

Navigating the Permit Process for Residential Construction Projects



Presented by:

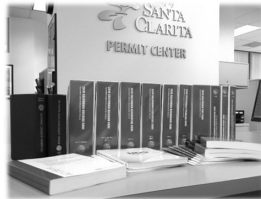
City of Santa Clarita Permit Center
23920 Valencia Boulevard Suite 140
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

Planning: (661) 255-4330

Engineering Services: (661) 286-4060

Building & Safety: (661) 255-4935

www.santa-clarita.com



Welcome!

In this information session, staff from the City's Permit Center will guide you through the building permit process for residential construction projects. You'll gain valuable insight and numerous tips to help you complete your project on-time and within budget.

Did you know...?

In 2017 Building & Safety issued
5,782 permits
and performed
21,208 building inspections
for more than
\$365 million of new construction
in the City of Santa Clarita!



Topics Covered

- Why permits are necessary
- Projects which are exempt from permits
- Risks of unpermitted construction
- Overview of construction regulations
- Preliminary phase
- City resources available
- Same-day (“over-the-counter”) permits
- Standard plans and details
- Conventional wood-framed construction
- Hiring a qualified designer
- The plan review process and eService
- Permit expediting tips
- Hiring a licensed contractor
- Pulling a building permit
- Building inspections

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Useful Definitions

Addition – Increasing the overall size of a structure, such as adding a room or building a new story

ADU – Accessory Dwelling Unit
Also JADU – Junior Accessory Dwelling Unit

Alteration or **Remodel** – Improving the interior or exterior of an existing structure, but not increasing its size

CBC, CRC – California Building Code, California Residential Code

Elevation – A height measured from a reference point. Also, a drawing of the vertical faces of a structure (as if standing on the ground and facing the structure)

Final or **Finaled** – Passed a final building inspection. A structure that is “finaled” is approved for occupancy

Grade – The elevation of the adjacent ground

Grading – Earth work. Altering the topography of a site by moving, removing, or importing soil

HVAC – Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning

Loft Addition – Adding floor area to an upper floor within a multi-story home, but not increasing the overall size of the structure

Special Inspection or **Deputy Inspection** – Inspection work performed by a third-party inspector who is registered by the City

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Why Permits are Necessary

The intent of the permit process is to **safeguard the public health, safety, and general welfare** through the following:

- **Structural strength and stability**
- **Safe exit routes from buildings**
- **Safety to life and property from fires, floods, and other hazards**
- **Sanitation**
- **Adequate lighting and ventilation**
- **Weather resistance**
- **Energy conservation and environmental sustainability**

Code-compliant structures improve and maintain the value of properties in our City.

The Insurance Services Office (ISO) evaluates the City's Building Code adoption and enforcement activities.

Permits and plans are kept by the City permanently.



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Residential Projects Which Are Exempt from Permits

A building permit is not required for certain types of small residential projects. Examples include:

- Accessory structures 120 sq. ft. or less*
- Wood, vinyl, or wrought iron fences not over 6 ft. tall
- Sidewalks and driveways*
- Decks or platforms not more than 30" above adjacent grade*
- Exterior hardscape features*
- Small canopies, awnings, or open trellises*
- Short retaining walls*
- Decorative moldings, trim, window treatments, wall coverings, painting, papering, tiling, carpeting, hardwood or tile flooring, counters or countertops, tub or shower surrounds, and similar interior finish work
- Garage and closet organizers, cabinets, or shelving*
- The installation of replacement window units installed within existing frames and where no stucco or siding is removed*
- Low-voltage wiring for security systems, telephone, etc.*

A grading permit is not required for:

- Soils work 3 feet or less below a foundation
- Minor alterations to site topography which do not change the overall drainage pattern of the site

City Planning clearance is required for all residential projects. Planning review for small and mid-sized residential projects can typically be done over-the-counter without an appointment.

Projects which are exempt from permit must still comply with all applicable regulations.

