

guide to obtain permits

COMPLETE, EASY-TO-
UNDERSTAND INFORMATION
ON HOW TO APPLY FOR A
BUILDING PERMIT IN
THE CITY OF CHICAGO



December 2017



CITY OF CHICAGO
Rahm Emanuel, Mayor



Dear Permit Applicant:

Behind every building permit is a homeowner’s dream, a new or expanded business, an enhancement to the community and the economy, and the creation of jobs. When I became Mayor, I made streamlining the building permit process and reducing the time to permit a top priority. In 2012, this involved replacing the old paper-based sequential plan review process with a new electronic plan review system known as E-Plan for small to mid-size standard plan review projects.

Today, E-Plan is an integrated streamlined process that allows homeowners, businesses and design professionals to submit plans electronically 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, to have simultaneous review of the plans by all professional and trade disciplines, and the real-time return of approved, stamped plans once fees are paid.

The more we create efficiency in our process, the better we can focus on our ultimate goal to protect the safety and welfare of the residents and visitors by ensuring that buildings are of the highest integrity and quality. A city building permit ensures that safety standards are met in constructing, altering and repairing buildings.

The Department of Buildings will continue to improve and streamline the permit process. By carefully reading this brochure, you will understand the process for obtaining required permits for the work you are planning to do.

Thank you,

Rahm Emanuel

Rahm Emanuel, Mayor
City of Chicago

TABLE OF CONTENTS →

General permit information.....	3
Before applying for a permit.....	6
When is a permit needed?	8
Permit review options	10
Where to apply?	12
When a building permit is not required	15

general permit information

ONE OF THE GREAT THINGS ABOUT THE CITY OF CHICAGO IS THAT IT NEVER STOPS GROWING AND IMPROVING. AT THE DEPARTMENT OF BUILDINGS, IT IS OUR MISSION TO ENSURE THAT AS OUR CITY GROWS, IT MAINTAINS SAFE STANDARDS OF DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND MATERIALS IN EVERY BUILDING AND STRUCTURE.

This brochure will give you clear, useful information about permits for your renovation, repair or new construction project. Although this brochure is mostly for residents and building owners, we have also included information for developers and larger commercial projects. Our department's professionals are here to answer all your questions and make the permit process as quick and simple as possible.

Why do I need a building permit?

The building permit process is designed to ensure buildings comply with minimum standards of safety established by the Chicago Building Code for the protection of building occupants. With a building permit, you or your contractors will get advice from reviewers and inspectors to ensure these standards are met in your project.

For what types of work do I need a permit?

A permit is generally required before beginning new construction, repairs, additions, alterations or demolition projects. Please turn to pages 5, 8 and 9 for a list and diagram of the types of projects that require a permit.

Some common projects for single-family homes: do I need a permit?

YES

- Building garages, porches, decks
- Moving walls, doors, columns, beams
- Changing the location of or adding new windows and doors
- Installing **new** boiler system

NO

- Replacing windows or doors *
(same size and location)
- Replacing plumbing fixtures
(same size and location)
- Replacing siding *
- Replacing furnaces
- Fences up to 5 feet high *
- Painting

For full list of common projects that do not require a permit, please see page 15.

Keep in mind that, as the property owner, you are ultimately responsible for obtaining the correct permits. However, an architect, contractor or any other person authorized by you may apply and sign the application

* Unless your building is a Chicago Landmark or is in a Chicago Landmark District, or your building has a vacant building violation.

Are there different types of permits?

The Department of Buildings issues many different types of permits, through different permit review processes, depending on the type of work you are doing and the size of your project:

- **Easy Permit (EPP):** for small and simple home and building improvement projects, including replace and repair projects
- **Homeowners Assistance:** special permit services are available for owner-occupants of single-family homes, i.e. plan assistance for certain renovation projects
- **Standard Plan Review (SPR):** for small to mid-size new construction and renovation projects using E-Plan system
- **Self-Certification Permit Program:** allows licensed design professionals who have completed special departmental training to certify that certain residential and small commercial projects comply with the Chicago Building Code
- **Developer Services:** for larger and more complex construction and renovation

You will find more detailed information about these permit review processes, as well as how and where to apply for a permit on the next several pages of this brochure.

Do I need to hire a professional architect or engineer?

