



Frequently Asked Building Questions

The many different building permit applications submitted to the City require different types of review. The City staff has divided these permits into five categories and, based on our experience, has established the following target timeline for the initial review of each type of permit. This timeline is based on the submittal of a complete application. It is our intention to process each and every permit as quickly as possible, while still preserving the integrity of the review to ensure the health and safety of the public.

TYPE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE	TIMELINE
1	Homeowner improvement projects for properties not adjacent to a lake (non-riparian lots).	Decks, lower level finishes, plumbing, heating, fireplaces, pools, additions and porches	Same day
2	New single family detached and attached residences for properties not adjacent to a lake (non-riparian lots).	New construction	10 working days
3	New single family residences and homeowner improvement projects for properties adjacent to the lake (riparian lots).	Decks, lower level finishes, plumbing, heating, fireplaces, pools, additions and porches	12 working days
4	Mechanical permits which do not require a plan review	Furnace replacement	Same day
5	Commercial and multi-family residential projects	Office buildings, apartment buildings	15 working days (small projects) 30 working days (large projects)

What is a building permit?

A building permit gives you legal permission to start construction of a building project in accordance with the approved drawings and specifications. The drawings and specifications must be approved and a permit issued by the City of Prior Lake. The purpose of the permit is to ensure that the building project meets minimum safety, zoning and aesthetic requirements enforced by the City of Prior Lake and required by the State Building Code. The [fees](#) charged for building permits are used to defray the cost of code enforcement and are typically less than 3 percent of the overall building project cost. Building permits and handouts can be obtained by clicking on the Document Center link to the right.

When do I need a permit?

The best way to find out if you need a permit is to call Building Inspections, (952) 447-9850. Discuss your plans with a building inspector before you begin construction to determine whether you need a permit. If a permit is not needed, the building inspector will answer your construction questions and can provide valuable advice.

How do I obtain the necessary permits?

Permits can be obtained at the Building Inspection Department, at 4646 Dakota St. SE, weekdays between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

How long does it take to get a building permit?

Small home improvement project permits (decks, lower level) may be issued at the Building Inspections Department service counter. Larger projects (additions, garages, pools) require an average turnaround time of 10 working days.

When is a permit not required?

Permits are not required for the following projects: Replace cabinets in your kitchen or elsewhere, install carpet or other floor coverings, install wallpaper or paneling on finished surfaces, or redecorate without structural change.

What good does a permit do?

Your home or business is an investment. If your construction project does not comply with the codes adopted by the city, the value of your investment could be reduced. Property insurers may not cover work done without proper permits and inspections. If you decide to sell your home or building, the potential buyer may examine our records to make sure the proper permits and inspections were obtained.

Whose responsibility is it to see that the building code is followed?

The contractor you hire to complete your project is responsible for compliance with the state building code. They should be licensed by the state (when required) to perform the work. If there is ever a question as to whether or not some aspect of a construction project complies with the code, the contractor is the responsible party. If you are performing the work yourself, then you are the responsible party.

What if I want to do the building project myself?

If you're planning on a do-it-yourself home improvement project, contact the Building Inspections Department at (952) 447-9850 for information about specific zoning and building code requirements. Staff can provide informational handouts that explain how to design, construct and obtain a permit for most home improvement projects.

What if I want to hire a contractor?

- The phone book is a good source as well as references from neighbors and/or friends.
- Find out how long the contractor has been in business in the area.
- Check references; make sure they are valid by contacting those for whom the contractor has performed construction work.
- Contact the Better Business Bureau at (651) 699-1111 to see if complaints have been registered against the company.
- Check to be sure that the contractor has insurance coverage and is bonded. State law required contractors to be licensed by the state. This licensing law benefits both consumers and contractors.
- To verify licensing, please call the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry Licensing Division at (651) 296-6319.

Can the city recommend a contractor?

Building Inspection Department employees are often asked to recommend contractors. For many reasons, some of them legal, we must regrettably refrain from this practice. If you are planning to hire a building contractor and are unsure of whom to hire, the following may be sources of recommendations:

- local lumberyards and building centers
- neighbors, friends and relatives
- local builder associations

Don't hesitate to ask a contractor for references of building owners where they have previously performed work. Then contact the owner to determine if the work was satisfactory. If possible, try to view the work yourself. You can also contact chambers of commerce, Better Business Bureaus, and the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry. The Minnesota Department of Commerce can provide information regarding the status of licensing and any complaints where action has been finalized. The Department of Labor and Industry can be reached at (612) 296-6319 or (800) 657-3978.

Who must be licensed?

The Department of Labor and Industry (<http://www.doli.state.mn.us>) establishes the rules for licensing of contractors. Most contractors are required to be licensed; however, there are some exceptions. You should ask your contractor if they are licensed. If a contractor asks you to apply for the building permit, chances are they are not licensed because we verify contractor licensing for all building permit applications. Resident homeowners do not have to be licensed to perform work on their own home. If you have questions about contractor licensing, contact the Department of Labor and Industry at (651) 296-6319.

Should I take the permit out for the contractor?

Do not take out a building permit for the contractor. When the contractor signs the permit, the contractor is agreeing to do the work according to code. If you sign for the permit, you are liable for correcting the contractor's work if it should fall short of city or state building code standards. Make sure your contractor has a permit and that the contractor calls for inspections. An inspection card will be issued and should be displayed near the work area. When each inspection has been completed, the city's Inspector will sign the card. When the final inspection is approved, the inspectors' signatures are your assurance that the work has been properly inspected and no violations of the building code were discovered. You should pay for the work only after it has passed final inspection.

I am a renter and having problems with my rental unit. Can you come out and inspect it?

The City of Prior Lake performs inspections only on active building permits. Refer to the Minnesota Attorney General Handbook, Landlords and Tenants: Rights and Responsibilities. Information can be found at www.ag.state.mn.us.

I am having problems with my house i.e. siding rippling, roof leaking, foundation cracking, etc. I want the city to come out and complete an inspection and tell me what is wrong.

The City of Prior Lake does not provide homeowners this type of inspection service. The City of Prior Lake performs inspections on active permits. Independent inspectors can be hired to do these types of troubleshooting inspections. Independent Inspectors may be found in the telephone book.

I have a complaint about my builder not correcting things in my house. What should I do?

Builders usually have a policy and time line for corrections on new homes. Always make the requests to the builder in writing. Contact the Department of Labor and Industry at (651) 296-6319 if you feel your contractor has not performed per your contract.

Do I need a permit for a fence?

Yes. A zoning permit is required. There is no cost for this permit. Contact the Planning Department at (952) 447.9810.

Does the Building Department handle electrical inspections?

No. Electrical inspections are performed by the state electrical inspector, Justin Doebbeling, who may be contacted at his office Monday through Friday, 7 - 8:30 a.m. at 612.643.1838.

I want my escrow back. What do I need to do?

The escrow is only released after final grade approval and the sod and trees are installed. Contact the builder as to how the escrow is returned to the homeowner.

I want to put a retaining wall up. Do I need a permit and are there restrictions as to where I can put the retaining wall?

If the wall is over 4 feet tall a permit is required. Engineering or manufacturer's specifications will also be required. The retaining wall may not encroach into drainage easements on the property.