**Certain limitations apply. Please visit the City's website or contact the Permit Center for more information.*

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Risks of Unpermitted Construction

Unpermitted and/or substandard construction can expose you to the following risks:

- **Life safety and health risks**
- **Property damage due to fire, floods, and other hazards**
- **Inefficient and ineffective construction**
- **Difficulties selling the property**
- **Legal troubles**
- **Limited or prohibited occupancy (yellow or red tagged property)**
- **Added costs to resolve unpermitted or substandard work**
 - Code Enforcement citations
 - Penalty fees
 - Costs to repair, correct, and/or upgrade substandard work



Enforcement related to unpermitted and substandard construction is carried out by the City's Community Preservation Division, with support from Permit Center staff.

*In order to be legalized, unpermitted construction must comply with **current Building Code requirements** (not the codes applicable when the illegal work was done).*

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Risks of Unpermitted Construction



Fire caused by an unpermitted water heater. Not only was the structure badly damaged, but the vehicle was a total loss.



Fires caused by unpermitted electrical work.

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Risks of Unpermitted Construction



Unpermitted block wall which collapsed in the 1994 Northridge Earthquake.



Failure of an unpermitted retaining wall.



Framing cut during an unpermitted re-pipe.



Deck collapse due to inadequate connections.

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The Permit Process Saves Lives and Property



This fire destroyed the garage structure and all of the vehicles inside...

but the homes on the other side of the fire-rated wall were saved!

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Overview of Construction Regulations

Unified Development Code (UDC)

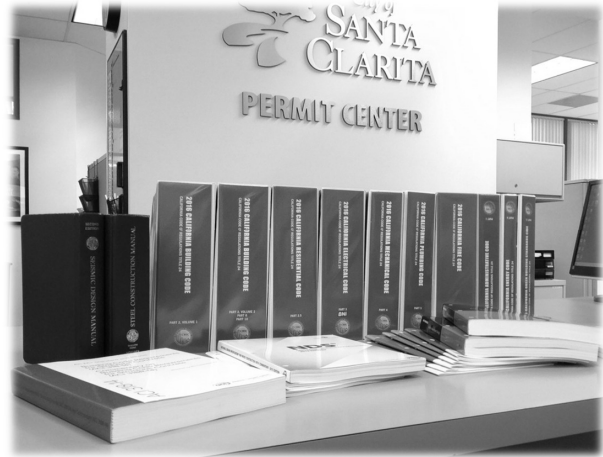
Enforced by Planning and Engineering Services

- Land use (zoning)
- Setbacks (distances from property lines and other structures)
- Aesthetics
- Grading
- Drainage

Building Codes

Enforced by Building & Safety

- California Building & Residential Codes
- California Mechanical Code
- California Electrical Code
- California Plumbing Code
- California Energy Code
- CALGreen Code
- City Amendments to the Codes



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Overview of Construction Regulations

Additional Regulations

- **Floodplain ordinance**
Enforced by Building & Safety, Engineering Services, and the City's Certified Floodplain Manager
- **Fire Code**
Enforced by L.A. County Fire Prevention
- **Sewer regulations**
Enforced by L.A. County Sanitation District
- **Septic system regulations**
Enforced by L.A. County Health Services
- **Oak tree ordinance**
Enforced by Planning and Urban Forestry
- **Landscape Maintenance District regulations**
Enforced by Special Districts
- **Asbestos regulations**
Enforced by South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD)
- **Construction safety regulations**
Enforced by Cal/OSHA
- **Oil, gas, and geothermal regulations (wells)**
Enforced by CA Dept. of Conservation
- **Cannabis (marijuana) ordinance**
Enforced by Community Preservation (Permits are not required for residential growing unless alterations are made.)

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Existing conditions and regulations can have a major impact on the design, cost, and feasibility of your construction project.

The key to successfully managing your project is to proactively identify these challenges and resolve them early on.

“Measure twice, cut once.”

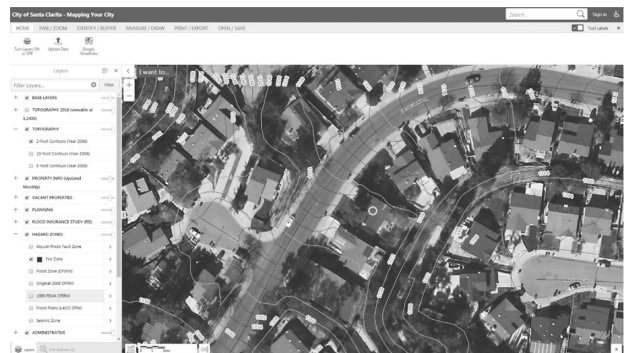
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Preliminary Phase

Before detailed plans are prepared, the following preliminary work should be done.

