



## HOW TO OBTAIN A BUILDING PERMIT SUMMARY

The purpose of this guidance document is to help customers better understand the building permit process by summarizing the basic steps of the process. This guidance document is intended as a guide only. Forms referenced in this document contain supplemental information and are available on the County website.

Building permits may be applied for at the Department of Planning and Land Use (DPLU), Building Division:  
5201 Ruffin Rd., Suite B, San Diego, CA 92123-1666  
Office Hours: 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM Monday through Friday  
<http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu>  
(858) 565-5920



Contact information for Zoning, Land Development, and Department of Environmental Health (DEH) Counters:  
5201 Ruffin Rd., Suites B, C, & D, San Diego, CA

Zoning Counter  
(858) 565-5981

Land Development Counter  
(858) 694-2055

DEH Counter  
(858) 565-5173

### BUILDING PERMIT PROCESS

A building permit is required to construct, enlarge, alter, convert, repair, move, or demolish a structure. Permits are also required for grading, plumbing, electrical, and mechanical work. Permits must be obtained prior to construction. For a list of work exempt from permit, see *Permit Requirement Exceptions* (form [BD #110](#)).

To obtain a building permit, an applicant must submit building plans and a building permit application for the proposed work. The plans are reviewed by County staff for compliance with codes and ordinances. Plan review must be completed and approved, all permit conditions must be satisfied, and fees must be paid before a permit can be issued. See the *Sample Conditions of Approval* (form [DPLU #712](#)) for a list of potential conditions which may apply. A customized list will be generated when the building permit application is submitted.

A County building inspector must approve each part of the subsequent construction as it progresses, verifying that the work is done safely and in accordance with the approved plans and codes. Once construction begins, an inspection must be requested – and construction progress demonstrated – every six months for a building permit to remain active. Permits have a maximum duration of three years. Expired building permits may be renewed for a percentage of current fees, but the project may be subject to new regulations in effect at the time of the renewal.

#### Over-the-Counter (OTC) Permits

Some projects may be processed “over the counter” (OTC) at the discretion of the Building Division staff. Minor projects with quality drafted plans may be eligible for OTC review. Plans of poor quality are more time-consuming to review and will not be checked OTC.

For an OTC permit, no appointment is made for submittal and County staff performs plan review at the counter while you wait. Projects typically require plan corrections and/or outside agency clearances. In most cases, at least one return visit is necessary. Requirements for permit issuance are the same for OTC and log-in permits.

## Log-In Permits

For projects required to be “logged-in”, building plans are submitted for review by County staff. The customer will be notified once the plans have been reviewed and are ready for pick-up.

Projects associated with code enforcement cases (FICO) must be logged in for review; these projects will not be processed OTC. This document does not specifically address code enforcement projects; which will require additional steps. Please consult with your code enforcement officer to discuss processing of these projects.

## **PERMIT, IMPACT & AGENCY FEES**

The building permit and inspection program is funded entirely by fees and does not receive revenue from taxes. Plan check and permit fees are calculated based on the cost of providing the service. Fees vary depending on the nature and scope of the project. Typical new house fees (plan check & permit through final inspection) range from \$3,000 - \$6,000\*. Building plan check and permit fees can be estimated with the *Building Construction Permit Fees* (form [DPLU #613](#)) and by using the *Building Plan Check and Permit Fee Estimator Spreadsheet* available online at: <http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/bldgforms/index.html>.

\*Please note: This estimate does not include other fees not administered by the Building Division, including impact fees (transportation impact fees (TIF), park fees (PLDO), flood control, etc.) and agency fees (school fees, fire mitigation fees, sewer & water, etc.) that must be collected prior to issuance. These impact and review fees can be a sizeable amount (\$10,000+) and should be researched by the applicant prior to applying for a building permit.

## **PROCESSING TIME**

Plan check turnaround times for “log-in” plan checks vary due to workload. Typical backlog time for initial plan check after application submittal and payment of plan check fees is approximately four weeks for residential projects and six weeks for commercial projects. Overall processing time between initial submittal and permit issuance is often prolonged due to multiple re-check cycles. About half of projects submitted require more than two plan check cycles. The best way to save time in the process is by submitting quality plans, thoroughly addressing all plan check correction items, and by returning plans for re-check in a timely manner.

## **PLAN CHANGES**

Projects must be constructed as shown on the approved plans. Any changes to the project must be submitted to County staff, reviewed, and approved before commencing work. Inspections will be delayed until the plan change process is complete. See the *Plan Change Guidance Document* (form [DPLU #803](#)) for more information.

# **BASIC BUILDING PERMIT PROCESSING STEPS**

For most projects, the following steps must be completed before a building permit can be issued.

### **Step 1:**



- Obtain evidence of a legal lot at the Zoning counter. A parcel must have been legally created and the owner must provide evidence. (See *Determination of Legal Parcel*, form [ZC #013](#))
- Consult with DEH, Zoning, Fire, and Land Development for requirements which may affect the proposed project (i.e., flood, special area designations, route locations, septic, etc.).
- Determine setback requirements (Zoning, Fire, Department of Public Works, etc.).

