

# How to Get a Building Permit



## Benefits of Permits and Inspections

- **SAFETY** Your project is reviewed and inspected by experts to ensure it meets safety standards.
- **LEGAL** Permits and inspections are required by law. Illegally conducted work may incur citations and reconstruction costs.
- **LIABILITY** Insurance companies will not cover damages to, or caused by, construction done without permits. Protect yourself by getting a permit.

We'll answer your questions about permits and inspections.  
408-535-3555

Contestaremos sus preguntas referente a permisos en Español.  
408-535-3555

Chúng tôi sẽ trả lời thắc mắc về giấy phép của quý vị bằng tiếng Việt.  
408-535-3555

## 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)

Any change to the structural, electrical, plumbing, or mechanical configuration of any part of a home or building requires a building permit. Installing certain large appliances or equipment, such as a water heater, also requires a building permit.

Projects that affect the site or exterior of the home or building may need a permit from Planning or Public Works *before* you can get a building permit. Call the Permit Center to speak with a Planner about your project requirements. You may also wish to read these bulletins:

- Projects That Don't Need a Building Permit Find them at
- How to Legalize Unpermitted Work [www.sanjoseca.gov/buildingbulletins](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/buildingbulletins)

To get a building permit:

- **STEP 1 - Choose the permit service that fits.** Are you looking to save on permit fees? This bulletin explains the type and size of projects that qualify for our lowest-cost Online and Over-the-Counter services; how small business owners can use our Small Business Ally program for no-cost guidance; and options for expedited residential and non-residential plan review.
- **STEP 2 - Complete a Building Permit Application.** Unless using [sjpermits.org](http://sjpermits.org), you must submit a [Building Permit Application](#) with project plans in person at the Permit Center. The application covers building, electrical, plumbing, and mechanical permits.  
Download the form: [www.sanjoseca.gov/buildingapplications](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/buildingapplications)  
Owner-Builder applicants must also submit the [Owner-Builder Verification](#) form
- **STEP 3 - Prepare project plans.** For many projects, a licensed professional must draw the plans. But for some residential projects, as long as conventional framing is used, anyone can draw the plans as long as they are accurate. Learn more on pages 3-4, and visit [www.sanjoseca.gov/buildingbulletins](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/buildingbulletins) for information on project plans.

## Who Can Apply for a Permit

Permit applicants may only be one of the persons described below. All applicants must show a government-issued photo I.D. Executors of trusts must also show the trust paperwork that indicates they are a trustee or executor. Officers of corporations must also show the Operating Agreement, Articles of Incorporation, or Bylaws that indicate their status as an officer or partner.



**Property Owner**  
includes Trusts and Corporations

- Complete and sign:
- Building Permit Application
  - Owner-Builder Verification form
  - Bring plans and other forms as necessary to the project



**Licensed Contractor**

- Complete and sign:
- Building Permit Application
  - Bring plans and other forms as necessary to the project



**Authorized Agent**

- May complete and sign
- Building Permit Application if first authorized
  - Agents acting for Property Owners must still provide the [Owner-Builder Verification](#) form, signed by the Owner
  - Bring plans and other forms as necessary to the project

*How to Authorize an Agent.* The Building Permit Application provides a section for authorizing an agent to apply on behalf of a Property Owner or Licensed Contractor. The Property Owner or Contractor must still either sign the application OR provide a letter of authorization, with signature, to the City that names the authorized agent. The letter must be dated with the current year. A letter from Contractors must show the contractor's name, business name, and license number.

*Learn more about our Permit Services >*

**ONLINE PERMIT SERVICE: WWW.SJPERMITS.ORG**

Service is available for: <i>Subject to change; visit sjpermits.org for current list</i>	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		●	●
<b>M &amp; P = both a mechanical and plumbing permit apply</b>			

**Online permit service is for**

- Simple projects
- Certain equipment/large appliance installations

At these types of properties:

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

**MF** - Multifamily properties

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

**Benefits**

- Saves \$40 compared to Over-the-Counter Service
- Saves time, download a permit from home or office
- Permit fee includes one inspection
- Easy to 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.

Plans are generally not needed. Only a **rooftop solar installation** requires a plan, and the inspector will review that plan on-site at the time of inspection.

**Contractors**

You will need to

- provide your state license number
- provide your San José business license number

*You can also use sjpermits.org to find your zoning and other kinds of information about your property.*



[www.sjpermits.org](http://www.sjpermits.org)

## RESIDENTIAL PLAN REVIEW SERVICE

### Over-The-Counter Service

For projects with no or only minor structural changes

#### Benefits

- Permit fees are lower than other Plan Review options
- Fast! Walk in with accurate plans, walk out with a permit; no appointment is required

#### To use Over-the-Counter

Come to the Permit Center and bring:

- A completed Building Permit Application
- Accurate plans

*WHO CAN PREPARE PLANS?* If the project involves framing other than conventional framing, plans must be drawn by a licensed design professional. Otherwise, anyone can prepare residential plans, but they must be accurate to get a permit. Learn more about plans: [www.sanjoseca.gov/building](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/building)

### Plan Review and Express Plan Review Services

#### Benefits

- Comprehensive review of plans
- Express Plan Review enables the project designer to meet with inter-department staff for a time-saving concurrent review (fee is 1.5X regular plan review).