Identify any existing conditions that could affect the project:

- **Topography (slopes)**
- **Geotechnical (soils) conditions** (landslide, liquefaction, expansive soils)
- **Sewer/septic systems** (projects within 200 ft. of a sewer must connect)
- **Site drainage elements** (area drains, swales, etc.)
- **Flood zones**
- **Fire hazard zones**
- **Oak trees**
- **Landscape Maintenance District areas**
- **Public right-of-way encroachment**



The City's Geographic Information System (GIS) is an excellent resource

www.santa-clarita.com/gis

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Preliminary Phase

Perform property research:

- Easements
- Conditions, covenants, and restrictions (CC&Rs)
- Homeowners Association (HOA) rules
- Restricted use areas
- Lot status (legal lots)
- Legal access issues
- Unpermitted / substandard construction



L.A. County Tax Assessor Maps
maps.assessor.lacounty.gov

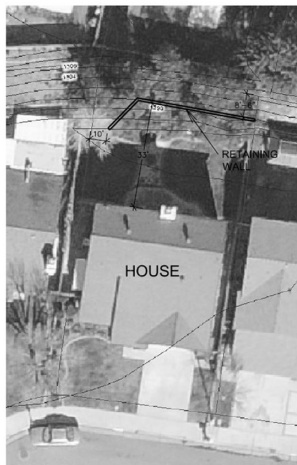
Time spent during the preliminary phase is crucial. If homeowners, designers, and builders rush through this phase, important items are often missed.

Property documents are recorded with the L.A. County Registrar-Recorder

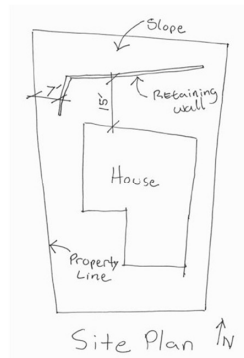
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Preliminary Phase

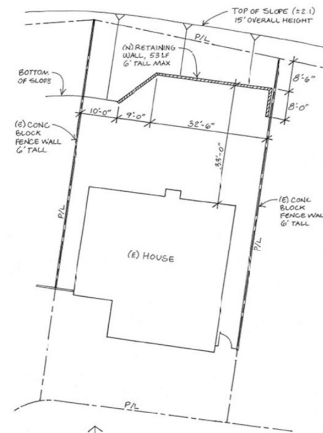
Before contacting the City's Permit Center and other agencies, you should have a good idea of what you want to build. Prepare preliminary drawings that describe the overall project and that are clear and legible.



UNACCEPTABLE



UNACCEPTABLE



ACCEPTABLE

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City Resources Available

The City's website is a great resource:

www.santa-clarita.com/planning (Planning home page)

www.santa-clarita.com/building (Building & Safety home page)

www.santa-clarita.com/engineering (Engineering Services home page)

www.santa-clarita.com/gis (GIS mapping home page)

