

Building or Renovating?

Baltimore Housing's Office of Permits & Building Inspections Can Help.

In order to protect both public safety and property values citywide, we issue building permits and perform associated inspections to ensure that projects are completed safely and in compliance with the City's building code.

What requires a permit?

A permit is required to:

- Construct, enlarge, alter, repair, rehabilitate, demolish or move any structure
- Erect, install, enlarge, alter, repair, remove, convert, or replace any electrical, gas, mechanical or plumbing system
- Change the use of any structure or land
- Perform any grading or excavating

As a general rule of thumb, minor repairs do not usually require permits, unless the item is being replaced altogether or significantly altered. Renovations, modifications, and reconstructions always require a permit. This list below is not all-inclusive but is representative of work that requires a permit:

- Placing boards on a property for security reasons
- Adding or upgrading electrical outlets or voltage
- Adding a gas stove
- Building rooftop decks or rear decks
- Building a swimming pool
- Changing a building's use or occupancy
- Building or altering a chimney
- Demolishing a building or shed
- Erecting a fence
- Erecting or hanging signs
- Installing a furnace or HVAC system
- Installing a lawn irrigation system
- Moving a building
- Operating a public assembly space
- Excavating, paving or resurfacing an area
- Removing an interior wall
- Replacing pipes and sinks
- Replacing windows, doors, and siding

Frequently Asked Questions

1) Why Do I Need a Permit?

a) It's the law. Neglecting to obtain a permit when required will result in fines and penalties.

b) Permits, and the inspection services provided along with them, help ensure the safety, health, and welfare of the citizens of Baltimore City. When a permit is obtained, it ensures that related work is performed by a licensed contractor, when or as required, and that construction will be inspected by a City inspector who will verify that the work has been done safely and in compliance with the City's building code. Conformance with these standards helps protect citizens from dangers such as structural collapse and fire.

c) Permits help protect the value of your home. They serve as proof to future buyers that work was performed safely and correctly. Permits also help ensure that a neighbor's work, done properly, will not damage your property.

2) Who is responsible for obtaining the permit?

The property owner is responsible for obtaining the permit, although an authorized party may be sent to physically apply for and receive the permit. The owner must ensure that the contractor is working within the permit's scope.

3) If my contractor is licensed, do I still need a permit?

Yes. Proof of the contractor's license is required for obtaining most permits, but in no case does a license substitute for a permit.

4) If I own the home and am the one doing the work, do I need a permit?

Yes. If the work requires a permit, you need a permit, even if you are the homeowner.

5) Do I need a permit to build a deck on my house? To replace the windows? To build a fence around my yard?

Yes. A permit is required for all of these activities. As a general rule of thumb, minor repairs do not usually require permits, unless the item is being replaced altogether or significantly altered. Renovations, modifications, and reconstructions always require permits.

6) What are the consequences for working without a permit?

In addition to paying any assessed administrative penalties, you must apply for the appropriate permit. You will be required to apply for the proper permits and pay the appropriate fees. You will be penalized by the greater of: a fine up to \$1,000 or 50% of the total permit fee. If the work you have done is code-compliant, the permit will be issued and appropriate inspections will be made. If the construction does not conform to code, you have two options: construction may be brought into compliance under a newly issued permit, or construction may be removed. For removal of especially large projects, a demolition permit is required along with an inspection to ensure proper debris removal. Work without a permit is a misdemeanor and may be prosecuted at any time. It is punishable by up to one year in jail or a criminal fine up to \$1,000.

7) Do I have to post my permit in the window?

Although you are not legally required to post your permit in your window or on the building, it is recommended, so that our inspectors and other community members can see that you have obtained a permit for the work being performed. Regardless of whether the permit is posted, it must be available on-site at all times, so that it can be presented to an inspector if requested.

8) When should I schedule an inspection?

Inspection timing varies depending on the project. An inspection is required prior to covering up or concealing any part of the construction. Permit holders are required to schedule all necessary inspections.

9) If I live in a Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP) district, does that affect my permit requirements?

