

*St. Louis County Department of Public Works  
Division of Code Enforcement*

## **When is a Building Permit required for Residential Projects?**

### **BUILDING CONSTRUCTION WORK**

A Building Permit is required to construct, enlarge, alter, repair, move, demolish & replace, convert unfinished space to habitable rooms, or change the occupancy of a building or structure or to a portion of a building or structure

Some examples of typical residential construction projects that require a Building Permit are: new house construction, fix-up/rehabilitation repair type projects, room additions, finishing basements, kitchen remodel, bath remodel, garages, carports, porches, decks, patio covers, barns, sheds, retaining walls, swimming pools, built-in backyard outdoor kitchens and fireplaces, solar panel arrays, fire damage repairs, etc. For additional information on permit requirements refer to the Residential Guides on our website at [www.stlouisco.com/YourGovernment/CountyDepartments/PublicWorks](http://www.stlouisco.com/YourGovernment/CountyDepartments/PublicWorks).

With respect to repairs, a Building Permit is required to repair a building or structure that has been damaged from termites, fire, wind, flood, or earthquake, regardless of the extent of the damage, as well as, to fix-up or rehabilitate a building that has not been maintained in good condition due to lack of on-going maintenance or neglect.

Residential building projects within unincorporated county & contracting municipalities that include electrical, and/or plumbing, and/or mechanical work are issued as an Integrated Building Permit (one permit for the entire job). Electrical work must be done by a licensed Electrical Contractor or qualifying homeowner, plumbing work by a licensed Master Plumber or qualifying homeowner, and mechanical work by a licensed HVAC Servicer-Installer Contractor or qualifying homeowner.

The following types of work are considered ordinary repairs or minor work for which a Building Permit will not be required, provided such ordinary repairs are regularly performed as on-going continued maintenance for the purpose of maintaining the building in good condition:

1. Tuckpointing, patching holes in plaster and drywall, painting (interior and exterior), floor sanding and refinishing, installing floor tile and/or carpeting, replacing finish flooring with like material, application of wall paper (and other similar wall covering material), and replacing cabinet units and/or countertops or a vanity in the same location. (Note: Replacing/installing drywall on new or existing room walls, bulkheads, soffits, or ceilings requires a building permit. A plumbing permit is required to replace/reset sinks & water closets and to install dishwashers associated with replacing countertops and/or cabinets or vanities. Reconfiguring kitchen cabinet & bathroom layouts will likely trigger changes to the plumbing piping and code required electrical receptacle locations, as well as, plumbing & electrical permits for the required installations);

2. Repair or replacement of existing gutters and above-grade portions of downspouts;
3. Application of pre-finished aluminum or steel (or other like materials) on existing soffits, fascia boards, overhangs, porch columns & beams, etc.;
4. Replacement of existing windows within existing rough openings provided the new windows have a maximum U-Factor of 0.40 and meets safety glazing requirements when applicable; repair of existing windows sash and frames within existing rough openings; installation of storm windows and storm doors; glazing and glass replacement within existing frames provided the installation of replacement glass meets the safety glazing requirements for new installations when applicable; (Note: a building permit is required to enlarge or modify existing rough openings)
5. Replacement of exterior doors within existing rough openings provided the new exterior doors have a maximum U-Factor of 0.40; replacement of interior doors and/or door frames within existing rough openings provided the replacement of any door from the house to a garage is at least a 1 3/8" solid wood door, 1 3/8" solid or honeycomb core steel door, or 20 minute fire rated door; repair of exterior and/or interior doors and/or door frames; (Note: a building permit is required to enlarge or modify existing rough openings)
6. On-grade exterior sidewalks, ramps, stairs and/or steps that meet all of the following:
  - a. supported on-grade for their entire area, and
  - b. are not more than 12 inches above grade, and
  - c. are not structurally attached to the house or another structure, and
  - d. are within the property lines.

Note: A Special Use Permit is required from County Highways & Traffic for any sidewalks, ramps, or steps located within their right-of-way.