You do not need to hire an architect or engineer for simple home improvement projects. If your project is for a single-family home

renovation and you are the owner-occupant, in many instances you can prepare your own drawings through the Homeowner Assistance Program. For all other permit applications that require plans or drawings, they must be prepared by an Illinois-licensed architect or structural engineer. In all cases, the project must comply with the Chicago Building Code and other Municipal Codes.

Do I need to hire a general contractor?

That depends on the type of work you are doing. If you are an owner-occupant of a single-family home or residential building with up to three stories and six dwelling units, in many cases you can be your own general contractor. In that case, for carpentry, or heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) work you will need to fill out the Certification of Responsibility portion of the permit application. This certifies that you take responsibility for meeting the Chicago Building Code and other Municipal Code requirements and for correcting any deficiencies.

All masonry, plumbing or electrical work requires a licensed contractor. An exception is granted to owner-occupants of a single-family dwelling. They may take responsibility for plumbing and masonry work by completing and notarizing the Certification of Responsibility portion of the construction permit application.

Before your permit application can be reviewed, the Department of Buildings checks if your property has any citations for building code violations or stop work orders. You must resolve any outstanding issues before you apply for a permit or address them as part of your permit application.

← TERMS

Permit review process: Different projects require different types of review & approval. **Easy Permits (EPP)** are generally approved the day of application. **Standard Plan Reviews (SPR) and Developer Services (DS)**, take longer.

Zoning approval needed: Most projects require approval from the Zoning Administrator.

Plans required: Construction drawings prepared by a licensed architect or structural engineer.

Homeowner Assistance available: To make things easier for single-family homeowners, the City allows, in some circumstances, the owner-occupant to draw up their own plans. Please see pg. 12 for more details.

Licensed professional required: For the safety and protection of homeowners and businesses, a signed contract with a licensed contractor or trade professional is required when applying for an Easy Permit.

Licensed professional to apply: Some jobs are complex enough to require a contractor, architect or engineer to apply for the permit. Remember that the homeowner is still ultimately responsible for the permits.

Owner-occupied exception available: For residential permits, owner-occupants of buildings of 6 or fewer dwelling units and not more than 3 stories high may act as their own general contractor.

Note: Landmark buildings or buildings in Landmark Districts have special requirements and may require additional steps or permissions not indicated in this guide.

Common permit projects

This chart presents a summary of useful information for various residential construction, renovation and repair projects that require a permit.

	Permit Review Process	Homeowner's Assistance Available	Zoning Approval	Plans	Licensed Professional to do work	Licensed professional to apply	Online Application
Addition: rooms, upper floors, expanding building envelope first floor addition only	SPR	•	•	•	•	•	•
Basement: finishing (multi-unit) Single-Family Home	SPR	•	•	•	•	•	•
Boiler: install new system replace (4+ dwelling units only)	SPR EPP			•	• •	•	•
Carport: install or replace attached carport	SPR		•	•	•	•	•
Chimney: install or replace repair	SPR EPP		•	•	• •	•	•
Concrete: replace basement slab	EPP				•		
Conversion of Units: single to multiple units	SPR		•	•	•	•	•
Deck: build or replace (over 6 ft from grade) Single-Family Home (under 6 ft from grade)	SPR	• •	•	•	•	•	•
Deconversion of Basement: single-family home	EPP						
Deconversion of Units: multiple to fewer units	SPR		•	•	•	•	•
Dormer: Installation	SPR		•	•	•	•	•
Drywall: over 1,000 sq. ft. (may also need electrical permit)	EPP						•
Driveway	SPR		•	•	•	•	•
Electrical System: alteration or expansion	SPR		•	•	•	•	•
Fence: non-brick or chainlink, 5-6 ft. tall at ground level over 6 ft. tall or brick at ground level	EPP EPP		•				• •
Furnace: install system Replace (4+ dwelling units)	SPR EPP		•	•	• •	• •	• •
Garage: New, over 600 sq. ft. or with rooftop deck New, 600 sq. ft. or less and no rooftop deck	SPR EPP		•	•	•	•	• •
Green Roof:	SPR		•	•	•	•	•
Gut-rehab: complete modernization	SPR		•	•	•	•	•
Hot water heater: install or replace (4+ units)	EPP				•	•	• (replace only)
Light Fixtures: install or replace	EPP				•	•	•
Masonry: replace/install face brick (4+ units) tuckpointing only	SPR EPP		•	•	• •	•	• •
Plumbing Fixtures: replace (4+ units)	EPP				•		
Plumbing System: construct or alter	SPR		•	•	•	•	•
Porch: build, replace or enclose (50+ sq. ft./6 ft. over grade)	SPR		•	•	•	•	•
Roof: tear off, recoat, recover, no structural work (4+ units) rebuild slope less than 5-in-12 inches	EPP SPR		•	•	• •	•	• • (recover only)
Security Alarm: installation (no permit required for low-voltage system)	EPP				•	•	•
Sewer: new system (City Hall, Room 906) Repair	EPP	•	•	•	•	•	
Shed: 70 + sq. ft.	EPP		•				
Solar Panels: 13.44 kw and greater Less than 13.44 kw	SPR EPP		•	• •	• •	• •	• •
Stairs: Tread and riser repair (4+ units) Structural repair or replacement (6 + ft. over grade)	EPP SPR		•	•	•	•	•
Trash Enclosure: any material	EPP						
Ventilation System: new mechanical and supply	SPR		•	•	•	•	•
Walls: moving or removing Single-family Home	SPR SPR		•	• •	• •	• •	• •
Water Service: new (City Hall, Room 906) Repair (City Hall, Room 906)				•	• •	• •	
Window & Door Replacement: 4+ units	EPP				•		•
Wrecking: demolition of entire home, garage or building (City Hall, Room 906)					•	•	