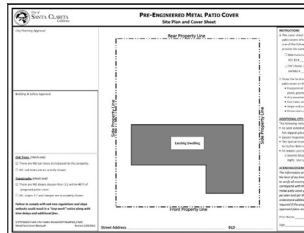
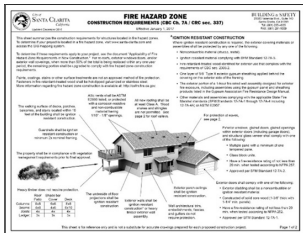
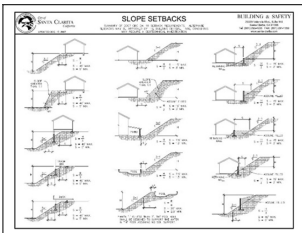
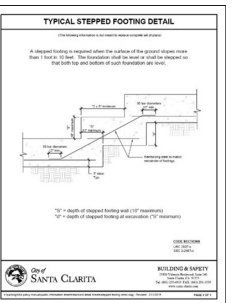
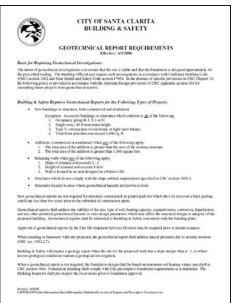
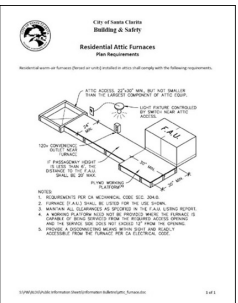
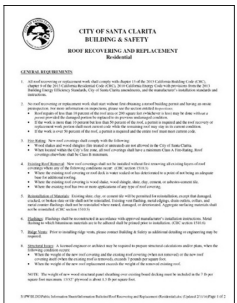
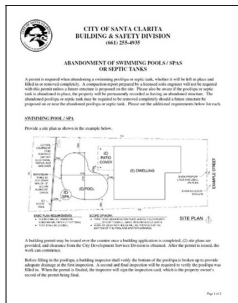
www.santa-clarita.com/eservice (eService permitting system)



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City Resources Available

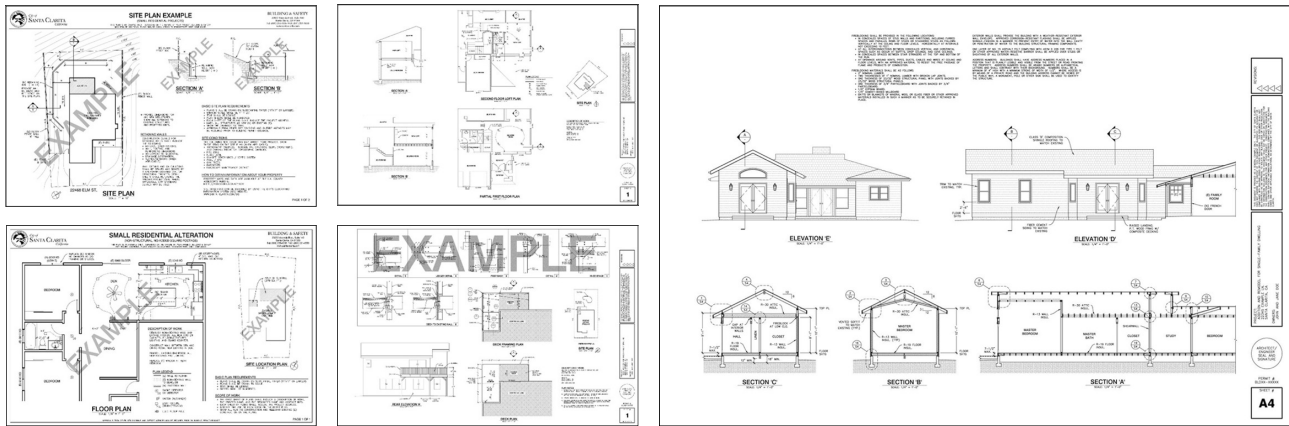
Numerous handouts and checklists are available online.



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City Resources Available

Example plans for common types of projects are available online.



Construction plans must clearly depict the location, nature, and extent of the project and show in detail that it will conform to the provisions of the Building Codes and other relevant regulations.

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Same-Day (“Over-the-Counter”) Permits

Permits for the following types of small projects are issued the same day (“over-the-counter”):

- Re-roofs
- Kitchen and bathroom remodels
- Standard patio covers
- Small mechanical, electrical, and plumbing projects (HVAC equipment replacements, new lighting or electrical plugs, water heater replacements, re-pipes, etc.)
- Fence walls and small retaining walls

Online permits are issued for re-pipes, water heater change-outs, water service, and electrical panel upgrades.

Permits are issued at the Permit Center counter during business hours.



