

You Probably Need a Building Permit

And other tips for permitting residential construction, remodeling, and repairs

Remodeling or adding an addition to your house?

Converting your garage, basement, or shed to living space?

Replacing windows, water/sewer lines, water heaters, heating systems, or a roof?

Building a detached structure in your yard, such as an ADU, art studio, yoga room, guest space/bedroom, home office, sauna, greenhouse, toolshed, tiny home on wheels, etc?

Building a deck, fence, retaining wall, or shade structure in your yard?

ASSUME YOU NEED A BUILDING PERMIT

Before you begin any project:

- 1) Read this entire document to determine if you need a permit.
- 2) Still not sure? Email our permitting staff awarren@cityofpt.us or rhill@cityofpt.us or call (360)379-5095. Email is preferred.

***NOTE:** The code requirements in this document are specific to residential zoned properties with single-family homes or duplexes. **Do not** refer to this document for commercial or multi-family projects, as requirements are different.



1. Most new structures require a building permit, including some sheds.

There are many factors that determine whether a residential building permit is required. **Do not assume your structure is exempt from building permits based on its size**, as the use of the structure (example: art studio, office, guest space, ADU) or other factors may trigger a building permit. **See #3 for permit exemption criteria** for sheds and similar structures. In addition to building permits, other permits may be required for your project.

2. Most remodeling and repair projects require a building permit, plumbing permit, and/or mechanical permit from the City.

A permit is required to:

- Add an addition to an existing residence or other structure on your property.
- Convert part of your home, garage, or an outbuilding into an accessory dwelling unit (ADU).
- Construct an ADU or place a Tiny House on Wheels to your property.
- Convert an unfinished basement, garage, shed, or outbuilding into living or sleeping quarters, an office, art studio, or other habitable space.
- Add or replace windows, doors, or structural elements (foundation, beams, rafters, studs, joists, subfloor, headers, ledgers, etc).
- Add or remove a wall (including non-load bearing walls) or replacing sheet rock.

- Replace a roof on your house or add a covered porch.
- Add or replace a water heater, shower, bathtub, or plumbing inside a wall, ceiling, or floor.
- Add or replace heating and cooling systems, including propane fireplaces.
- Install a new gas line or modify an existing line.
- Any electrical work, which requires an electrical permit from the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries (L&I), not City of Port Townsend.

This is not an all-inclusive list. If your project type is not listed above, check with our permitting staff. A permit is **not required** for painting, tiling, carpeting/flooring, cabinets, countertops, and similar finish work.

3. A shed or similar accessory structure is only exempt from a residential building permit if you can answer YES to ALL the following criteria:

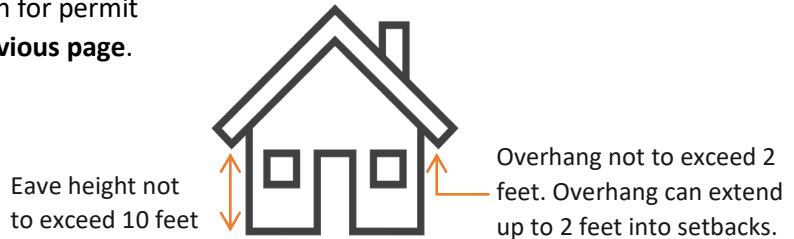
Criteria	Details	Yes?
Structure is a detached accessory structure	The structure is not attached to or on top of an existing building and is accessory to the main residence (on the same lot as your house).	
Structure is a single story	The structure does not include a loft, basement, mezzanine, or additional stories.	
Structure is 200 square feet or less in size	The structure as measured from the faces of exterior walls, not including roof eaves, does not exceed 200 square feet.	
Structure is not used for habitation/habitable space or for vehicle storage	The structure is not used as a dwelling unit, garage, carport, art studio, workshop, office, sleeping quarters, detached living/TV room, yoga room, sauna, reading room, guest space, or similar use.	
Structure is used for storage only (tool/garden shed), is a children’s outdoor play structure, greenhouse, or similar use	Structure is not used as habitable space and is not used to store/park vehicles.	
Roof eave height does not exceed 10 feet, and eave overhang does not exceed 24 inches	See illustration on page 3.	
Structure contains no permanent mechanical heat source	Structure has no permanent mechanical heating, but plug-in space heaters are ok.	
Structure does not have plumbing	Structure contains no sinks, toilets, showers, hot water tanks, or hose spigots, and is not connected to water or sewer.	