NOTE: If your building has landmark designation, landmark approval from Department of Planning and Development is always required.



What should I do before I apply for a permit?

- **Building Code Violations.** Provide proof that the violations have been resolved by submitting a copy of the building permit obtained to correct the violation and pass permit inspections. If the violations have not been resolved, you will be required to include the scope of the work to address the violations.
- **Stop Work Orders.** These must be resolved before any new permits are approved.
- **Revenue Indebtedness.** You may begin the application process, but any outstanding debt to the city must be paid before any permits are approved and issued.

DO I NEED ZONING APPROVAL?

Most projects require zoning approval during the permit process. Zoning Ordinance Administration staff can help you determine if your project needs zoning approval and/or is subject to landmark approval. They are also available to review plans, resolve issues and authorize zoning approvals.

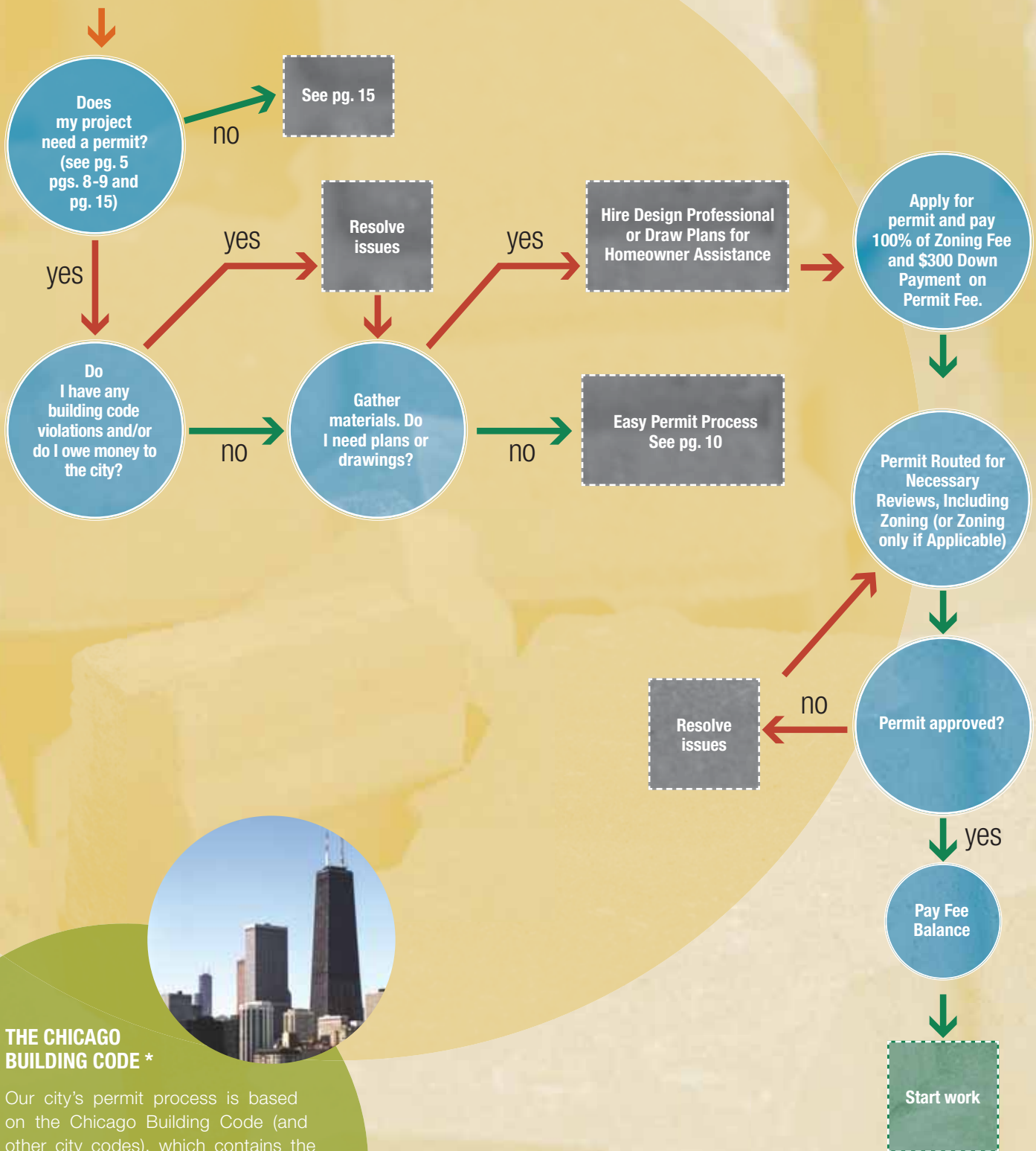
If you are altering the footprint or height or changing the use of a space, you may need to apply for a zoning exception, variance or adjustment which may increase the time it takes to obtain a building permit.