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Same-Day (“Over-the-Counter”) Plan Reviews

Plan reviews for small projects which require no more than 30 minutes are typically performed the same day (“over-the-counter”):

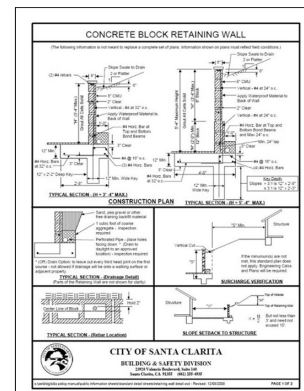
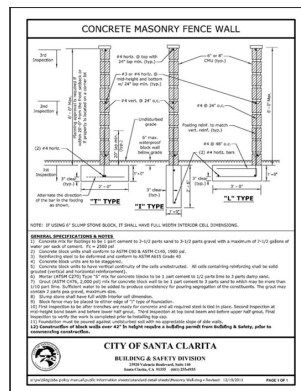
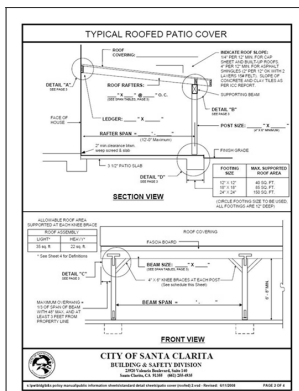
- Remodels involving minor structural or floor plan changes
- Simple single-story additions
- Small sheds and accessory structures
- Custom decks and patio covers
- Retaining walls
- Pools and spas



Over-the-counter plan check hours are:
7:30 to 11:00 a.m. Monday through Thursday
8:00 to 11:00 a.m. Friday

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Standard Plans and Details for Small Projects

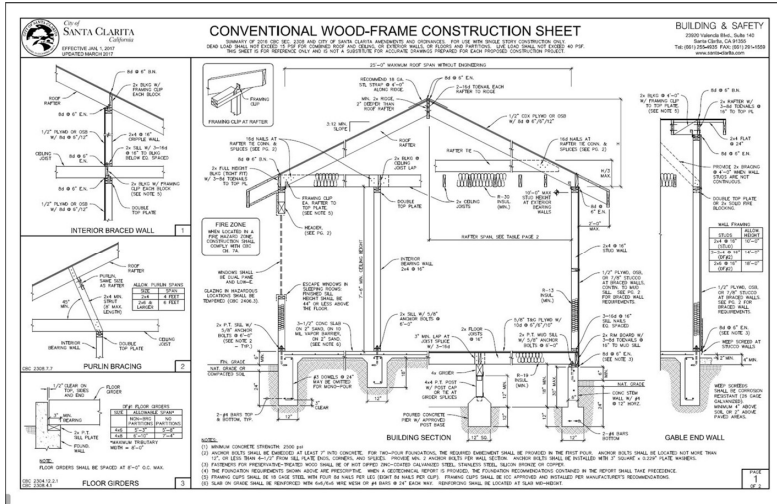


For very small projects, the City provides standard plans and details (block fence walls, retaining walls, patio covers, etc.).

Third-party standard plans also exist for metal patio covers and enclosures, pools, and other pre-fabricated elements.

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Conventional Wood-Framed Construction



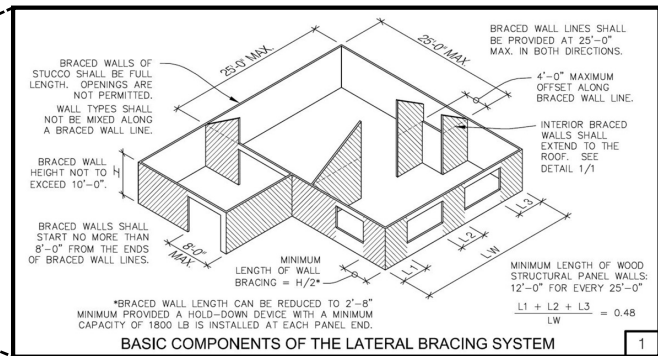
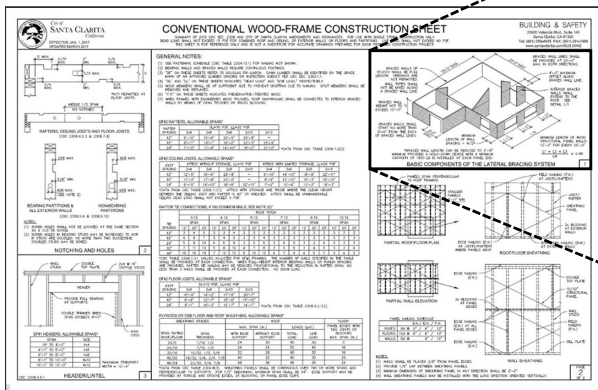
Plans for conventional wood-frame structures need not be sealed and signed by a licensed Architect or Engineer.