If you have answered YES to all of the above criteria, your accessory structure is exempt from a building permit;

However, your structure is NOT exempt from Building Code or Port Townsend Municipal Code. Please check the requirements in #4 before proceeding with your project.

If you can’t answer yes to all the above criteria, your accessory structure needs a permit.

Eave height and overhang illustration for permit exemption criteria, **see table on previous page.**



4. All structures and improvements must meet the following requirements, even if the project is exempt from a residential building permit.

Requirement	Details
Structure is built to current building code standards, 2021 International Residential Code (IRC).	Even if your project is exempt from a permit you can't build to a lesser standard than the International Residential Code.
Structure meets setbacks (required distance to your property line)	Please refer to the Port Townsend Municipal Code (PTMC) table 17.16.030 for setback and lot coverage requirements.
Structure meets lot coverage (does not exceed percentage of allowed buildable area)	
Structure is a permitted use for your zoning district	Please refer to PTMC 17.16 Residential Zoning Districts, table 17.16.020 .
Structure is built on your private property	Structure cannot be built on or extend into public rights-of-way or neighboring properties.
Structure is not in a critical area, critical area buffer, or within 200 feet of a shoreline	A critical areas review or permit is required to build within a critical area, critical area buffer, or shoreline.
Structure meets any other requirements of Port Townsend Municipal Code (PTMC) that may apply	There may be additional requirements depending on your project.
All electrical is permitted and inspected by the Washington Department of Labor and Industries	Even if your shed is exempt from a building permit, electrical permitting is always required.

5. Other permits may be required for your residential project.

Below are some examples of other permits that may be required for your project. Please inquire with staff about your specific project and what types of permits may be required.

Permit Type	Details
Tree permit	If removing, pruning, or planting trees in the public right-of-way.
Minor improvement permit	If altering the public right-of-way, such as adding a sidewalk, gravel parking, or installing decorative rocks or raised planting beds.

Critical areas permit	If your property contains steep slopes, a drainage corridor, shoreline, or a wetland - assume it is a critical area; however, you can't always tell just by looking at your property. Contact our staff to ask if your property has critical area before you begin any work. If you damage a critical area the City will pursue code enforcement.
Clearing and grading permit	If clearing vegetation/trees, disturbing soil, grading, or adding fill to your property.
Electrical permit	All electrical work requires a permit from the Washington Department of Labor and Industries (L&I): https://www.lni.wa.gov/licensing-permits/electrical/electrical-permits-fees-and-inspections/
Demolition permit and asbestos notifications	If you are demolishing a structure on your property you are required to have a demolition permit from the City AND file a demolition notification with the Olympic Region Clean Air Agency (ORCAA): www.orcaa.org/asbestos-demolition/ Home renovations may also be subject to asbestos regulations/notification. Visit the Olympic Region Clean Air Agency (ORCAA) website for requirements: www.orcaa.org/asbestos-demolition/asbestos-forms-resources/
Short term rental permit	If establishing a short-term rental (29 days or less) in your home.

6. A permit is required to establish a Tiny House on Wheels (THOW).

Even though a THOW is not constructed on site, a permit is **required** to place one on your property. A THOW may be established as an Accessory Dwelling Unit or as a unit in a permitted THOW community. Please see THOW handouts for permitting requirements: <https://cityofpt.us/planning-community-development/page/forms-documents>

7. Outdoor projects such as decks, fences, retaining walls, sheds, greenhouses, shade structures, pools, and hot tubs may also a require permit.