Zoning Ordinance Administration

9th Floor, Room 905
121 North LaSalle St.
(312) 744-5777

Monday through Friday
8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

the permit process

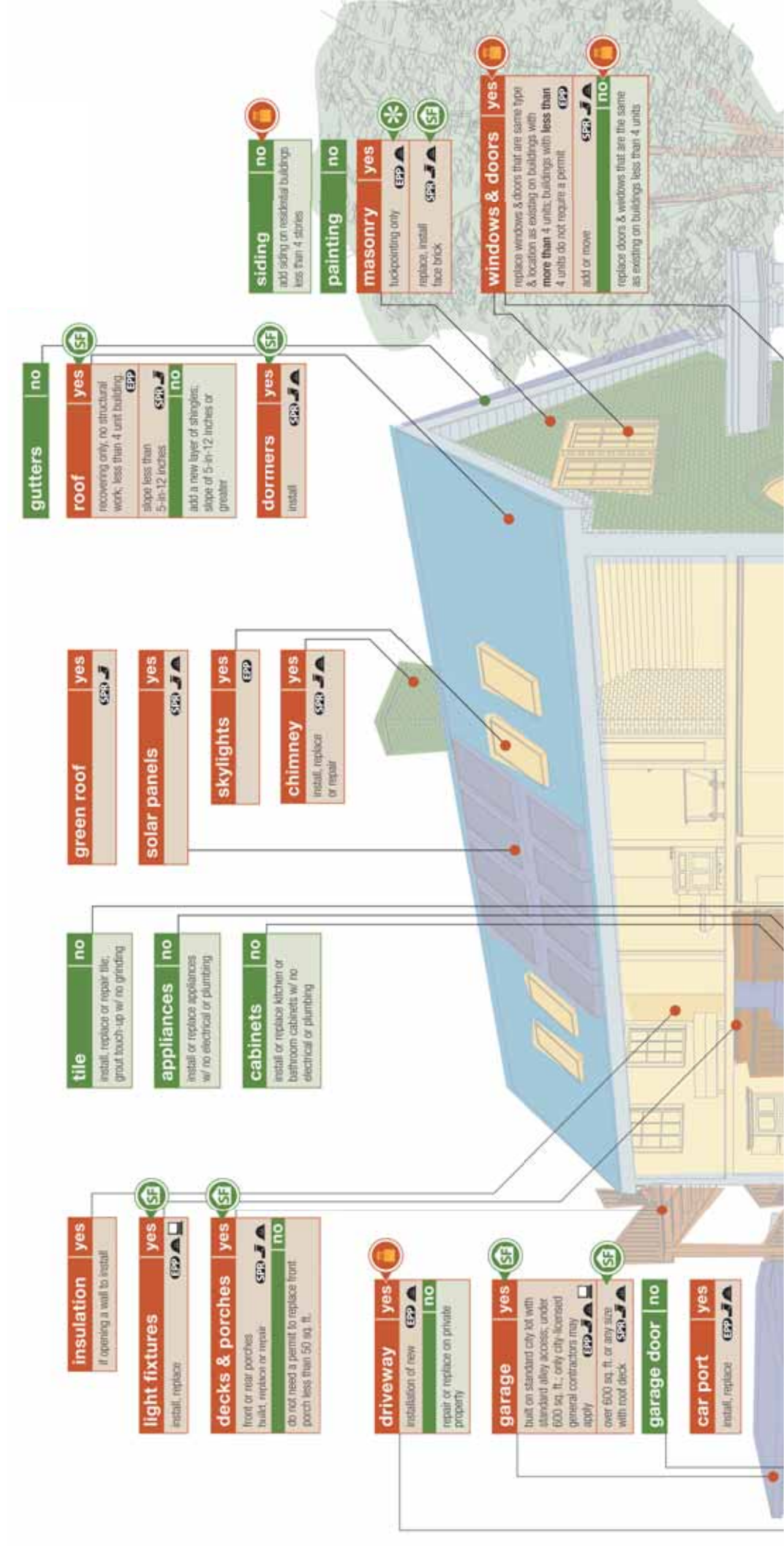


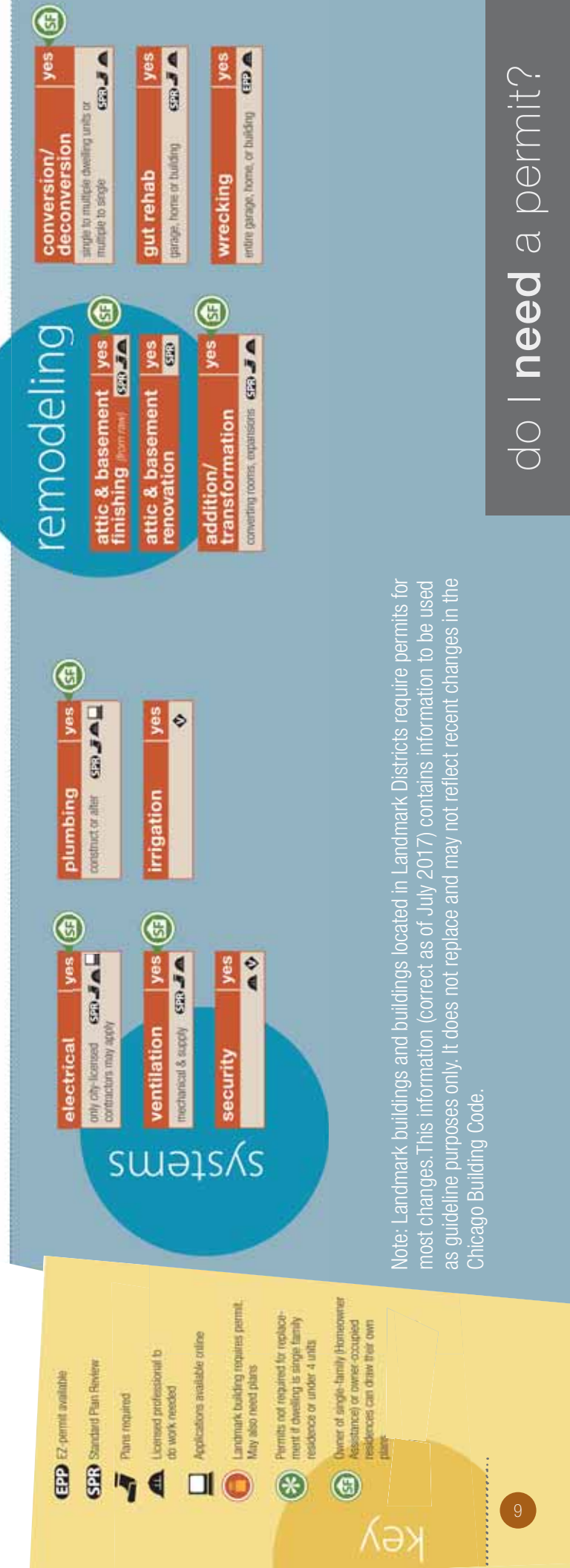
THE CHICAGO BUILDING CODE *

Our city's permit process is based on the Chicago Building Code (and other city codes), which contains the laws and rules that determine how structures should be built and maintained. If you are interested, you can review the Chicago Building Code yourself online at www.cityofchicago.org/buildings and click button labeled Building Code.

