

Basic repairs to an existing structure require no plan submission but still require a permit. Stop by the “Stop Here First” desk – that was easy – and you will be directed to a residential impact fee coordinator who will assist you in filling out the required form.

For more elaborate repairs, alterations or additions both site and building plans are required.

First step is, as before, check in at the “Stop Here First” desk, meet with the impact fee coordinator to obtain a permit form and get a basic review of the plans. Next stop is the site review desk – same room, just around the corner. The site plan is checked to be sure there are proper setbacks and zoning. The site development section – in the Department of Public Works – reviews the site plans against possible damage to other property due to excavation or silt runoff. Everybody gets to mark all over your plans and, hopefully, stamp them as approved.

Be sure to include the location of all the trees on your site plan because the arborist is the next person with the power of yea or nay. Know the diameter of the trees in order to calculate the critical root zone. Specifics are available from the arborist’s office. As long as you don’t affect more than 20% of any of the critical root zones, you will probably get a stamp from the arborist, too. You will be a lot happier if you can avoid cutting down trees.

Now the fun really begins. The small plan review section in the person of a building plan review specialist is waiting to look over your handy-work. You will need floor plans drawn to scale, with dimensions, of both the existing and proposed building. You will need elevation drawings of all four sides, existing and proposed, foundation details, floor details, wall details, roofing details and drawings of any special structural features required for the project. These drawings must stipulate dimensions of the structure and dimensions of the material and designated spacing of joists, studs or rafters. Don’t forget to include height of handrails, spacing of uprights and width of stairs. You better believe that “details” means exactly that. Two copies of everything, by the way.

These plans can be hand drawn – I’ve done it – or produced by CADD programs. If you prefer, your concepts can be converted to reviewer friendly plans by an architect or by one of the many CADD professionals who make it a practice to pass out their cards to harried supplicants in the waiting room.

In this final review, waiting may be the operative word. Given the work schedule of the small plan review section and the required stops prior to bringing your plans to them, it is unlikely the process can be completed in one day. In fact, the following circumstances really drag out the process:

1. The plan reviewer check-in list accommodates a specific number of folks and can fill up very early.
2. The office is closed on Tuesdays.
3. Unless you want to begin the whole building plan review process all over, you have to see the same reviewer for approval of any requested changes.
4. Reviewers are frequently out of the office for training upgrades or meetings.
5. It can take an hour or more for a reviewer to serve one of the applicants.
6. Required details documenting accepted construction practices are often lacking in the drawings.

The reviewers do not want to complicate your life but if you complicate theirs, they are perfectly capable of returning the favor – in spades! For the first timer the above mentioned specialists on review-friendly drawings and permit expeditors who know the ropes and the reviewers are probably the most cost efficient route.

Should you elect to dive in yourself, remember, there is no such thing as too many details.