7. On-grade driveways & parking area within the property lines not more than 12 inches above grade (Note: A Special Use Permit is required from County Highways & Traffic for any driveway work beyond the curb and within their right-of-way);
8. On-grade paved areas for activities related to single-family residential usage (such as a concrete patio, shooting area for a basketball goal, etc), not more than 12 inches above grade, on the same lot as the primary structure, and without roofs, covers or enclosures;
9. Wheelchair ramps (including landings) constructed of wood or similar materials providing access to a private residence that meet all of the following:
  - a. footprint area does not exceed 120 square feet and the ramp and landing floor surfaces do not exceed 30 inches above adjacent grade, and
  - b. rest directly on and/or are supported by the existing grade, sidewalk, patio, porch steps and/or porch, with no separate foundations, and
  - c. are not structurally attached to the house, and
  - d. any portion of the ramp or landing that is more than 12 inches above grade is located behind the front and side yard setback\* required by the County Zoning Ordinance.

It is intended that these ramps could and would be easily removed when they are no longer needed. A building permit is required for wheelchair ramps and landings that, regardless of size, are structurally attached to and supported by the house on one or more sides (similar to typical deck construction) and/or are erected on a foundation system.

10. Wood patios/platforms which rest directly on the ground or a rock base, provided they are

not covered by a roof or canopy, are not supported by any type of permanent foundation, and are a maximum of 12 inches above the finished grade;

11. Some retaining walls up to 3 feet in height that do not support a surcharge load and are not located in close proximity to a property line (see Residential Retaining Wall Brochure for specifics on when a permit is required). Small walls exempted from permit and associated grading shall not create a change in property elevation along property lines, block drainage or create erosion or damage to adjacent properties (see document titled "When is a Land Disturbance Permit required for Residential Projects");
12. Fixed or retractable awnings installed on windows & doors which do not project more than 54" from the exterior wall and do not project into the front yard setback\* as required by the County Zoning Ordinance;
13. Wall paneling & wallpaper of any type when applied to existing residential room wall surfaces;
14. Ceiling tile of any type, other than foam plastic, when applied to existing residential ceiling surfaces. Replacement of damaged lay-in ceiling panels of like materials up to 25% of a room/space and a maximum of 500 square feet;
15. Installation of battery operated smoke detectors within existing dwellings/dwelling units;
16. Small accessory building/structures used as tool or storage sheds, cabanas, play houses, and similar uses which are 120 square feet or less in area and less than 10 feet in height (measured to the mid-point of a sloped roof) provided the structure maintains the front yard setback\* requirements of the County Zoning Ordinance. (Note: This does not include small accessory buildings or built-in structures having unique uses such as outdoor fireplaces, outdoor kitchens & BBQ's and/or smoke houses, storage of fuel or other hazardous materials above normal household quantities, the presence of fuel fired appliances or equipment, solar panel arrays, and other similar uses that if not properly located and/or installed may present an increased fire hazard. A permit is required for all buildings/structures housing these types of uses regardless of size.)
17. Residential accessory structures such as; clothes poles, arbors, garden trellises and other similar minor structures, provided such accessory structures maintain the front yard setback\* required by the County Zoning Ordinance;
18. Basketball goals and standards;
19. Normal manufactured backyard playground equipment for residential property provided such equipment maintains the front yard setback\* required by the County Zoning Ordinance. (Note: This does not include large unique or unusual structures such as playhouses exceeding 120 square feet in area or 10 feet in height, skateboard ramps, batting cages, etc. A permit is require for these types of structures);
20. Swimming pools having a wall height less than 26 inches & a water depth less than 24 inches that are installed entirely above ground and hot tubs & spas placed on a slab-on-grade, provided such structures maintain the front yard setback\* required by the County Zoning Ordinance. (Note: All other swimming pools including inflatable pools, hot tubs, & spas require a building permit);
21. Small goldfish pools, lily pad pools and other similar residential water landscaping type features not intended for bathing purposes, provided such features maintain the front yard setback\* required by the County Zoning Ordinance and the associated grading, etc. to

create the pool does not create a change in property elevation along property lines, block drainage or create erosion or damage to adjacent properties (see document titled "When is a Land Disturbance Permit required for Residential Projects"). (Note: Some retaining walls require a building permit, see Item 10 above);