### **Step 2:**



- Prepare plot plan. (See *Minimum Plot Plan Information*, form [DPLU #090](#))
- Prepare two complete sets of building plans and supporting documents (including structural calculations, truss drawings, energy calculations, etc.) based upon code requirements, zoning regulations, and other applicable provisions (e.g., DEH, DPW, Fire). (See *Minimum Essential Plan Submittal Items for Single-Family Dwellings and Accessory Structures*, form [DPLU #050](#))

### **Step 3:**



- If your project requires a DPLU minor grading permit pursuant to the County Grading Ordinance, prepare grading plans on the DPLU Grading Plan Template (cover and supplementary sheet), [GRDDPLU](#) and [GRDDPLU2](#). (See *Minimum Requirements for Grading Plans*, form [DPLU #173](#) and *Minor Grading Plan Checklist*, form [DPLU #009](#))
- For large grading (L-Grade) projects, please contact Land Development for requirements.

**Step 4:**

- Bring building plans (and minor grading plans, if applicable) and all supplemental information to the Building Plan Pre-Submittal Review (BPPR) counter and obtain Pre-Submittal Review approvals (Zoning, Building, Land Development, and DEH).
- Schedule an appointment for project submittal as required by Pre-Submittal Review. An appointment is required to submit plans for a project unless it is determined to be OTC.

**Step 5:**

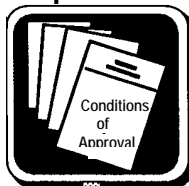
- Complete the *Building Permit Application* (form DPLU #291) and, if applicable, the *Grading Permit Application* (form DPLU #352). Applications are available at the Building Division.
- Completely fill out the applicant's portion of the application(s).
- If the property owner is to construct the project, read and complete *Owner-Builder Information and Verification*, form [DPLU #421](#).

**Step 6:**

- Return to the Building Division at the scheduled appointment time.
- Submit building plans and permit application. Allow at least one hour for project submittal.
- If a minor grading permit is needed, submit grading plans and grading permit application after submitting your building permit application. Process grading separately per the Conditions of Approval. Rough grading inspection must be approved prior to building permit issuance.

**Step 7:**

- Receive plan check fee invoice. (See *Building Construction Permit Fees*, form [DPLU #613](#))
- Pay plan check fees. Plan check will not begin until the balance is paid in full.

**Step 8:**

- Read all documents received at plan submittal, including the conditions of approval. All conditions of approval must be completed prior to issuance of the building permit.
- A plan check is valid for one calendar year from the date the plans are submitted. If the plan check expires, the plans must be resubmitted and a new plan check fee paid.

**Step 9:**

- Obtain required clearances as specified by the conditions of approval. Several of these items should be addressed soon after plan submittal, including:
  - DEH review of septic or sewer
  - Clearance letters for school, water, and sewer agencies
  - Other conditions identified

**Step 10:**

- Plans are reviewed and correction lists are generated by the following County specialties (as required):
 

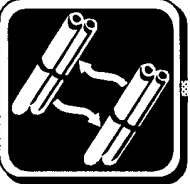
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Engineer (Structural)</li> <li>▪ Planner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Electrical, Plumbing, and Mechanical</li> <li>▪ County Fire Marshal (if not in fire district)</li> </ul>
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**Step 11:**

- The project contact person on record will be notified when the plans have been reviewed and are ready to be picked up.
- Pick up plans and correction lists from the Building Division counter.

**Step 12:**

- Correct all noted deficiencies on the plans per the correction list(s) and any red/blue marks identified on the plans.
- Prepare a thorough response list to each correction list describing where and how all correction items were addressed on the plans.
- Re-print corrected plans and retain original plan-checked sets.

**Step 13:**

- Return corrected plans, old plans, correction list(s), and response list(s) for recheck.
- Repeat steps 9 through 12 (as required) until all corrections are approved.

**Step 14:**

- For projects not reviewed by the County Fire Marshal, submit plans approved by County specialties (engineer, planner, etc.) to the applicable fire district for review. For fire district contact information see *Agency Contact Lists*, form [DPLU #804](#).
- Obtain fire district approval and stamps on the plans and a completed fire mitigation form.
- If fire review necessitates plan revisions, return to the County for approval stamp transfers.

**Step 15:**

- Return signed-off correction lists and stamped, approved plans to the Building Division.
- Submit evidence that all conditions of approval for permit issuance have been satisfied.
- The Land Use Technician at the Building Division counter reviews the conditions of approval and submitted evidence to ensure all conditions have been satisfied.

**Step 16:**

- Permit invoice is issued.
- Pay applicable fees, including any or all of the following:
  - Building permit fees
  - Drainage fees
  - Expedite fees
  - Transportation impact fees
  - Fire mitigation fees
  - Other
  - Park fees
  - Sanitation district fees

**Step 17:**

- Permit is issued.
- Receive building permit, stamped and perforated approved set of plans and supporting documents, and an *Inspection Record* card (form DPLU #291B). Each of these items must be kept at the building site and available to the inspector while the project is under construction.

**Step 18:**

- Commence construction and call for inspections. To request an inspection, call our office during business hours or the 24-hour inspection request hotline (800) 351-2551 (see *Instructions for 24-Hour Inspection Hotline*, form [DPLU #598](#)). In most areas of the County, notice of at least one working day is required for inspections. We may not be able to provide next day inspections in some remote areas.

**Step 19:**

- All required inspections (including final inspection) must be passed to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy. (See *Final Residential Inspection Requirements*, form [DPLU #117](#))
- A separate document will not be provided to signify Certificate of Occupancy. The completed, signed-off permit card is the Certificate of Occupancy and should be retained.

**These forms and many others are available online at the County's web site at:**  
<http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/bldgforms/index.html>