Project type	Building permit <u>not</u> required	Building permit <u>is</u> required
Decks	<p><u>New residential deck</u>: exempt from a building permit if it meets ALL of the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 200 square feet in area • Under 30 inches in height • Has no railings • Has no more than 3 exterior steps • Is not attached to the building • Does not serve an exit door • Serves a single-family home or duplex <p><u>Repair/replacement of existing decks (of any height or size)</u>: only decking boards can be replaced without a permit. A permit is always required for structural repairs/replacement.</p>	<p><u>New residential deck</u>: a permit is required if deck does not meet ALL deck exemption criteria listed in the column to the left.</p> <p><u>Repair/replacement of an existing residential deck</u>: permit is required to replace railings, stringers, ledgers, posts, beams, joists, or any other structural components.</p> <p>Note: Decks at commercial or multi-family properties ALWAYS require a permit and engineering.</p>

<p>Fences</p>	<p>A permit is not required for fences 7 feet or less in height; however, all fences are required to meet height and design requirements as specified in PTMC Chapter 17.68 and our fence handout (https://cityofpt.us/planning-community-development/page/trees-landscaping).</p> <p>Fences must be located on your property and are prohibited in the public right of way. Fences on top of retaining walls have height limitations.</p>	<p>A permit is required for fences over 7 feet in height. A maximum fence height of 8 feet is permitted.</p>
<p>Retaining Walls</p>	<p>A permit is not required if ALL the following criteria are met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retaining wall is 4 feet or less in height (as measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall) Retaining wall does not support a surcharge, such as a parked vehicle or a structure. <p>All retaining walls must meet the requirements listed in our retaining wall handout (https://cityofpt.us/planning-community-development/page/trees-landscaping).</p>	<p>A permit is required for retaining walls greater than 4 feet in height. A permit is also required for any retaining wall that supports a surcharge.</p>
<p>Sheds, greenhouses, and shade structures</p>	<p>A permit is not required if the accessory structure meets all exemption criteria in item #4.</p>	<p>A permit is required if the accessory structure does not meet all exemption criteria in item #4.</p>
<p>Prefabricated swimming pools</p>	<p>A permit is not required if the pool meets ALL the following criteria per International Building Code (IBC) Section 105.2 Work exempt from permit: <i>Prefabricated swimming pools accessory to a Group R-3 Occupancy that are less than 24 inches deep, are not greater than 5,000 gallons and are installed entirely above ground.</i></p> <p>Please note that pools must be properly secured with code compliant barriers to prevent children from gaining unauthorized access to the pool. See IBC section 305 for requirements.</p> <p>An electrical permit from L&I is required for any electrical work, even if your pool is exempt from a building permit.</p>	<p>A permit is required for any pool that does not meet all exemption criteria listed in the column to the left.</p>

<p>Hot tubs</p>	<p>A permit is not required if the hot tub is placed on a concrete pad OR if the hot tub is placed on a deck that meets ALL deck permit exemption criteria (listed at the beginning of this table).</p> <p>An electrical permit from L&I is required even if your hot tub is exempt from a building permit.</p>	<p>A permit is required if the hot tub is placed on a deck that does not meet the deck permit exemption criteria (listed at the beginning of this table).</p> <p>An electrical permit from L&I is also required.</p>
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NOTE: Your outdoor project is also subject to some or all of the requirements in item #4.

8. Building permits cost less than you think.

The fees below are provided **for informational purposes only** - permit fees change annually, and some permit costs are based on project valuation while others are a fixed fee. Typical permit fees in 2023:

- 100 feet of 8-foot-tall fence: **\$57.15**
- Water heater replacement: **\$66.00**
- A reroof of a single-family residence: **\$112.25**
- A 250 square foot art studio (with a project cost valuation of \$19,000): **\$634.29**

To get a permit fee estimate specific to your project, email our permitting staff (see page 8).

9. Many residential building permits can be issued in a few days or a few weeks. Larger residential projects may take 1-3 months.

Permitting times vary, depending on the specifics of your project and the City’s permit load.

