

Construction Codes Advisory

Promoting construction of safe, healthy, habitable buildings

Building Permit Process

Question?

Why is the building permit process essential for property owners undertaking new construction or additions and what are the typical steps involved in obtaining a building permit for a new house or addition?

Answer:

As per *The Construction Codes Act* (CC Act), a building owner must obtain a valid building permit prior to commencing work on a building. In addition to satisfying this legislative requirement, there are several benefits to obtaining a building permit:

- **Peace of Mind:** Owner receives an independent third-party review by a licensed building official which provides assurance the building is safe, healthy and habitable and in compliance with the construction standards.
- **Mortgage and Insurance Coverage:** Having a valid building permit is often a requirement to obtain or maintain a mortgage or insurance on a building.
- **Record Retention:** The local authority is required to retain the records (including the approved drawings) which can be invaluable if a fire occurs in the building or when planning future alterations.

The typical building permit process for a new house or addition is as follows:



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Step 1: Building Design

A homeowner initiates the project by hiring a competent person¹ to prepare a set of detailed drawings for the project. Any elements outside of the scope of Part 9 of the National Building Code of Canada (NBC) are required to be designed by an engineer or architect. A detailed drawing package typically includes:

- Site plan
- Floor plans
- Building elevations
- Cross sections
- Structural drawings (including foundation plan, framing plans, structural details)

Step 2: Plan Review and Approval

1. A homeowner or designer submits a building permit application to the local authority. A building permit application typically includes:
 - Completed application form
 - Detailed drawing package prepared by a competent person¹
 - Any additional forms as required by the local authority (e.g. Ventilation Design Summary Sheet, Commitment for Field Review Form, etc.)
2. The local authority and their appointed building official will then review the plans for compliance with the construction standards, including the local building bylaw. If the plans satisfy the requirements, the building official will approve the application. If the plans do not satisfy the requirements, then changes will have to be made to the design before the application can be approved.
3. The homeowner or contractor will then pay the building permit fees.
4. The local authority can then issue the building permit.

Step 3: Construction

1. Once a building permit is issued, the contractor can proceed with construction following the approved set of drawings.

Step 4: Inspections

1. The appointed building official will complete inspections during construction. The local authority will define the frequency and/or timing of the inspections. It is common practice for a local authority to require inspections at the following stages for a new home or an addition to a home:
 - Footings
 - Pre-backfill
 - Framing
 - Vapour barrier
 - Pre-occupancy/final

¹ * a “competent person” is defined in *The Building Code Regulations* (the BC Regulations) as:

“...a person who is recognized by a local authority as having:

(a) a degree, certificate or professional designation; or
(b) the knowledge, experience and training;

necessary to design or review the design of a building.”

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Any deficiencies identified during the inspections are typically communicated to the owner and contractor through an inspection report issued by the appointed building official.

2. If there are any components of the building that were designed by an engineer or architect, then the engineer or architect will also need to complete a field review of the components they designed.

Step 5: Permit Closure and Occupancy

1. Once all the inspections are complete and outstanding paperwork (if any) is submitted, the local authority will then proceed to close the building permit². The owner typically receives notification of when the process is complete.
2. The homeowner can then occupy the space.

Contact Your Local Authority

The local authority is responsible for administering and enforcing construction standards, and therefore, the permitting process could differ from what is described above. Contact your local authority to discuss their permitting process and inspections and your specific project requirements.

² Some local authorities will issue an occupancy permit prior to closing the building permit. This allows the owner to occupy the space before the permit is closed. Not all local authorities have an occupancy permit program.

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