural, electrical, plumbing, or mechanical configuration of any part of a home or building requires a permit. Installing certain appliances or equipment, such as a water heater, also requires a permit.

Cosmetic work, such as painting and flooring, doesn't need a permit—see our bulletin, [Projects That Don't Need a Building Permit](#), for more information. If you're seeking to legalize work done without a permit, see our bulletin, [How to Legalize Unpermitted Work](#). Both can be found at our [Building Handouts and Forms](#) web page at [www.sanjoseca.gov/building](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/building).

Here are the steps for getting a building permit, including any trade permit for electrical, mechanical, or plumbing work:

- **STEP 1 - CHOOSE THE PERMIT SERVICE THAT FITS.** Our services fit projects that range from simple to complex. This bulletin helps you choose the right service for your project.
- **STEP 2 - SUBMIT A BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATION.** You must submit a [Building Permit Application](#), except in the case of online permits, to the Permit Center. The form covers all types of permits: building, electrical, plumbing or mechanical. If other forms are needed, our staff will let you know. It's easy to fill out the application on your computer:  
  
Download the [Building Permit Application](#) from the [Building Handouts and Forms](#) web page at [www.sanjoseca.gov/building](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/building).
- **STEP 3 - ACCURATELY PREPARE PROJECT PLANS.** Except for online permits, all projects require accurately drawn plans. For many projects, anyone can draw the plans as long as they are accurate, but some project plans must be produced by licensed professionals. Permit Center staff will help you understand what you need to submit, or visit the [Building Handouts and Forms](#) web page for helpful information on the content and production of project plans.

## Our Permit Services

- **www.sjpermits.org.** Your lowest-cost permit can be obtained online at [www.sjpermits.org](http://www.sjpermits.org). Fast and easy. Limited to simple projects and installations of equipment and major appliances.
- **Over-The-Counter Service** (residential projects only). Walk in with accurate plans, walk out with a permit. Only for projects with no or minor structural changes.
- **Plan Review Service** (residential and non-residential projects). For new construction or projects with structural changes. Experts review your plans for compliance with zoning and codes. An Express Option provides even faster service.
- **Small Business Service.** If you need help finding a location for your small business or guidance through the permit process, please visit [www.sanjoseca.gov/businesscoach](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/businesscoach). Our Small Business Ally provides assistance in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese and at no cost to you.



*Not sure which service fits your project? We'll help you.  
Just call or visit the Permit Center.*

**Learn more>**

WWW.SJPERMITS.ORG ONLINE PERMIT SERVICE

Service is available for: (see sjpermits.org for the most current listing)	SF/D	MF	C/I
<b>BUILDING-STRUCTURAL permits</b>			
Reroof	●	●	●
Chimney Repair	●		
<b>ELECTRICAL permits</b>			
Air Conditioning	●		
Appliance - New or Replacements	●	●	●
Electric Vehicle Charging Station	●		
Light Fixtures - New or Replacements	●	●	
Receptacles and Switches - New <i>Replacements in an existing location don't require a permit</i>	●	●	●
Rewire - 1 or 2 story	●	●	
Solar (Photovoltaic) Systems	●	●	●
Service Change up to 200 amps	●	●	●
Service Change 1 meter up to 600 amps	●	●	●
Subpanel/s	●		
<b>MECHANICAL permits</b>			
Air Conditioning	●	●	
Appliance - New or Replacements	●	●	●
Decorative Gas Fireplace Appliance	●	●	●
Duct/Flue Alteration	●		
Evaporative Cooler	●		
Exhaust Fan	●	●	●
Furnace, New	●		
Furnace, Replacement	●	●	●
Heat Pump including condensate	●		
<b>PLUMBING permits</b>			
Backflow/Vacuum Breaker		●	●
Condensate Waste or Inlet Drain <b>M &amp; P</b>			●
DWV (Drain-Waste-Vent)/Water Alteration	●		
Dry Well or French Drain <b>M &amp; P</b>	●	●	●
Fixture - New or Multiple Replacements	●	●	
Fixture - Single Replacement	●	●	●
Gas Earthquake Valve	●	●	●
Gas Line Rough & Final <b>M &amp; P</b>	●	●	●
Gas Line Retest <b>M &amp; P</b>	●	●	●
Gas Log Lighter	●		
Property Line Cleanout	●	●	●
Repipe	●		●
Repipe, Gyp or Gyp & Shear Repair		●	●
Sanitary Sewer Replacement	●	●	●
Water Heater Replacement	●	●	●
Water Service Change	●	●	●
Water Softener Installation	●	●	
Water Treatment Equipment		●	●

**M & P** = both a mechanical and plumbing permit apply

**For**

- Simple projects
- Certain equipment installations

At these types of properties:

**SF/D** - Single-Family/Duplex properties

**MF** - Multifamily properties

**C/I** - Commercial/Industrial properties

**Benefits**

- saves time, download a permit from home
- saves \$40 compared to Over-the-Counter Service
- permit fee includes one inspection
- you can schedule inspections online

**To use sjpermits.org**

First register at [sjpermits.org](http://sjpermits.org). Be prepared to provide the property address, your email address, and credit card for payment. The system will guide you as you enter your information and select the desired permit.