Typical time for City to review and issue a permit	Example project types
2-3 business days	New roof, water heater, mechanical heat pump
1-2 weeks	Sewer or water line replacement
2-3 weeks	Fence, shed, window replacement
3-6 weeks	Minor to moderate interior remodels
4-8 weeks	Detached ADU, major interior remodels

NOTE: If your property is in a critical area or your house is a historic structure, this may add time to the permitting process.

You can avoid unnecessary delays: 1) submit a complete permit application 2) pay permit fees as soon possible 3) respond quickly if city staff request additional information or plan revisions 4) ensure your contractor has a Port Townsend business license.

10. Emergency or expedited permits are available in limited situations.

Expedited permits are only available to address public health/safety issues or to restore basic needs (heat, water, sewer). Some emergency work can be completed before a permit is issued, especially during evenings and weekends.

Emergency or expedited permits are **only** available for a limited number of situations:

Project	YES, you qualify for an emergency/expedited permit and can start work without a permit	NO, you must apply for a permit and wait to receive your permit before beginning any work
Sewer pipe replacement	Sewage is backing up into your house or surfacing on the ground.	Pipes are still functional, but they are older and need replaced soon.
Water pipe replacement	A water leak you can't isolate and/or you have no water.	
Water heater replacement	Water heater fails and you have no hot water.	System is still functional, but it is older and needs replaced soon.
Home heating system replacement	Home heating system fails and you have no heat.	
Propane system replacement	A propane tank or pipe is leaking.	

For a qualified emergency, please apply for a permit by the next business day. You can apply online 24 hours a day, 7 days per week at cityofpt.us/permits. Please email our permitting staff (see page 8) to let them know of your situation so your permit can be expedited. **Take photos to document the work** and leave work uncovered (as much as possible) for inspections.

NOTE: Your contractor having a sudden opening in their schedule **does not** qualify for an expedited permit. Plan ahead and apply for permits early.

11. Both property owners and contractors can apply for permits.

Discuss permitting requirements upfront with all contractors and decide who will apply for permits. If you are doing the work yourself without a contractor, permits are still required. NOTE: Property owners are required to correct a situation where work was done without a permit and bring their property into compliance. In some cases the City will also pursue enforcement action against contractors. **Please share this document with your contractor** as they may not be aware of all permit requirements.

12. Building without a permit can cost you significantly more time and money. And stress!

If it comes to the City's attention that you are building without a permit:

- City staff will issue a **stop work notice**, require you to apply for a permit, and typically charge double permit fees. Any work requiring a permit must be paused until a permit can be issued.

- You may be required to open walls so a proper inspection can be performed, correct any work not built to code, or remove a structure if it does not meet setbacks, lot coverage requirements, or cannot be brought up to code.
- **If you damage a critical area** you will typically be required to apply for a critical areas permit, hire a consultant to develop a mitigation/monitoring plan, and pay to correct the damage.

13. Building without a permit may result in dangerous or unsafe living conditions.

Permitting your projects helps to ensure the health and safety of your family, guests, and/or tenants. Consider some of the possible risks that could occur without permitting and inspections:

- Improper installation of a gas water heater could cause someone to be hurt or killed.
- Installation of a bedroom in a basement without proper egress windows may cause someone to become trapped in a fire.
- Removing or altering load bearing features could cause structural issues in your home.
- Unpermitted electrical work could pose a fire risk.

Apply for Your Permit Online

Scan the QR code to the right or visit our online permitting portal at:

<https://cityofpt.us/permits>



Scan to apply online.

Questions? Need Help?

Please email the City’s permitting staff: Amber (awarren@cityofpt.us) or Robin (rhill@cityofpt.us) or call (360) 379-5095. Email communication is preferred. Please include a property address or parcel number in your inquiry so we can better assist you.

Answers to common questions, forms/documents, and tips for applying online can be found on our website: <https://cityofpt.us/planning-community-development>.

The **permit counter at City Hall** is also open to walk in customers from **9 am to 1 pm, Monday through Thursday**, excluding holidays. Appointments are encouraged. Depending on the scope of your project/questions, you may need to schedule a Customer Assistance Meeting.