Do I need a permit?

HERE ARE THE TYPES OF PROJECTS AROUND A TYPICAL HOUSE THAT REQUIRE A PERMIT. PLEASE NOTE THAT THE PROPERTY OWNER IS THE PERSON ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE FOR OBTAINING THE PROPER CITY OF CHICAGO BUILDING PERMIT.





9

do I **need** a permit?



What type of permit review process should I use?

THE CITY OF CHICAGO OFFERS SEVERAL TYPES OF PERMIT REVIEW PROCESSES FOR SMALL AND LARGE PROJECTS, RESIDENTIAL OR COMMERCIAL. THE DEPARTMENT OF BUILDINGS STAFF IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE TO HELP YOU IDENTIFY THE RIGHT PERMIT PROCESS FOR YOUR PROJECT.

This section provides an overview of the different permit application and approval processes available. In general, home and property owners can apply for Easy Permits and Homeowner Assistance Permits. All other permits generally require the services of a design professional or contractor.

1. Easy Permit

WHAT IS IT?

- A streamlined process for small and simple home and building improvement projects.
- Repair and replacing elements that do not require architectural plans. (see the chart on pg. 5 for projects which need plans).

HOW DOES IT WORK?

- Available at our City Hall Office, Room 900. Usually requires only one visit, and are generally approved the same day.
- Before your visit, you may download an application form from our website: www.cityofchicago.org/buildings (click on the [Easy Permit Process](#) under [What We Do](#)). Then submit the application at one of our offices, plus any additional documentation.
- Some Easy Permits may be applied for online – apply for an Easy Permit, pay for it and print it out. Visit cityofchicago.org/buildings and click on [Easy Permit Process](#) under [What We Do](#).

2.

Standard Plan Review

WHAT IS IT?

- Small to mid-sized new construction and renovation projects for buildings up to 80 feet high, residential properties of up to 49 units or commercial properties under 150,000 square feet.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

- Standard Plan Review applications are submitted online and reviewed through the City's electronic plan review system. Each project is assigned a Project Manager to facilitate technical plan reviews, ensure plan compliance, and issue permits.
- The architect or expeditor must complete the permit application online and upload plans electronically to E-Plan.
- Property owners should ensure their contact information is included in the application for notification purposes.
- Your Project Manager will coordinate all technical and regulatory reviews.
- If corrections are needed, applicant of record will be notified and may resubmit corrected plans online electronically, 24/7, from the convenience of any computer.
- The applicant will be notified when the review is complete and the permit is issued via email, including building owners if contact information has been provided.



3. Self-Certification

WHAT IS IT?

- A streamlined review process allowing Illinois-licensed architects and structural engineers who have completed a special training course, and are registered within the department, to certify that the project complies with the Chicago Building Code and other Municipal Codes.
- Available for small to mid-sized residential and commercial projects meeting eligibility criteria.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

- Applications may be submitted online by qualified Illinois-licensed design professionals.
- The design professional must upload the permit application and all required plans, drawings and documentation.
- Some projects may require peer review by structural engineer.
- The design professional will be notified if your permit is approved or if corrections are needed.
- The design professional can pay the permit fee online and download the approved plans and permit certificate for printing.
- Expeditors are not allowed to submit plans and/or obtain permits through the self-certification program.

4. Developer Services

WHAT IS IT?

- The Developer Services process is designed to meet the permit review and approval needs of large and highly complex new construction or renovation projects, such as, high-rise buildings over 80 feet high, large or open air assembly, institutional or mercantile buildings over 150,000 square feet, residential buildings with 50 units or more, technology centers, projects with green technology, and foundations 12 feet or deeper.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

- Available at our City Hall office, Room 900.
- Submit an appointment request form online. Go to cityofchicago.com/buildings and click on [Developer Services](#) under [What We Do](#).
- At the meeting, a Project Administrator will give applicant an outline of the coordinated review process, a checklist of all required documents and plans and the estimated timeline for issuing the permit.
- The Project Administrator will be your single point of contact to manage the entire permit review process within the Department.
- The plan reviews are performed by our third party review design firms. This review is an additional cost to building permit fees.

