	City of Arcata, California Building Division Informational Handout

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Building Permits - First Questions

Do I Need A Permit?

A building permit is required for any new construction, demolition, remodeling, expansion, addition or repair to a structure.

Work requiring a permit includes (but is not limited to) additions, swimming pools, hot tubs, trellises, carports, sheds, skylights, covered patios, bathroom and kitchen remodeling, termite repairs, solar panels and most interior and exterior remodeling work. Additional sub-permits may also be required for plumbing, heating & cooling, re-roofing and electrical work.

Construction undertaken without a permit may be subject to a penalty on all required permits and may involve dismantling or uncovering completed work to provide access for inspection. If you are in doubt as to whether a permit is required for your project, call the local building department before starting the work.

Are Construction Plans Required?

If you asked the question, they probably are. In order to approve your building permit application the plan checker or building inspector needs to have a clear picture of your project. You must always assume that someone other than yourself is going to do the construction. Very minor work, such as dry rot repair, usually does not require plans. Kitchen and bathroom remodels, removal or addition of walls, exterior changes, additions, will all require plans.

Applying for a Building Permit

Who May Apply For A Permit?

Property owners or licensed contractors may apply for a building permit or sub-permit. Contractors must provide a Certificate of Workers' Compensation Insurance. Property owners doing their own work will be required to sign an "Owner-Builder Declaration" stating that they are actually doing their own work and are exempt from the requirement of having Workers' Compensation Insurance, or they will be required to provide a Certificate of Insurance.

How Do I Apply For A Permit?

The first step is to fill out a building permit application form. This form must be submitted for all construction and must be completely filled out and signed. If the applicant is lacking any information asked for on the form, this should be brought to the attention of the staff

member accepting the application so that he or she can assist the applicant in completing the form.

For an interior remodeling project, the applicant must submit two copies of complete floor plans with details indicating the proposed changes. Be sure to indicate clearly what is new work and what exists, what is to remain and what is to be removed.

For additions or new construction, the applicant must submit two sets Title 24 State Energy calculations along with a CF-1R form. CF-1R form with signature shall appear on plans.

Before preparing your plans, be sure to check with the Community Development Department to see if you are in a flood zone. This requirement applies to all applications for exterior modifications.

Construction work must start within 180 days of the issuance of the permit. If work has not been started and no inspections have been called for in this period, the permit will be declared null and void. The permit may be renewed for one-half the original permit fee if no change in the plans are made, but the renewal process may only be used up to one year after issuance. Beyond that time a new application and full fee will be required.

The Building Official may extend an unexpired permit once for a period not exceeding 180 days on written request by the permittee showing reason(s) for not commencing the construction.

How Much Will It Cost?

Building permit fees are based on a proportion of the total construction cost, including all materials and labor involved in the proposed work. A Building Division plan-checking fee is assessed at 65 percent of the building permit fee. These plan check fees must be paid upon submittal of the plans and application.

Plumbing, mechanical and electrical permit fees are based on the actual work done (such as how many receptacles, sinks, fans, etc). Re-roofing permit fees are based on the value of the entire job, including materials and labor.

Preparation of Plans

What Kind Of Plans Are Required?

All plans must include the name, address, stamp and signature of the architect, engineer, designer or other person preparing the plans. No marked-over or altered plans will be accepted. If major revisions are necessary or additional information is required, the original drawings must be corrected and resubmitted.

Completeness and clarity of the drawings is essential. Remember that the plan checker can only review your plans to the level of the information you supply. Your plans would be considered complete if you could give them to a total stranger and he/she could understand how the building will be constructed and what the finished project will look like. Incomplete and unclear plans can delay issuance of your permit.

Information Required On Drawings

Plan size shall be 18 inches by 24 inches minimum and 24 inches by 36 inches maximum. Plot plans must be included in plans for any work, which alters the exterior of an existing structure, or any new buildings. Plot plans must show all property lines and lot dimensions. Front, rear and side setback distances to buildings shall be noted along with the building's exterior dimensions. Show all covered patios, porches and roof overhangs. Indicate all public and private easements and underground utility lines. Show proposed and existing gas and electric meter locations. Plot plans should be drawn to a scale of 1/8" = 1'-0" or 1" = 10'-0".

