



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**City of Grand Rapids
Building Safety Division**

218-326-7601

www.grandrapidsmn.org



This handout is intended only as a guide and is based in part on the 2007 Minnesota State Building Code, Grand Rapids City ordinances, and good building practice. While every attempt has been made to insure the correctness of this handout, no guarantees are made to its accuracy or completeness. Responsibility for compliance with applicable codes and ordinances falls on the owner or contractor. For specific questions regarding code requirements, refer to the applicable codes or contact your local Building Department.

What requires a building permit?

A building permit is required any time you do work that is regulated by the Minnesota State Building Code. This would include any work to the permanent weather resistive surfaces of the dwelling such as the siding, windows or roof. Any structural alterations or repairs to those members require a permit. Changing the use of a space or finish unfinished space, dwelling additions, garages, and decks also require a permit.

Work that is exempt from a permit includes painting, wallpapering, flooring, kitchen cabinets, minor repairs, and detached storage buildings not exceeding 120 square feet.

If you are unsure if the project you are starting requires a permit, please contact the Building Safety Division.

How do I obtain a building permit?

Permit applications may be obtained in the Community Development Department downloaded from the city's website or they can be faxed or mailed to you.

The information you will need to provide on the application includes your name, address, telephone number, description of the work, general contractor, and the valuation of the work. If you need help filling out the application, staff will be happy to assist you.

To begin the permit process, you will need to submit your completed application and two sets of plans, if plans are required. They will either issue the permit to you or forward the permit to another staff member depending on the nature of the work. You can submit the permit application in person, by mail, or by fax.

Once a permit is ready to be issued, you will be called to pay for and pick up the permit.

Do I need to hire a contractor or can I do work myself?

Nothing prohibits a homeowner from doing work on their own home. So, the answer to whether you need to hire a contractor largely lies with your own abilities to do the work you propose. If you feel uncomfortable doing electrical wiring for example, you may wish to hire an electrical contractor although you may do the work yourself. In either case, make sure you check on the permitting requirements for the type of work you are proposing to do.

If the building is a commercial building, you may do work on property you own without hiring a contractor and without a license. Exceptions to this include plumbing, mechanical, and electrical work that must be performed by licensed contractors.

Are contractors required to be licensed?

Minnesota law requires residential builders, remodelers, and roofers to be licensed as a means to help protect homeowners. Contractors are required to include their license number in any contracts submitted to you as well as in any advertising.

You can verify if a contractor is licensed by calling the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry at 651-296-4026.

If your contractor asks you to obtain a permit for him or tells you that he can do the work cheaper because he is not licensed, he should be reported immediately to the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry.

The Minnesota Attorney General's Office has a number of handouts available about hiring a residential contractor. You are encouraged to contact them or visit their web site for more information.

How much does a building permit cost?

Permit fees have a number of different components. First is the building permit fee. Building permit fees are either fixed fees or they are derived from a sliding scale based on valuation. Plan review fees are also charged in addition to the building permit fee for projects other than roofing, siding, window replacement, and some minor repairs. The plan review fee is based on 65% of the building permit fee. In addition to permit and review fees, a state surcharge is collected at the rate of 50 cents per \$1000. Here are some examples of the cost of a permit for various projects (plan review fees are included where applicable):

12X12 Deck	\$136.50 flat rate
Basement remodeling (\$10,000 valuation)	\$307.94
Roof house (\$7500 valuation)	\$45.00 flat rate
Garage (\$10,000 valuation)	\$307.94
Dwelling Addition (\$75,000 valuation)	\$1403.21

If you have questions regarding a permit fee, please contact the Building Safety Division.

Please note that permit fees can vary by city and are subject to change from time to time.

What type of plans do I need to submit?

The most important step in the permit process is the submittal and review of building plans. The purpose of developing a set of plans is to provide a written document of the scope of your project. A staff member will review your plans to determine in advance that the proposed work complies with the various building rules. In order for the review to be a help to the builder or owner, it is important that the plans be as detailed as possible. The goal is to uncover potential problem areas while the project is still on paper and save costly corrections later. Applicants are asked to provide two sets of plans. The City retains one set, the other set will be returned to the permit applicant with any corrections noted. The plan set returned to you should be made available to building inspectors when they conduct inspections.

What should be included in the plan sets and how should they be prepared?

As noted above, plans should be detailed. They must be neatly drawn and drawn to a useable scale. One-quarter inch to one foot is a common scale. Typical residential plans would include a site plan, floor plans, cross sections, elevations, details of various structural components, and a window schedule. Plans should be dimensioned and include information on use of rooms, wall and ceiling finishes, and lumber sizes and spacing. The Building Safety Division has a handout detailing what must be included on plans.

Do I need an architect or engineer to prepare my plans?

The short answer is no. You can prepare your own plans or your contractor or a drafting service can prepare them for you. If you are having multiple contractors bid on your project, you will be better able to compare the bids if you prepare the plans and specs yourself rather than have each contractor prepare a set.

If your project is very complex, you may find it advantageous to hire a professional designer to assist you. Also, if your design involves complicated framing techniques or the use of steel I-beams, for example, you may be required to verify that the designs meet code as a part of the plan review process. The Building Safety Division may require that a licensed engineer provide this verification.

How long does it take to get a permit?

Permits for work that requires no review are issued the same day and generally at the time the permit application is submitted. Permits where a plan review is necessary can take from a few days to 7 days. Some plans may need to be reviewed by more than one city department. For this reason, it is important that you plan ahead and have your permit application and plans submitted far enough in advance of the start of work that the permitting process does not delay the start of your project.

What happens if I start work without a building permit?

Since failure to obtain a permit is a violation of city ordinances and state law, fines may be levied. If work for which a permit is required by the code has been commenced without first obtaining a permit, a special investigation shall be made before a permit may be issued for the work. An investigation fee established by the municipality shall be collected and is in addition to the required permit fees, but it may not exceed the permit fee.

Are inspections required?

All work is subject to inspection. The number and type of inspections vary depending on the work being done. When the permit is issued, you will receive an inspection record card that lists the types of inspections that you will need to call for your project. The telephone number to call is also on the permit card as well as the permit number.

It is the owner or contractors responsibility to call for an inspection when the work is ready. When scheduling an inspection, you'll need the address, permit number and type of inspection. We require at least a 24 hour notice in advance to schedule an inspection.

Where can I get information on codes and construction?

The Building Safety Division has a number of handouts, free of charge, that address common building projects. The internet is also an excellent source of information. Please contact your Building Safety Division for a list of site.