Conventional structures must comply with specific Building Code requirements which are more restrictive in many cases.

Simple single-story wood-framed structures may qualify as "conventional" in accordance with the Building Code.

The City's Conventional Wood-Frame Construction Sheet is available online.

Conventional Wood-Framed Construction



To qualify as conventional, the structure must be single-story, have relatively short spans, and limited openings in the walls.

Most residential projects do not qualify as conventional, and require a licensed Architect or Engineer to seal and sign the structural plans.

Hiring a Qualified Designer (Draftsperson)

The regulations governing construction are very complex. Construction plans which do not comply must be revised, and in some cases completely redesigned.

Whenever a residential project requires custom plans, a qualified designer (someone with experience preparing construction plans) should always be hired to prepare them.

Owners and contractors will sometimes attempt to save on costs by preparing the plans themselves. This often delays the permit process.

For many residential projects, a licensed Civil or Structural Engineer prepares the structural plans, and a qualified designer (unlicensed) prepares the rest of the plans (architectural, utility, energy, etc.).

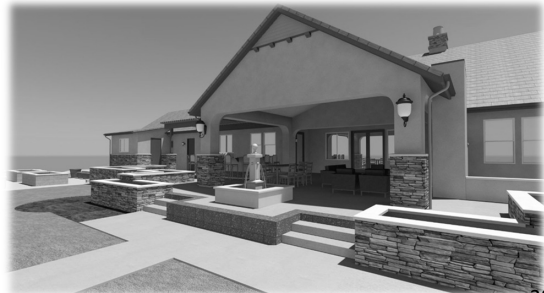


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Hiring a Qualified Designer (Draftsperson)

Questions to ask before hiring a designer:

- What qualifications does the designer have?
- Has the designer prepared plans for residential projects before?
- Can the designer provide client references and examples of his/her work?
- Is the designer directly involved in the preparation of the plans, or delegating the work to someone else?
- Will the designer submit the plans to the various City Divisions and other agencies (provide routing services)?
In many cases, the owner or contractor will do the project routing.
- Is the designer familiar with the latest Building Codes and other regulations?



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Hiring a Qualified Designer (Draftsperson)

The City cannot recommend designers to the public. However, permit information and plans are available for viewing at the Permit Center.

See the Architects Practice Act and the Professional Engineers Act for more information.

State law requires licensed designers to execute a written contract with their client prior to commencing architectural or engineering work, unless the client knowingly states in writing that work may be commenced before the contract is executed.



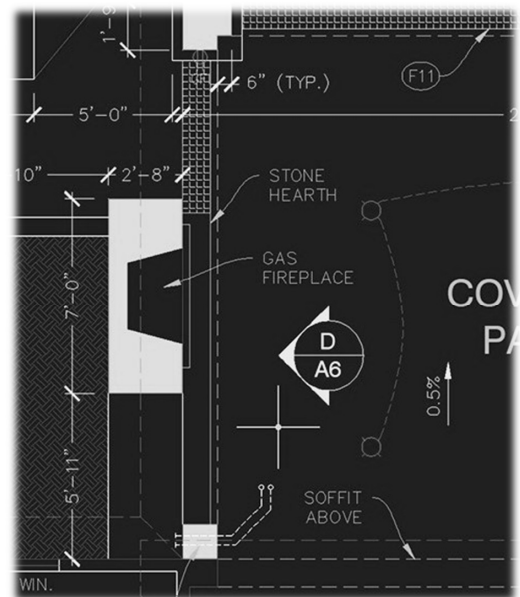
*Consumer's Guide to Hiring an Architect
published by the California Architects Board*

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Hiring a Qualified Designer (Draftsperson)

Questions to ask before signing a contract with a designer:

- Does the contract clearly describe the services to be provided?
- Does the contract clearly describe the basis of compensation and method of payment?
- Does the contract include a procedure for additional services?
- Does the contract include a procedure for terminating the contract?
- Does the contract include the professional's contact information (name, address, and license number)?
- *Does the contract include services to address agency comments/corrections and obtain approval for a building permit?*
- *Does the contract specify timeframes for completion of the professional services?*



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The Plan Review Process

Before a building permit can be issued, the project must be reviewed and approved by all of the applicable City Divisions and outside agencies (see the Agency Referral List).