Contractors must provide their state license number and City of San José business license number.

Most online permits do not require plans; only a rooftop solar installation requires a plan; it is not submitted but rather reviewed at the time of inspection.



**You can also find zoning and other kinds of information about your property at [sjpermits.org](http://sjpermits.org).**

**OVER-THE-COUNTER SERVICE**

Service is available for:	SF/D	MF
1-story additions ≤ 500 sf	●	●
1-story remodeling ≤ 750 sf (e.g., kitchen or bathroom work that does not entail moving weight-bearing walls; this remodeling may include an addition of up to ≤ 500 sf)	●	●
Accessory structures ≤ 500 sf	●	●
Engineered ICC-approved patios and screen rooms	●	●
Fire or auto damage repair work to a structure	●	●
Foundation improvements such as adding seismic bolting	●	●
Foundation repairs	●	●
Pool and septic tank abatements	●	●
Pools with a current master structural file	●	
Siding or stucco replacement	●	●
Termite and dry rot repairs; must include a report from the company performing the work	●	●
Remodeling required for code compliance, subject to above size limitations	●	

**For**

- **Projects with no or only minor structural changes**
- **Certain repairs or abatements**

At these types of properties:

**SF/D** - Single-Family/Duplex properties

**MF** - Multifamily properties that are 1-story and non-sprinklered

**Benefits**

- no appointment needed
- same day permit issuance
- fees are lower than Plan Review service

**To use Over-the-Counter Service**

Come to the Permit Center and bring:

- A completed **Building Permit Application**
- Accurate project plans; they do not have to be professionally drawn, but they must be accurate in order to get the permit issued on the day you visit.
- View our **Building Handouts and Forms** web page for guides on the content of project plans. Or visit the Permit Center where staff provide no-cost guidance on what your plans should include.

*Walk in with accurate plans;  
walk out with a permit!*



**WHAT DOES A PERMIT COST?**

Permit fees are subject to change and vary according to the type and scope of a project. For current fees, view the **Building Division Schedule of Fees** at [www.sanjoseca.gov/building](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/building). You can also obtain a no-cost estimate of your permit fees by submitting a **Permit Cost Estimate Worksheet**. Instructions are provided on the worksheet, which can be found at the **Building Handouts and Forms** web page at [www.sanjoseca.gov/building](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/building).

**PLAN REVIEW SERVICE**

**RESIDENTIAL**

Service is available for:

SF/D and MF	Plan Review	Express Plan Review
New construction	any size	
Single-story additions	any size	750 sf or less
Two-story remodeling	any size	750 sf or less
Secondary units	Yes	—
Code compliance cases	any size	—



**NON-RESIDENTIAL**

Service is available for:

C/I	Plan Review	Express Plan Review	Enhanced Express Plan Review
Retail tenant improvement	any size	Total floor area is less than 1,500 sf	Total floor area is less than 10,000 sf
Office/R&D tenant improvement	any size	Total floor area is less than 10,000 sf	Total floor area is less than 20,000 sf. No HazMat.
Restaurant tenant improvement	any size	Dining area is less than 750 sf; Scope limited to customer area	No change in use. No increase in assembly or square footage. Requires prior County Health Department and Regional Wastewater Facility approvals.
Code compliance cases	Yes	—	—
Cell site installations	Yes	—	Battery electrolyte is less than 50 gallons. Exterior battery system only. No HazMat.
Rooftop mechanical units	Yes	—	Maximum 2,500 lbs. Maximum 2,000 CFM. No HazMat.

**SMALL BUSINESS SERVICE**

Any small business that needs help going through the permit process can get guidance at no cost. Please visit [www.sanjoseca.gov/businesscoach](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/businesscoach). Our Small Business Ally provides assistance in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

**For**

- New construction
- Projects with structural changes
- Code compliance cases
- Certain installations

At these types of properties:

**SF/D** - Single-Family/Duplex properties

**MF** - Multifamily properties

**C/I** - Commercial/Industrial properties, including restaurants, offices, retail, and industrial uses.

**Benefits**

- Expert review ensures compliance with current zoning, building, and safety codes.
- Express Plan Review provides concurrent review with all involved City divisions— Planning, Building, Public Works, and Fire Prevention in one meeting. The professional designer meets with this team for a time-saving review. The fee is 1.5 times the regular plan review fee.

**To use Plan Review Service**

Regular Plan Review does not require an appointment. Express Plan Review—for both residential and non-residential service—requires an appointment; call 408-535-3555 to schedule an appointment.

Come to the Permit Center and bring:

- A completed [Building Permit Application](#)
- Accurate project plans; some projects may require professionally-drawn plans. Please check with City staff.
- View our [Building Handouts and Forms](#) web page at [www.sanjoseca.gov/building](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/building) for guides on the content of project plans. Or visit the Permit Center where staff provide guidance on what your plans should include.

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