

City of Fort Smith Building Permit Process Frequently Asked Questions

Question: Who must obtain a building permit?

Answer: This answer is the same for residential or commercial building. Any owner or authorized agent who intends to construct, enlarge, alter, repair, move, demolish, or change the occupancy of a building, structure or sign, or to erect, install, enlarge, alter, repair, remove, convert or replace any electrical, gas, mechanical or plumbing system, the installation of which is regulated by this code, or to cause any such work to be done, shall first make application to the building official and obtain the required permit. Specific questions about your project can be directed to the Building Safety Division staff at 479-784-2206 or visit www.FortSmithAR.gov/departments/building.

Question: If I replace my front door do I need a permit?

Answer: No, unless you are replacing the structural elements in the area of the door.

Question: If I replace my windows or my roof, do I need a building permit?

Answer: Yes, this would be considered a repair for maintenance of your building or home and would require a permit. Specific building and life safety requirements related to roofing and windows must be checked.

Question: If I paint my house or business inside or out, do I need a building permit?

Answer: No, the City of Fort Smith does not require you to have a permit unless you are painting in the historic or downtown district.

Question: If I replace my carpet for my home or business, do I need a building permit?

Answer: No, the City of Fort Smith does not require you to have a permit to replace your carpet.

Question: I am building a retaining wall in my yard; do I need a building permit?

Answer: Yes, per city adopted codes and ordinances, the wall must be permitted and inspected.

Question: I am building a fence in my yard; do I need a building permit?

Answer: No, not at this time.

Question: Do I need a building permit for pre-fabricated carports and storage buildings?

Answer: Yes, all carports and storage buildings require building permits.

Question: Do I need a building permit for a swimming pool?

Answer: Yes, all pools must be permitted and inspected.

Question: Do I need a permit for a driveway?

Answer: Yes, all driveways must be permitted.

Question: Do I need a permit for the replacement or addition of siding to my home or structure?

Answer: Yes. this would be considered a repair for maintenance of your building or home and would require a permit.

Question: Will my contractor obtain the permit?

Answer: Reputable contractors know the requirements and abide by them. In most cases, the contractor will obtain the building permit for the property owner. Unfortunately, not all contractors comply with the applicable code requirements. Remember, regardless if your contractor or the homeowner obtains the permit, the property owner is ultimately responsible for ensuring that all work on his/her property meet city adopted codes and standards. A homeowner should make sure the contractor obtains a permit and all work is inspected and approved.

Question: Do plans have to be stamped by an architect?

Answer: Most single family and duplex projects as well as some small non-residential projects do not require an architect or engineer. However, Arkansas law requires an architect and/or engineer prepare construction drawings on several occupancies and significant buildings as defined by the law. Also, some significant problems may require the consultation of an architect and engineer on any building. Any specific questions regarding a specific project should be directed to the Building Official as soon as you start the planning phase of any building project.

Question: How much lead time is needed to do an inspection?

Answer: If you call the inspection office between 8 and 9 a.m. or requested the inspection the previous afternoon, the inspection will be that morning and if you call the inspector between 1 and 2 p.m., the inspection will be performed that afternoon. An inspection request can be made anytime during the day by contacting the Building Safety Division office.

Question: If a change has to be made because an inspector would not sign off on a project, can I get the same inspector to look at the changes that have been made?

Answer: Yes, unless the inspector is unavailable; however, the file is noted for the necessary change and only that change would be inspected on the second visit.

Question: What is the avenue of appeal if there is a disagreement regarding code specification?

Answer: The building official will settle any disputes and if necessary an appeal can be made to the board of appeals. The respective boards meet on call and can be convened as soon as the committee members can be contacted.

Question: May I perform my own plumbing, electrical or mechanical work?

Answer: Yes, a homeowner may perform work regulated by the plumbing, electrical and mechanical codes as adopted by the City of Fort Smith in a single family dwelling that is owned and occupied by the homeowner as his/her principal residence. However, the owner must appear before the inspectors who will inquire into the knowledge and capabilities of the homeowner to perform the needed task before a homeowner's permit can be issued.

Question: Can I contact the City staff to discuss my project before and during my planning and design phase?

Answer: Absolutely. The division asks that all owners, contractors, and design professionals meet with the staff to help during the planning or design phase of a project. Often, these meetings will save the owner or authorized agent time and money and will minimize misunderstandings.

Building Permit Information and Inspection Requirements

Requirements for obtaining building permits are listed on the attached Residential Construction Requirements and Commercial Plan Review.

When you have successfully obtained a building permit you received a card. The building permit card shall be posted in a conspicuous place on the front of the premises. The permit card shall be kept on the property until the building inspector removes it on the final inspection.