Planning typically reviews small to mid-sized residential projects over-the-counter at no cost.

Turn-around time for Building & Safety plan review is typically 2-4 weeks for first review and 1-2 weeks for rechecks.

Building & Safety plan review fees are roughly 1% - 2% of the project valuation (varies with size).

Plan review fees cover one plan review and two rechecks. Additional rounds of plan review, if any, will incur additional fees.



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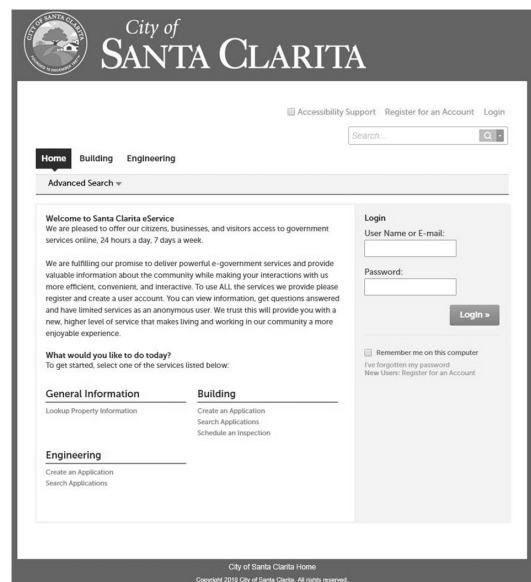
The Plan Review Process

The City's online permit system is called **eService**.

eService allows customers to:

- Create an account at **www.santa-clarita.com/eservice**
- Submit permit applications
- Upload plans and other documents
- Monitor the status of their projects
- Receive plan review comments
- Receive e-mail notifications during the process
- Pay City fees
- Schedule inspections
- See basic permit records for any property within the City

The City accepts paper or electronic plans.



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Permit Expediting Tips

Properly coordinating the submittals to the various City Divisions and other agencies is key. Delayed submittals to one or more agencies can result in changes later in the process.

Plan reviews for large projects may be expedited by paying an additional 50% plan review fee. The turn-around time is reduced by half. The availability of expedited plan review varies with workload.

Address all plan review comments before resubmitting for recheck. If you are unsure about a comment, contact the plan reviewer. Plan reviewers are available at the Permit Center counter (before 11:00 a.m.), by phone, or by e-mail.



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Plans which are incomplete or do not comply with construction regulations may need to be rechecked multiple times.

Unfortunately, some designers intentionally submit incomplete plans in order to collect a design fee or to “see what the City says” before finishing the design. This only delays the permit process. It is much more effective to meet with City staff early to obtain feedback, and submit a complete set of plans from the beginning.

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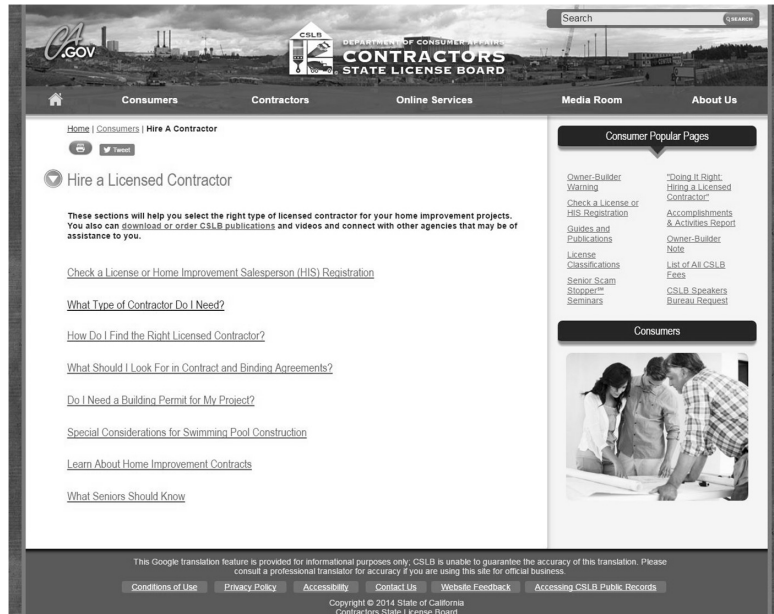
Pulling a Building Permit Planning a Residential Project

The Contractors State License Board (CSLB) website is an excellent resource for those seeking to hire a contractor.