#### To use Plan Review

Come to the Permit Center (no appointment) and bring:

- A completed Building Permit Application
- Accurate plans with, if needed, professional calculations

#### To use Express Plan Review

Call 408-535-3555 to make an appointment.

	Over-The-Counter (OTC) SF/D MF limited to 1-story non-sprinklered and 4 or less units	Express Plan Review SF/D and MF properties	Plan Review SF/D and MF properties
New construction	—	—	yes
Secondary/Accessory dwelling units	—	—	yes SF only
Accessory structures	must be ≤ 500 sf	must be < 750 sf	any size
Single-story addition	must be ≤ 500 sf	must be ≤ 750 sf	any size
Single-story remodeling	Must be ≤ 750 sf. No changes to weight-bearing walls. May be part of an addition ≤ 500 sf.	Must be < 750 sf. An addition plus remodel must be < 750 sf.	any size
Two-story remodeling	—	must be < 750 sf	any size
Engineered ICC-approved patios and screen rooms	yes	yes	yes
Fire or auto damage repair work to a structure Subject to size limitations on this chart	yes	yes	yes
Foundation improvements such as seismic bolting	yes	yes	yes
Foundation repairs	yes	yes	yes
Pool and septic tank abatements	yes	—	—
Pools with a current master structural file	yes	—	—
Siding or stucco replacement	yes	—	—
Termite and dry rot repairs; must include a report from the company performing the work	yes	—	—
Remodeling required for code compliance Subject to size limitations on this chart	yes SF/D only	yes SF/D only	yes



*WHAT DOES A PERMIT COST?* Permit fees vary according to the type and scope of a project. See current fees at [www.sanjoseca.gov/BuildingPermitFees](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/BuildingPermitFees).

*GET A NO-COST ESTIMATE* - To get a free estimate of your permit fees, follow the instructions on the [Permit Cost Estimate Worksheet](#) found at [www.sanjoseca.gov/buildingapplications](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/buildingapplications).

## NON-RESIDENTIAL PLAN REVIEW SERVICE

For commercial/industrial customers

### Benefits

- Comprehensive review for compliance with zoning, building and safety codes.
- Offers expedited options: Express, Enhanced and STI-ITI. Project designer can meet with inter-department staff for a time-saving concurrent review. Fee is 1.5X regular plan review.

### To use Plan Review

Come to the Permit Center (no appointment needed) and bring:

- A completed Building Permit Application
- Accurate plans and, if needed, calculations

### To use Express/Enhanced Plan Review

Call 408-535-3555 to make an appointment.

### To use STI-ITI Plan Review

Email [targeted.review@sanjoseca.gov](mailto:targeted.review@sanjoseca.gov) to make an appointment.

*PLAN PREPARATION* - At [www.sanjoseca.gov/buildingbulletins](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/buildingbulletins), you will find a number of handouts and checklists to assist with plan requirements. Additionally, see [Bulletin 240 - Plans That Require an Architect or Engineer](#) for more information on plan preparation.



	Express Plan Review	Enhanced Express Plan Review	Special Tenant Improvement (STI) & Industrial Tool Installation (ITI)	Plan Review
Industrial Tool Installation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Office/R&D tenant improvement	Total floor area is less than 10,000 sf	Total floor area is less than 20,000 sf. No HazMat.	any size	any size
Retail tenant improvement	Total floor area is less than 1,500 sf	Total floor area is less than 10,000 sf	—	any size
Restaurant tenant improvement	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.	—	any size
Rooftop mechanical units	—	Maximum 2,500 lbs. Maximum 2,000 CFM. No HazMat.	Yes	Yes
Cell site installations	—	Battery electrolyte is less than 50 gallons. Exterior battery system only. No HazMat.	—	Yes
Code compliance cases	—	—	—	Yes

## SMALL BUSINESS SERVICE

Service is available for

- No-cost permitting guidance for all small businesses
- Streamlined small business restaurant permitting
- Business registration guidance

Our Small Business Ally staff provide assistance in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese on permitting and inspection processes and City business registration requirements. Please visit [www.sanjoseca.gov/businesscoach](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/businesscoach) to learn more.

To reach a Small Business Ally or to schedule a meeting, email: [juan.borrelli@sanjoseca.gov](mailto:juan.borrelli@sanjoseca.gov)  
[xuan.ha@sanjoseca.gov](mailto:xuan.ha@sanjoseca.gov)

This publication can be made available in alternative formats, such as Braille, large print, audio tape or computer disk. To make a request, call 408-535-7770 (voice) or 408-294-9337 (TTY).

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