Inspections shall be made by the inspectors upon notification of the permit holder. Inspectors will either approve the construction as completed by signing off on the card or will notify the permit holder wherein it does not pass inspection or comply with the applicable code. At times an exception sheet is attached to the card, so that the builder will know what has to be rectified.

FOUNDATION INSPECTION

This is made after the trenches have been excavated, the forms erected, all reinforcing steel in place, and all the materials for the foundation delivered. Concrete supplied from a central mixing plant does not have to be on the site during inspection.

CONCRETE SLAB

This is made after all in-slab or under floor plumbing, electrical, conduit, piping accessories and their ancillary equipment items have been inspected. Reinforcing wire, vapor barrier and termite protection must be installed prior to this inspection.

PLUMBING, MECHANICAL AND ELECTRICAL

Separate permits are required for plumbing, gas, electrical, and mechanical installations. Rough (in wall, ceiling, attic) inspection made prior to covering or concealment and before fixtures are set.

FRAME INSPECTION

This is made after the roof, all framing, fire blocking and bracing are in place; after all pipes, chimneys and vents are complete, and after the rough electrical, mechanical, plumbing and heating wires, pipes and ducts are approved. WALLS CANNOT BE COVERED UNTIL THIS INSPECTION IS APPROVED.

FINAL INSPECTION

Plumbing and electrical and mechanical inspections are required before the final building inspection.

FINAL BUILDING INSPECTION

This is made when the building has been completed and is ready for occupancy. A BUILDING CANNOT BE LAWFULLY OCCUPIED UNTIL A FINAL INSPECTION AND SUBSEQUENT CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY IS ISSUED THEREFORE.

Work shall not be done on any part of a building or structure beyond the point indicated in each successive inspection without first obtaining the written approval of the Building Official, or his designated agent. Such written approval shall be given only after an inspection shall have been made of each successive step in the construction as indicated by each of the foregoing inspections.

INSPECTION REQUESTS are taken between the hours of 8:00 - 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 - 2:00 p.m., Monday thru Friday at the numbers listed below.

BUILDING: 784-2239 or 784-2240

ELECTRIC: 784-2233 or 784-2234

PLUMBING: 784-2215 or 784-2475

MECHANICAL: 784-2238

SIGNS

There are different requirements for sign building permits. They are separated by portable signs and permanent signs.

PORTABLE SIGNS

THE APPLICANT:

- a). Shall obtain a Sign Permit Application from the Building Safety Division.
- b). Shall fill out the application form and submit it along with a site plan showing the locations the sign on the property.
- c). The application must be complete in order for the Building Safety Division to review its contents.
- d). The applicant shall contact all the utility departments to verify utility locations.
- e). If the sign is along a state highway, the applicant shall contract the highway department for their approval.
- f). Questions concerning sign regulations, contact the Planning Division at 784-2216.

THE APPLICATION WILL BE:

- a). Checked by the Planning Division to determine if the proposed sign will comply with the Municipal Code and Ordinances.

THE APPLICANT SHALL NOT PLACE THE PORTABLE SIGN ON THE PROPERTY UNTIL NOTIFIED BY THIS DEPARTMENT TO INSTALL THE SIGN.

PERMANENT SIGN PERMITS

ONE SIGN PER APPLICATION

THE APPLICANT:

- a). Shall obtain a Sign Permit Application from the Planning Division or the Building Safety Division.
- b). Shall fill out the application form and submit it along with installation plans to the Planning Division, Room 331, or Building Safety Division, Room 405 of the Stephens Building, 623 Garrison Ave.
- c). The application must be complete in order for the City staff to review its contents.
- d). The applicant shall contact all the utility departments to verify utility locations.
- e). If the sign is along a state highway, the applicant shall contact the highway department for their approval.
- f). Questions concerning sign regulations, contact the Planning Division at 784-2216.

THE APPLICATION WILL BE:

- a). Checked by the Planning Division to determine if the proposed sign will comply with the Municipal Codes and Ordinances.
- b). Checked by the Building Safety Division staff to determine if the proposed sign will comply with the Municipal Codes and Ordinances.
- c). If the structure and plans comply with the above mentioned requirements, the applicant will be notified so that they may obtain the sign permit.

THE APPLICANT SHALL PLACE THE PERMIT CARD ON THE SITE BEFORE BEGINNING CONSTRUCTION. IF WORK BEGINS BEFORE OBTAINING PERMIT, THE PERMIT FEE WILL BE DOUBLED!

Development of Land

The requirements of an individual or business proposing a land use or development are rather complex. A meeting with the Planning Division staff is suggested before procedures or possibly even feasibility studies begin. Attached are some flow charts showing some of the requirements. The website www.fsark.com/future/planning is very helpful with information gathering.