

Frequently asked questions of Building and Safety

1. Q: Do I need an Architect or Engineer to stamp my plans if I remodel or add square footage to my single family residence?

A: For alterations or additions you do not need an Architect or Engineer if your project meets all of the conventional construction provision of the California Residential Code.

2. Q: Do I need a permit to replace or relocate my water heater?

A: A plumbing permit is required to relocate or to install a new water heater.

3. Q: Can I submit to Building and Safety prior to obtaining Land Use clearance?

A: You can submit to Building and Safety prior to Land Use clearance. However, this can be risky if the Land Use review process places conditions on the project that require significant redesign or completely deny the request. A redesigned project will have to be completely reviewed as if it were new and additional plan check fees will be assessed. In the case of denial, the plan check fees are not refundable if the project has undergone initial plan review.

4. Q: Does an addition to a single family dwelling need sprinklers?

A: If the additional square footage results in a building that is over 5,000 square feet the entire structure will need sprinklers. In Montecito the threshold for sprinklers is 3,500 square feet. If your residence is outside an Urban Limit Line, any addition greater than 1000 square feet will require the installation of fire sprinklers in the entire structure. For more detailed information on sprinkler requirements, please see Chapter 15, section 903 of the Santa Barbara County Code.

Any additional square footage will need sprinklers if the existing dwelling is sprinkled.

5. Q: How many sets of plans and construction documents need to be submitted for with a building permit application?

A: For most projects we require that you submit 3 sets of plans and two sets of construction documents. Additional sets may be required for the Planning process.

6. Q: How long will it take to get a building permit?

A: There are many variables in the permit issuance process. Clearances from other county departments, revisions to projects, incomplete project/plan information and of course, the amount of time that the plans are in the possession of the draftsman or Registered Professional making corrections as required by the county Plans Examiner.

We offer an over the counter plan review for:

- Simple Tenant Improvements
- Residential additions 600 square feet or less located on a flat parcel and remodels
- All other projects within this size category will be targeted for review within 10 working days.

Our target time for an initial review for a project larger than 600 square feet is 30 calendar days.

7. Q: How much will my permit cost?

A: Each project can vary based upon many factors. The permit cost is based upon the size, construction type and occupancy of the building. It is difficult to calculate a permit cost without reviewing a plan that includes the above information.

Grading fees are based on the cubic yardage of earth moved (largest amount of cut or fill) and other factors such as erosion and sediment control, retaining walls, installation of drainage systems, etc. If you have questions about grading fees please contact the grading section at 934-6513.

8. Q: Where can I find the county materials and construction methods for exterior wildfire exposure as they apply to Single Family Residences?

A: The requirements can be found in Chapter 3 of the California Residential Code. This publication can be found online at the Building Standards Commission website.

<http://www.bsc.ca.gov>. In addition, the county has adopted an ordinance that requires additions to comply with the regulations.

9. Q: Does the county have the plans for my house or commercial building?

A: The Santa Barbara and Santa Maria offices keep archives of commercial plans and some residential developments. Depending on the location of your property, you can contact either office to inquire whether we have copies of your plans. If we do not have them, you can contact Architectural Archives at 805-967-3639. They are located at 415 Camino Del Remedio in Santa Barbara.

10. Q: Does a retaining wall need a permit?

A: Yes. However, if the retaining wall does NOT exceed four feet, measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall, the backfill behind the wall is level and there are no other surcharges on the wall, such as a driveway or building, the retaining wall is exempt from permits.