A new Direct Developer Services Program is also available. If you are interested, please send an email to dobcommissioner@cityofchicago.org or visit www.cityofchicago.org

where do I apply for a building permit?

1. CHICAGO CITY HALL

Department of Buildings
City Hall, Room 900
121 North LaSalle St. Chicago, IL 60602
(312) 744-3449

- Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
You may apply for the following permits at City Hall:
Easy Permit, Driveway, Sewer, Water Sign, Elevator.
- You may also apply for a permit through the
the Homeowners Assistance Program. For more
information, visit www.cityofchicago.org and click on
Homeowner button.

2. ONLINE PERMITS

For your ease and convenience, you can also
apply for some permits online at www.cityofchicago.org/buildings
and click "Getting Started Online." Permits
available online include:

- Standard Plan Review Projects using E-Plan
- Replacing existing windows and doors; same size and
location only; permit required for buildings with 4 or
more dwelling units and for landmarks
- Replacing furnace or boiler for a four or more dwelling
unit building
- Fence; permit required for non-brick or chainlink
fences over 5 feet and up to 6 feet high
- Tuckpointing
- Wood-frame garage; built on standard city lots with
standard alley access, application must be completed
by contractor or owner occupant of a residential building
up to 3 units.





What should I bring to the permit office?

When you are ready to apply for an EPP or Homeowner Assistance permit at City Hall, bringing the following items with you will make the process faster and easier.

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>→</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permit application signed by property owner • Architectural plans or drawings, if needed • Details of work to be done • Estimated cost of the project • Square footage of the area of work • Property Survey | <p>→</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notarized Certification of Responsibility (not for condominiums, more than 6 units or commercial buildings) • Other documentation, if applicable: copies of signed contracts between owner and contractor, zoning approval documentation, signed approval letter from condo associations, original electrical application from contractor, photos, etc. |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Note: For Standard Plan Review projects, you must submit your application online using the E-Plan system at cityofchicago.org/buildings.

online permits

Several other types of permits can also be applied for, paid and printed online by licensed professionals in the City of Chicago.

PERMIT TYPE

Who can apply online?

Garage

Only licensed general contractors or single family homeowner

- Go to www.cityofchicago.org/buildings
- Click "Getting Started Online"
- Enter username and password (or create one)
- Select "Garage" or "Hot Water Heater"
- Enter all required information and payment

Hot water heater

Only licensed plumbers

Electrical

Only licensed electrical contractors

Go to www.cityofchicago.org/buildings

- Click "Getting Started Online"
- Enter username and password (or create one)
- Select "Electrical"
- Enter all required information
- Finish by paying and printing permit online



other important questions

How long will the permit process take?

Permits obtained through the Easy Permit Process can be obtained quickly, sometimes even in the same day. The Municipal Code of Chicago allows a 10-day window for the local Alderman to review the permit. The 10-day notice does not apply to residential garage permit applications or easy permit applications.

In order to expedite the 10-day window, an applicant may obtain an Aldermanic Acknowledgement Letter from their respective Alderman and submit it with their building permit application.

Beginning October 2013, permits now have the number of days the process took printed directly on the permit.

What if I start construction without a permit?

The construction permit process is very important for the safety of residents and visitors in our city, which is why it is necessary to obtain proper permits. Generally, when non-permitted work is discovered:

- A stop work order is issued and work must cease immediately
- Work can be restarted only after you obtain the proper permit and pay a penalty of \$1,000 (or associated stop work order fee)
- If building and zoning codes have been violated, you may be subject to administrative or Circuit Court enforcement action
- Possible penalties for violating a stop work order include fines up to \$1,000 per day, up to 100 hours of community service and imprisonment up to 6 months
- You might be required to remove any work that was completed without the required permits

What if I do more work than the permit allows?

If the work on your project goes beyond the scope of the permit, or does not comply with approved drawings or plans:

- A stop work order is issued and work must cease immediately
- The permit may be revoked
- Work can be re-started after you obtain a new permit and pay a penalty of \$1,000 (or associated stop work order fee)
- If building and zoning codes have been violated, you may be subject to administrative or Circuit Court enforcement action
- Possible penalties for violating a stop work order include fines up to \$1,000 per day, up to 100 hours of community service and imprisonment up to 6 months
- You might be required to remove any work that was completed without the required permits

Are there permit waivers for Senior Citizens?