<http://www.cslb.ca.gov/>

Access the “Consumers” page, and select “Hire a Licensed Contractor”.

It is important to check the contractor’s license status and whether he/she has worker’s compensation insurance.



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Hiring a Licensed Contractor

Only a California licensed contractor or the property owner (or his/her designee) can obtain (“pull”) a building permit.

Contractors are licensed under different classifications:

- **Class C – Specialty Contractor**
Plumbing, electrical, drywall, roofing, etc.
- **Class B – General Building Contractor**
Builds structures for the support, shelter, and/or enclosure of persons, animals, or property.
- **Class A – Engineering Contractor**
Builds fixed works such as highways, bridges, tunnels, pipelines, flood control structures, etc.

Specialty contractors (Class C) can only pull permits for work covered by their licensure. Permits for work involving multiple trades must be pulled by Class A or Class B contractors.



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Pulling a Building Permit

Risks of Pulling a Permit as Owner-Builder

As an owner-builder, you assume full responsibility for all phases of your project and its integrity.

Unless you are knowledgeable about construction, mistakes can be costly and take additional time to repair or correct.

Subcontractors and suppliers who are not paid on schedule may file mechanics liens against your property.

If your workers are injured, or your subcontractors are not licensed or do not carry liability insurance or workers' compensation insurance and they are injured, you could be asked to pay for injuries and rehabilitation through your homeowner's insurance policy or face lawsuits.

Be cautious of unlicensed individuals claiming to be contractors who prey upon homeowners. They may promise to guide you through the owner-builder process for a consulting fee, but they are breaking the law.

Licensed contractors must demonstrate knowledge of their craft, be tested, fingerprinted, bonded, and undergo an FBI background check before they are licensed to work in California.

Unlicensed contractors can botch a job or leave with the down payment, leaving the owner-builder to deal with the consequences.

In order to pull a permit as owner-builder in the City of Santa Clarita, Building & Safety requires owners to sign an acknowledgment.

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Pulling a Building Permit

Permit and Development Fees:

- Building inspection fees are roughly 1% - 2% of the project valuation (varies with size)
- Records maintenance fee
- Bridge and Thoroughfare (B&T) fee (for new residential dwelling units)
- Sewer connection fee (for new sewer connections)
- Other State and local fees

City staff can prepare an estimate of City fees upon request.

Outside agencies may have additional fees which are collected by those agencies. Approvals / proof of payment are required before permit issuance.



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Building Inspections

Building Inspectors inspect the project during construction for compliance with building codes and the approved plans.

The City generally provides next-day building inspections if scheduled before 2:30 p.m. A morning or afternoon inspection can be requested and will usually be accommodated (depending on inspection activity levels).

Make the Building Inspector aware of any field discrepancies or potential revisions as early as possible.

For small revisions or clarifications, the inspector may accept a detail or letter from the designer. For larger revisions, the plans must be updated and approved by the City plan review staff. Depending on the scope of the revisions, up to two weeks may be required for review. Additional plan review fees may apply.

A building permit is active for 180 days from the issued date or from the last inspection.



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Building Inspections

Be sure to schedule inspections in a timely manner, but not too early. Consistently scheduling building inspections before the work is ready may result in re-inspection fees.

Special Inspection is required by the Building Code for certain items where the City Building Inspector cannot be on-site full-time (epoxy, welding, etc.).

Remember to schedule a final inspection once all of the work is completed.

Although the City maintains copies of permits and plans, you should also keep your permit and inspection documents.

Our Building Inspectors have assisted thousands of projects through the inspection process, and they can provide valuable feedback.

In 2017 City Building Inspectors completed an average of 85 inspections per day!



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Thank You!

City of Santa Clarita Permit Center

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