



City of Carmel-by-the-Sea
Community Planning and Building Department
Planning & Building Permit Requirements

What is the difference between a Planning Permit and a Building Permit?

While the Planning Division and Building Division closely intertwine, each division issues a separate permit with separate requirements. The Planning Division reviews for compliance with the Design Guidelines, Zoning Code, historical resource regulations, and all other requirements related to the finished appearance of structures and properties. The Building Division reviews for compliance with the California Building Code, Fire Code, and other related codes for the safe construction and occupancy of residential and commercial structures.

It is common that a building permit is required after a planning permit is issued. This is to ensure that all construction documents are reviewed for compliance with the applicable building regulations.

When is a Planning permit required?

Almost always.

A planning permit is typically required whenever exterior changes, modifications, or additions are proposed to an existing structure, or the development of a new structure or use is proposed. This includes work ranging from major construction to minor cosmetic work such as paint. The best advice is to **call the Planning Department prior to starting any exterior work to find out if a permit is needed.** In addition to development or modifications of exterior elements, the Planning Division reviews and issues permits for zoning items such as lot line adjustments, site coverage modifications, and use changes for new or existing businesses.

When is a Building permit required?

The California Building Code states that *“Any owner or owner’s authorized agent who intends to construct, enlarge, alter, repair, move, demolish, or change the occupancy of a building or structure, or to erect, install, enlarge, alter, repair, remove, convert, or replace any electrical, gas, mechanical or plumbing system, or to cause any such work to be performed, shall first make application to the building official and obtain the required permit.”*

In essence, all construction work requires a building permit, even in emergency cases or the case of “in-kind” repair work. There are a limited number of items considered exempt from building permitting requirements, found in section 105.2 of the California Building Code.

Below you may find common examples of development work performed and their associated permitting requirements. **THIS IS NOT A COMPLETE LIST.** For items not listed here, or if you have any questions, please contact the Community Planning and Building Department at (831) 620-2010 for further information.

Construction Type	Planning Permit Required	Building Permit Required
Water damage or dry rot repair	Possibly. If work is exterior, if there are non-conformities, or if the property is historic, a separate planning review may be required.	Yes, the City does issue “exploratory demolition” permits to uncover the extent of these damages, however full plans and a permit is required before repairs begin.
Repair or replacement of decks, stairs, or landings	If replacements are in-kind, a separate planning permit is not required. If changes are proposed, a planning permit shall be acquired.	Yes, many items cannot be replaced “in-kind” due to building code changes. Refer to our guidance document for further information.
In-kind replacement of single-trade items (water heater, electrical panel, or furnace)	No, a planning permit is not required.	Yes, all instances require the appropriate permit. For emergency replacements, please see our emergency permit requirements .
Roof repairs or replacements	Some materials may trigger additional planning review. See our roof replacement handout for additional information.	Yes, building permits are required in all cases of repair or replacement.
Creation of new Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) or Junior ADU	Generally, ADU’s are not subject to a separate planning permit. A Coastal Development Permit may be required in some cases.	Yes, a permit is required in all instances. Additional information is available through the State Handbook .
Tenant Improvement (TI) of existing commercial space	TI’s that include exterior modifications or a change in use require a planning permit prior to building permit submittal.	Yes, all commercial projects require a permit in addition to a state-licensed architect to stamp and sign the plans.
Installation of new fences or site coverage elements	Yes, planning permits are required for all fencing or site coverage changes.	No, building permits are only required for fences exceeding 7’ in height. Permits are required for retaining walls 3’ in height or greater.
Remodel, addition, or rebuild of a single-family residence	Yes, any exterior changes require a separate planning permit. Minor work may qualify for a simple, free, over-the-counter permit.	Yes, all architectural or structural demolition or construction requires a permit.
Replacement of existing windows or doors	Yes, exterior modifications require planning permit approval.	No, permit is not required if header or framing is not changing
Demolition or installation of interior finishes (cabinets, flooring, countertops, painting)	No, interior modifications do not require planning permit review.	No, interior finishes do not require a permit application

An application for a Historic Evaluation may be required prior to approval of the Planning permit for a change in exterior structure or materials. CMC 17.32.050 (Alteration of Property).

Projects within certain overlay districts that may otherwise be exempt from permit requirements may require a Coastal Development Permit from the Planning Division. Please contact the Planning Division for additional information.