

## Construction Permit Frequently Asked Questions



Homeowners considering a remodel for their home or adding other improvements such as decks, roofs, garage, or retaining walls, often have questions about building permits. This information is designed to help homeowners know when construction permits and other approvals are required by the City of Mountlake Terrace

Because each construction project is unique, we invite you to contact a permit specialist at 425-744-6267 or [permitspecialist@ci.mlt.wa.us](mailto:permitspecialist@ci.mlt.wa.us). Our Permit Specialists are available during business hours Monday-Friday to answer your specific permitting questions.

### **What are permits and why do I need one?**

Permits are the way the City of Mountlake Terrace makes sure all construction or improvement projects meet the applicable rules and regulations. The process is designed to ensure all construction in the city is done properly for the safety of building occupants. In addition to Mountlake Terrace codes, there are other federal, state, and local laws governing construction. Based on the type of construction, there are several different categories of permits. Structural, plumbing, mechanical, right-of-way (driveway) and electrical are some examples. Most homeowner projects require a combination of permits. Additionally, the complete demolition and relocation of buildings will require permits.

### **What is my first step?**

Obtaining the actual permit is not the first step in the process. First, you want to thoroughly define the project, determining the type of process to be used to evaluate the proposal. Based on the scope of work, you may need to prepare plans to submit, draw a site plan for your property showing the improvements and show the type of construction you will be using. Once plans are approved, you are required to build the project to those plans. If any changes occur, they must be made with the city's approval through the revision submittal process. The second half of the process is the inspection of the work.

### **Do small cosmetic jobs require a permit?**

A construction permit is not needed for items such as: wallpapering, painting, carpet or similar finish work, platforms, decks and walks less than 30 inches high above grade or not over basement will not require a permit. One-story detached accessory structures used as tool and storage sheds, playhouses and similar uses (provided the floor area does not exceed 80 square feet and no side wall exceeds six feet in height) do not require a permit. Replacement or repair of fixtures, such as changing water faucets or replacing switches (up to five), does not normally



require a permit. Replacing a water heater or adding a new permanently wired light fixture, however, will require a permit.

For specific exceptions and for possible reviews from other agencies, please check with the city before beginning any construction.

### **When do I need a construction permit?**

A construction permit is needed for all new construction. Replacing, adding or extending a deck, roof or fence will require a permit. If you are just repairing or replacing fixtures in the same location, you will most likely not need a permit. If, however, you are making additions or changes to an existing system, such as plumbing or wiring, you may need a plumbing, electrical, or mechanical permit. Moving and/or adding an electrical outlet is an example that requires an electrical permit. To find out if your project needs a permit review please contact a permit specialist at 425-744-6267 or [permitspecialist@ci.mlt.wa.us](mailto:permitspecialist@ci.mlt.wa.us).

### **Where do I get a permit?**

Construction permits can be obtained through the city website: [www.cityofmlt.com](http://www.cityofmlt.com) and are issued at Interim City Hall, 6100 219<sup>th</sup> Street SW, Suite 200. If you only need simple permits for minor work, such as installing a water heater, permit applications may be submitted electronically.

### **How long does it take to get a permit?**

Permit issuance periods vary. Some minor projects can be fully permitted over-the-counter meaning a return trip may not be necessary. Most projects, however, require you to leave your plans for additional review.

### **What about other approvals or permits?**

Other government agencies may need to review and approve your project. The City will inform you of these reviews at the time plans are submitted. They may be outlined in the submittal checklists.

### **What if I don't get a permit?**

Failure to obtain a permit before construction begins is a violation of the City's codes and regulations and could subject you to fines and penalties. Construction codes are created for safety reasons. Work built without a permit can be unsafe, no matter how good it looks. You'll be required to obtain permits for the work and it must pass inspection, or you must return the structure or site to its original condition. Permit fees may be doubled as a penalty. A separate Investigation Inspection permit will also be required before submittal of the building permit to correct any construction that began without a permit.

### **Who should obtain the permit?**

It is the responsibility of the property owner to make sure all proper permits are obtained. Contractors who are licensed by the State of Washington or your agent can obtain the permits on your behalf.