The Building Commissioner may waive permit fees for building owners 65 years and older who own and reside in a building three units or less for 10 years or longer and whose household income does not exceed 80% of the Chicago area median family income as calculated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.



When a Building Permit is NOT Required

A building permit is NOT required for the following repair or replacement work at any building:

- Interior finishes such as carpet, hardwood flooring, tile, paint and wallpaper
- Interior non-fire rated ceiling tiles (excluding grid)
- Cabinetry and furniture without electrical and plumbing connections
- In-kind replacement of non-fire rated interior doors
- At grade non-combustible walkways and patios
- Playground equipment
- Fences max. 5'-0" high on private property (excludes landmark buildings and landmark districts as well as chain link and masonry fences)
- Vinyl, aluminum, wood, EIFS or other similar nonstructural exterior finishes on all one story buildings except Hazardous occupancy (excludes landmark buildings and landmark districts)
- Porches less than 50 square feet in area, excluding steps, and a maximum of six feet above ground level for the floor of the porch (excludes landmark building and landmark districts)

A building permit is NOT required for the following construction or alteration work at any building:

- Temporary tents max. 400 sq. ft. that comply with all zoning and construction type setback requirements and are not less than 2 feet from all property lines and not less than 6 feet from all residential buildings & erected for not more than 60 consecutive days

A building permit is NOT required for the following repair or replacement work in non-mixed use residential buildings (excluding hotels):

- Shingle roofing with slope of 5 in 12 or steeper on residential buildings with max. of 3 dwelling units & 3 stories
- In-kind replacement of non-fire rated doors/windows, hot water heaters, boilers, furnaces and AC condensers in buildings with max. of 3 dwelling units & 3 stories (excludes windows and exterior doors in landmark buildings and landmark districts)

- In-kind replacement of toilets, sinks, faucets and tubs
- Interior stairs in same location within a single dwelling unit
- Not more than 1,000 sq. ft. of drywall without any alteration of underlying structural, plumbing, electrical or ventilation systems
- Low voltage wiring for phones, speakers, burglar alarms, doorbells, thermostats and computers (excluding fire alarm systems)
- Replacement of not more than 250 bricks in buildings with max. of 3 dwelling units & 3 stories (excludes landmark buildings and landmark districts)
- Vinyl, aluminum, wood, EIFS or other similar nonstructural exterior finishes on residential buildings not more than 3 stories in height (excludes landmark buildings and landmark districts)

A building permit is NOT required for the following construction or alteration work in residential buildings with 1-3 dwelling units:

- Alteration of existing interior stair system with no change to existing stair opening in detached single family residences
- Alteration of low voltage wiring for phones, speakers, burglar alarms, doorbells, thermostats and computers inside non-mixed use buildings (excluding fire alarm systems)
- Gazebos max. 150 sq. ft. (open air with roof and no walls) that comply with all zoning and construction type setback requirements and are not less than 2 feet from all property lines and not less than 6 feet from all residential buildings. Combustible gazebos shall not be less than 3 feet from property lines.
- Enclosed sheds max. 70 sq. ft. that comply with all zoning and construction type setback requirements and are not less than 2 feet from all property lines and not less than 6 feet from all residential buildings. Combustible enclosed sheds shall not be less than 3 feet from interior property lines. Only one enclosed shed is allowed per lot.

Note: This does not constitute a waiver from the regulations of Title 13, 15 and 18 (Building & Construction) and Title 17 (Chicago Zoning Ordinance) of the Municipal Code of Chicago. All construction must be code compliant.



CUSTOMER SERVICE: (312) 744-3449
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, VISIT US AT
WWW.CITYOFCHICAGO.ORG/BUILDINGS

Notice of DISCLAIMER

This reference guide is provided as a public service for informational and educational purposes only. The information contained in this reference guide is summary in nature and does not include all conditions, limitations, or exceptions that may be applicable to a particular situation. This reference guide is not a substitute for the Municipal Code of Chicago or any other applicable federal, state or local law and does not waive, alter, or affect any rights of the City of Chicago or impose any liability on the City of Chicago; does not create any private rights, waivers, variances, entitlements or other privileges; and does not release, waive, alter or diminish a party from full and complete compliance with the Municipal Code of Chicago or any other applicable federal, state or local law.