



RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION CODES FAQs

When do I need (or not need) a building permit?

A building permit is required in so many situations that it may be easier to list those situations when a **building permit is NOT required**:

(Please note that other permit application reviews may also apply. See the next page for examples. Contact South Whitehall Township if you have questions.)

1. A building permit is not required for alterations when the fair market value, including labor and materials, is less than five hundred and fifty dollars (\$500.00).
2. Construction of retaining walls not more than four (4) feet high, unless the retaining wall supports a surcharge.
3. Construction of fences not more than six (6) feet high, unless the fence is a required barrier for a pool.
4. Concrete patios without footings.
5. Decks 30" or less above grade (measured to any point 36" horizontally from the edge of the deck).
6. Residential detached accessory buildings (greenhouses, sheds, carports, detached garages) having less than five hundred (500) square feet based upon outside dimensions, that are accessory to single detached dwellings.
7. Installation or replacement of a window, storm window, door, garage door or storm door in the same clear-width opening if the original dimensions or framing is not altered
8. Replacement of existing roof material without structure changes to the roof framing.
9. Replacement of glass in any window or door.
10. Painting, wallpapering, tiling, carpeting, cabinet or countertop installation, or similar residential finishing work (Electrical, plumbing or other permits may apply).
11. Prefabricated swimming pools capable of holding not more than twenty-four (24) inches of water.
12. Swings or other play equipment customary to single-family dwellings or twins.
13. Replacement of exterior rain gutters or leaders.
14. Water tanks supported directly on grade with a capacity of less than 5,000 gallons and a ratio of height to diameter that is no greater than 2:1.
15. Replacement of exterior siding and roofing.

The following items may or may not require a building permit (please see above), but **DO require a ZONING permit**. (Please note that other permit application reviews may also apply.)

1. Fences not more than six (6) feet high.

2. *Concrete patios.*
3. *All decks.*
4. *All sheds and accessory structures.*
5. *Sidewalks and driveways.*

How do I apply for a building permit?

South Whitehall Township utilizes a combination Building/Zoning Permit application that can be downloaded from this web site. Complete the form and submit it with all plans and relevant information to our Permits Clerk at the Township Municipal Building. Check with the Residential Building Inspector to find what will be necessary to have your residential building plan properly submitted and reviewed for permit issuance. It is the applicant's responsibility to submit all relevant information. We have experienced a continual problem with inadequate submissions. Please be as exhaustive as you can with the information you provide. It will expedite your review and prevent confusion, cost and delays during construction.

How long does it take to have my plans reviewed and a building permit issued?

That depends on several things:

- (a) The scope of your job
- (b) The thoroughness and timeliness of your plans and relevant information
- (c) The volume of work from other building projects.

All residential plans must be reviewed within fifteen (15) business days after the permit application is filed. This does include a zoning review.

What is the Building Code used by the Township, and how can I read it?

Currently, South Whitehall Township uses the 2009 International Residential Code (IRC 2009) as adopted by the Pennsylvania Uniform Construction Code. Be advised that the Township adopted this model code. You can see a copy of this code at the Township Permits Office, the Parkland Library or buy copies at www.iccsafe.org. Most architects have them, too. Understanding all of the requirements of the IRC 2009 is not a job for a novice.

What inspections must my project undergo and how do I arrange for them?

For building projects, the Township's building inspections normally include inspections of: footers, foundations, rough framing, insulation, wallboard, rough ceiling (commercial only) and final. (Be advised you will have to also call for any electrical, plumbing, HVAC system inspections too.) In general, if work involving a trade is to be covered, an inspection will be required. Call our office for inspections only if the work is complete and there are no known code deficiencies. Also, be aware that calls for inspections that are premature waste everyone's time. When it becomes a problem, we charge for re-inspections. Building Permits are allowed seven (7) inspections, Electrical Permits four (4) and Plumbing Permits five (5).

What can I do to make my project go as smoothly as possible?

There is no substitute for a contractor and owner who commit themselves to knowing exactly what they want to do (in detail), and taking on the responsibility to fully live up to the requirements of the code. Too often we find projects managed by people who want to wholly rely upon our Inspectors to tell them what is not right. Often they believe that if the Inspector misses a deficiency they no longer have an obligation to address it. This is false! Builders will

always be required to address deficiencies whether we catch it the first time or not. Attempts to cut corners always result in wasted time and expense. Also, be realistic about your completion dates. We find that most often building owners are overly optimistic and plan mortgage closings, office moves, or grand openings too soon. This creates great stress on all concerned. Get a job supervisor who is on the ball. Ideally, there would be one (competent) person to take note of code deficiencies found, disseminate that information to all of the right people, and follow up.

What does it mean to have machinery or equipment “properly listed and labeled?”

Basically, (in residential construction) anything that is energized by electricity or mechanical must be “listed and labeled” by an independent Testing laboratory. There are about ten of these laboratories in the United States. Underwriters Laboratory (UL) is probably the best known. These agencies develop standards of performance for broad categories of equipment that help assure their safe employment. Shocking hazards and fire hazards, etc., which might otherwise have been created by the equipments’ improper use, are thereby avoided. Thus, the equipment is properly matched to the job it is supposed to do, and it has been shown to have safety defects eliminated.

Can I appeal decisions of the Building, Plumbing and Electrical Inspectors?

Yes. We have a Building Code Appeals Board that will hear appeals related to the Construction Codes. At www.southwhitehall.com, you can click on Building Code Appeals Board to learn more about the Board and how appeals are filed.

Does the Township have specific instructions available for different types of jobs?

Yes, the following instruction sheets are available for download at www.southwhitehall.com:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 2009 IRC Changes | Commercial Sprinkler Plan Review Requirements |
| Clear Sight Triangles | Construction Codes FAQs |
| Commercial Accessibility Plan Review | Decks and Sheds |
| Commercial Building Plan Review | Fences |
| Commercial Electrical Plan Review | Plot Plan and Plot Plan Example |
| Commercial Fire Main Plan Review Requirements | Residential Construction Guide |
| Commercial Mechanical Plan Review | Residential Electrical Permit Application Guide |
| Commercial Plumbing Review Requirements | Residential Swimming Pool Requirements |
| | Shade Tree Guide |