22. Roof covering replacement for roof slopes of 4:12 or more when done with a like material. Replacement of 25% or less of the roof sheathing with like material. (Note: A building permit is required to shingle or install other roof coverings on roof slopes less than 4:12 and on roof slopes of 4:12 or more when re-roofing with different materials);
23. New exterior siding (vinyl, metal, wood, hardboard, etc.);
24. New fencing or replacement of existing fencing (except when enclosing swimming pools, spas, or hot tubs) in the rear or side yards provided the fence is no more than 6 feet in height. Fencing on a corner cannot be located within the County Zoning Ordinance site distance triangle (Note: A building permit is required for fences around swimming pools, spas, or hot tubs, and for all fences more than 6 feet in height)
25. Radio or television antennae 12 feet or less in height, mounted on the ground, attached to or on the roof of a building. Dish antennas 2 feet in diameter or less installed on grade, to the house wall or on the roof. All antennae must maintain the front yard setback\* required by the County Zoning Ordinance;
26. Minor cosmetic repairs (including minor smoke/fire damage, termite, wind, etc.) to a building when the building official verifies that the work is of a minor cosmetic nature and there is no structural damage or change to any part of the building structure. A field inspection is required in advance to determine the nature of the repair.
27. Resealing existing driveways and paved parking areas;
28. Temporary tents used exclusively for recreational camping purposes such as a homeowner's children's weekend campout in the backyard;
29. Small statues that can be placed on grade without needing a foundation support, and not attached to or part of a building or structure, provided such statues maintain the front yard setback\* required by the County Zoning Ordinance;
30. Foundation and floor slab repair such as patching/filling of cracks (up to 1/4 inch in walls and 3/8 inch in slabs), waterproofing basements, etc., including underpinning of slabs and foundation wall, provided the existing building is otherwise structurally sound; (Note: Removing and replacing a segment of the footing and/or foundation wall requires a building permit.)
31. Relining, repairing, patching and/or shotcreting existing swimming pool walls/floors, provided required minimum water depths under diving boards (if present) are maintained.
32. Repairing or replacing door or window hardware including locks and latches;
33. On existing interior stairs, landings, and/or elevated floors: Repairing or replacing handrails, tread, and/or riser finish boards, and/or up to 50% of the components (balusters or rails) that comprise the guard with like materials. (Note: a building permit is required to repair or replace more than 50% of the guard components (balusters or rails), to replace the guard along an existing interior stair, stair run, or elevated floor, and/or to replace an entire interior stair or stair run).
34. On existing exterior decks, porches, and/or stairs: Repairing or replacing up to 50% of the existing finish decking material with like material; repairing or replacing up to 50% of

the components (balusters or rails) that comprise the guard and/or replacing up to 50% of the entire linear length of the guard with like materials; and/or repairing or replacing stair handrails, tread, and/or riser finish boards with like materials. (Note: a building permit is required to replace a deck or porch; to replace deck/porch joists, beams, headers, ledger boards, and/or columns; to replace the finish decking, guard, and/or stair treads with a different material such as replacing wood with plastic or composite products; to repair or replace more than 50% of the finish decking with like material; to repair or replace more than 50% of the components (balusters or rails) that comprise the guard or to replace more than 50% of the entire linear length of the guard with like materials\*; and/or to replace an entire exterior stair or stair run)

\* When replacing more than 50% of the length of the guard, or when replacing a substantial percentage of the components that comprise the guard, the entire guard shall be made to comply with current code requirements which may require a different guardrail design and/or materials.

35. Increasing attic insulation or installing exterior wall insulation under new/replacement siding. (Note: a building permit is required to install insulation, furring strips, & drywall on the room side or interior basement side of exterior walls)

\*Caution: Usually houses in Unincorporated County are constructed on or close to the front yard setback line, thus there are very few lots where there would be sufficient space available to place a structure between the minimum front yard setback line and the house itself. Except for large wide lots a similar situation occurs with respect to the side yard setback. If located in a Municipality that contracts with the County for code enforcement contact the Municipal Zoning Official regarding setback requirements.

Listing of work exempt from a building permit was originally consolidated from individual policies and released 06/01/98; Revised/Updated 12/01/02 & 06/01/06; Document reformatted as "When is a Building Permit Required" and Issued 3/22/10, Revised/Updated 07/26/11, 04/19/13, 05/07/13, 9/20/13 and 10/01/13.