In general, exterior modifications and improvements require the review and approval of CHAP. Your permit will not be issued over the counter. Your permit application will be referred to CHAP, and you must obtain a Notice-To-Proceed from them in order for your permit to be issued. Useful information can also be obtained from CHAP at 410-396-4866. Please note that some minor work that would not otherwise require a permit will require one in a CHAP district. For example, but not limited to: exterior painting, installation of storm windows and replacing roofing materials.

10) When are inspections performed?

Inspections are performed by inspectors from our Permitting and Building Inspections Division between 8:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

11) How can I schedule an inspection?

Inspections can be scheduled using our automated phone system, "QuickTrac" by dialing 443-984-2776. You'll need to have your permit number ready.

12) Are fees charged for inspections?

There is no fee for an inspection as long as a permit has been issued for the work and the inspection has been requested to occur within normal working hours. However, should the first inspection fail, necessitating a re-inspection, a \$35 re-inspection fee will be applied.

13) What should I do if I suspect work is being done in my neighborhood without a permit?

To check whether a permit exists on a specific property, visit our "Existing Permit Search" tool online at: http://cels.baltimorehousing.org/Search_TM_MAP.aspx. You may anonymously report suspected unpermitted work by calling 311 or by submitting a request online after performing your search. One of our inspectors will follow-up on your request by visiting the work site and determining whether an appropriate permit has been issued.

14) When is construction work allowed?

Except in the case of specifically approved emergencies, no site work, demolition, pile driving or construction is permitted within 300 feet of a dwelling between 7p.m.-7a.m. If you see work being done

between 7p.m. and 7a.m., please call 311 and one of our inspectors will follow-up with the workers and property owner.

15) How long is a permit valid, and what happens if my permit expires?

Durations vary, but most permits are valid for 6 months. If your permit expires and work has not yet been completed, you may apply for an extension. If applied for within the 30 day period following the permit's expiration, the fee is \$52; if applied for 30-60 days following expiration, the fee is 50% of the original permit fee.

16) How long does it take to get a permit?

Most permit applications submitted without plans are issued in under an hour from our One Stop Shop at 417 E. Fayette Street, Room 100.

17) How much does a permit cost?

Permit fees vary. A fee schedule is available here: http://static.baltimorehousing.org/pdf/permits_fees.pdf

18) How long does the Plans Review process take?

Over 98% of permit applications submitted with plans are reviewed in less than 30 days. For even quicker review of certain projects, we offer an expedited process called "Fast Track." Fast Track is available for projects such as commercial tenant fit-outs or minor alterations and when plans do not require a referral to any agency other than the Fire Department.

19) Can I mail in my permit application?

If neither plans nor sketches are required, you may mail your application to the One Stop Shop at 417 E. Fayette Street, Room 100; Baltimore, MD 21202. A permit application can be downloaded from http://www.baltimorehousing.org/permit_resources.

If you still have questions, call 410-984-1809.

Ready to Apply?

Tips for Making It a Smooth Process:

Visit Our Permit One Stop Shop:

Baltimore Housing's state-of-the-art One Stop Shop is located at 417 E. Fayette Street, Room 100; Baltimore, MD 21202. Permit Applications are accepted between 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. The office is open until 4:30 p.m. The busiest hours fall between 11:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. Come Prepared

To apply for your permit, you will need:

- Permit application – pick one up at the One Stop Shop, or obtain a copy online and fill it out in advance: http://www.baltimorehousing.org/permit_resources
- Contractor's license number as required
- Detail description of the work to be performed, including sketches if necessary
- For alterations (except minor ones), new construction and/or additions, plans drawn to scale as well as a site plan if necessary indicating the existing structures, proposed work, and property lines
- Method of payment (check, money order, or cash)

Use QuickTrac to Check the Status of Your Permit

If your permit application requires leaving plans for review by our engineers, you can check its status in the review process by calling our automated phone system QuickTrac at 443-984-2776 (have your plan number handy). When you hear the status of "Ready to be Issued," your permit is ready to be picked up.

All fees noted in this booklet are subject to change.