Foundation plans, which include a typical footing section, must be drawn for all new construction or first floor additions. Indicate the location and size of under-floor access (except for slab-on-grade type construction).

Floor plans must show all walls, plumbing fixtures, door, windows, skylights, major appliances, kitchen counters, furnace and water heater locations. Door and window sizes must be indicated and room dimensions must be shown. Ceiling heights can be noted in the plans or in detail sections. Electrical receptacles, switches, fans, smoke detectors and light fixtures may be shown on the floor plan if sufficient clarity is maintained, or may be shown on a separate electrical plan. Attic access location and size, stairway width, landing size and the rise and run of stairs must be noted. Fireplace location and hearth sizes must be noted.

Framing plans must indicate the sizes of floor joists and girders, ceiling joists and roof rafters or beams, lumber grade, direction and spacing. If you are using main beams, trusses or any unconventional framing, structural calculations and details must be submitted. These calculations and details must be stamped and signed by a licensed architect or engineer.

Floor plans, wall elevations, foundation and framing plans must be drawn to a minimum scale of 1/4" = 1'-0".

Four exterior elevations are required which show windows, doors, skylights and architectural finish features, along with chimney extensions, under-floor and attic venting location and sizes. Height of buildings must be indicated and the daylight plane lines indicated to show compliance with zoning regulations.

Is An Engineer or Architect Needed?

There are instances when you must have a professional's help on your project. Some examples:

All new construction requires a soils report.

When the design of your structure requires engineering calculations, i.e. when you are using prefabricated trusses or glued-laminated beams or you are not designing by conventional standards.

When you are building a retaining wall over 48 inches in height; measured from the bottom of footing to the top of the wall or the retaining wall has a surcharge i.e. slope greater than 2:1, structure.

There are instances when you are not required to but should seriously consider retaining a professional to help you with your project. Some examples:

When the size or the complexity of the project exceeds the time you can devote to it. A rushed job on the drawings or a lack of experience can lead to errors, which may be costly to fix during construction.

When the cost of the project justifies the expense. Professionals can assist you in accomplishing the design goals using the most efficient methods/materials at a cost within your budget.

How Many Copies Of The Plans Do I Need?

The number of plan sets required is based on the number of agencies that must review your project. Please refer to section titled "Plan Set Requirements" on the last page. One set will be returned to the permit applicant as the "JOB COPY", one duplicate set will be retained by the jurisdiction and one set, by law, must be retained for the County Assessor.

Do I Need An Encroachment Permit?

If your construction project requires frontage improvements or any other work to be performed in the City Right-of-Way, an encroachment permit will be required. If no work is being done, but the Right-of-Way will be occupied or used for storage i.e. storage bins, ladders, scaffolding, an encroachment permit will still be required.

Where Do I Obtain An Encroachment Permit?

Contact the City of Arcata Public Works Department located at 736 F St., or call 822-5957 for further details.

Plan Set Requirements

Compare your proposed project with the review responsibilities listed below. Follow the instructions in each section, total the number of sets as applicable, and submit that number of plan sets with your permit application.

#1 - Two sets of plans are the minimum required for Building Division Review. This is for projects that require review only by the Building Inspection Division, when there is no addition of square footage.	**2**
#2 - The addition of square footage requires the City to provide a copy of the drawings to the Humboldt County Assessor. If you are adding square footage or remodeling, add one set of plans.	**+1**
#3 - If your project is: **a. For a Commercial, Industrial or Multifamily use; or** **b. For a building containing Hazardous Materials,** **one set of plans is required for review by the Fire Department. Add one set of plans.**	**+1**
#4 - If your project is being plan checked by an outside plan checker, i.e. commercial projects or apartments over four units. Add one set of plans.	**+1**

Total Number Of Sets = _____