### **Can I apply for a permit for my mother, aunt, or a friend?**

Yes. To obtain a permit for someone else, you will be acting as their agent and an authorization letter may be needed.

### **Can I do the work myself or do I have to hire a contractor?**

You, as the property owner, can do the work yourself; however, you must follow the same codes and regulations as a contractor would. Such requirements include:

- **Build to the plans:** Be sure to follow your approved plans, whether they are drawn by an architect or designer or are standard construction requirements given to you by the city. If you change the plans while building the structure, problems may arise when the project is inspected. If you do decide to make changes, check with the City's plan review staff or your field inspector. For most building design changes, the revision re-submittal process will need to be followed.
- **Calling for inspection:** You must call for inspections as required by your permit as the work is completed. Failure to obtain a proper inspection can delay the completion of your project.
- **Obtaining final approval:** Once the construction is completed, you must seek final approval.

### **Who draws up the plans?**

Plans for projects such as room additions can usually be drawn up by qualified individuals such as a draftsman or by the homeowner. Other projects may require plans prepared and signed by an architect or engineer licensed by the State of Washington. Please contact our office for more information regarding hiring a design professional for your project.

### **What about inspections?**

It is the homeowner's responsibility to insure that inspections are requested and obtained at specific times during construction. You may have your contractor make the call, but it is still the homeowner's responsibility to make sure the inspections are made. Inspections are made during certain points in the project, depending on the work that's being performed. Inspections of foundation footings, for example, need to be made after forms are set and steel is placed, but before pouring the concrete.

### **What if I have a permit but never called for an inspection?**

Generally, permits expire after 180 days if no inspections have been made. In order for the project to be complete, it must pass final inspection. If a permit expires before final inspection, the project is in violation of City codes. If you would like help reactivating your permit or applying for another one, please contact a permit specialist. We will try to help with as little inconvenience as possible. Our interest is in seeing your project complete, including the final inspection. Once the permit has been reactivated or a new one has been issued, call 425-755-9694 to request a final inspection.

### **Am I required to have an inspection?**

Yes. All permits require inspections. The project is not legally complete until it passes the final inspection.



### **How do I schedule an inspection?**

Once you have received your permit approval, you can request an inspection by calling our Inspection Line at 425-755-9694 or going or scheduling one on line through our website: [www.cityofmlt.com](http://www.cityofmlt.com).

### **What are mechanical and plumbing permits?**

Mechanical and plumbing permits are authorizations to repair or construct mechanical and/or plumbing systems. Permitted work must comply with the adopted code. Inspections are required for both permit types.

Examples of work requiring a mechanical permit include adding or replacing a furnace (wall or floor), heaters, air conditioners, appliance vents for chimneys, refrigerator compressors, boilers, chillers, fan coil units, heat pumps, air handlers, duct work, ventilation fans and systems, and exhaust hoods and ducts.

Examples of work requiring a plumbing permit include addition, installation, or replacement of any plumbing fixture, such as water heaters, sinks, and water softeners.

### **What is an electrical permit?**

An electrical permit is an authorization to repair or construct an electrical system. The permits are available on our website. Permitted work must be in compliance with the City electrical code. An inspection is required for each permit. Examples of work requiring an electrical permit include installation of new electrical outlets, moving electrical outlets or switches, adding or replacing circuits, adding or replacing phase services, installing a temporary power pole, or adding new "hard wired" electrical appliances or fixtures.

### **How long does it take to process a simple permit?**

Our goal is to process simple permits such as plumbing and mechanical as they are received daily. During high-volume periods, processing requests may take up to three business days, but the turn-around time is generally faster. Invalid or incorrect information on the request will cause delay. Applications for walk-in customers will be processed while you wait.

### **When does my permit expire?**

Work must begin and an inspection made within 180 days, otherwise the permit expires. Every time you pass an inspection your permit is extended for another 180 days from the date of the passed inspection.

### **Where can I find out more about permits and developing?**

For more information on obtaining permits or the development process visit us at Interim City Hall, 6100 219<sup>th</sup> Street SW, Suite 200, Community and Economic Development department or check out our website at <http://cityofmlt.com>.