

Frequently Asked Questions- Building/Zoning Permits

What services does the Building Department provide?

Professionals who are familiar in building and local codes staff your local Building Department. Their focus is the promotion, awareness and enforcement of fire and life safety codes. These professionals can be an important source of information to help you through a building project, provide technical information and resources, and can answer zoning related questions. The Building Department reviews all plans for building permits to ensure compliance with zoning laws and building code requirements. They also perform periodic inspections during construction to make sure the work complies with the approved plans and the building code. The staff is available to answer any questions you may have.

What is a building/zoning permit?

A building permit is a document that grants legal permission to commence the construction, alteration, removal or relocation of a building or other structure in accordance with approved drawings and specifications.

Why do I need a building/zoning permit?

Permits ensure that construction within our municipality meet the standards set out in the NYS Building Codes and the Zoning Code of the Town of Skaneateles. Your project must meet minimum requirements for health, safety and structural soundness. The Town of Skaneateles Zoning Code regulates how close a structure can be located to a property line or watercourse, building height and the percentage of lot coverage. The permit process helps to make certain your project will comply with the Zoning Code.

When is a building/zoning permit required?

A permit is required for the construction, enlargement, change in occupancy or use of any existing building, alteration, improvement, removal, relocation or demolition of any building or structure or any portion thereof, and the installation of a solid-fuel-burning heating appliance, chimney or flue in any dwelling unit. Permits are also required to add any impermeable surface to any land and to convert a seasonal cottage to year-round use. Projects requiring a permit include but **are not limited to:**

- decks, porches, three season rooms
- conversion of a basement to living space
- attached or detached garages, pole barns, storage sheds including pre-built
- all swimming pools, hot tubs & spas that can hold 24 inches or more of water
- structural changes or repairs to existing buildings
- installation or replacement of a fence
- extensions to existing plumbing and electrical systems
- installation or replacement of any fireplace, wood-burning stove, pellet stove or other solid-fuel-burning appliance or its chimney/vents.
- enlarge, decrease or otherwise modify locations of doors or windows
- filling, excavation, clear-cutting or alteration of grade of land
- enlargement of any existing driveway or parking area

CHECK WITH THE BUILDING DEPARTMENT TO BE SURE IF YOU'RE PROJECT REQUIRES A PERMIT.

When is a permit NOT required?

- paving or repaving of an existing driveway or parking area involving no enlargement
- install or replace siding or a roof provided no more than two layers are to be covered and the existing roof covering is not wood shake, slate, clay, cement or asbestos-cement tile.
- ordinary repairs that are not structural in nature and do not provide for a new or extended use of the building or structure
- replacing windows or doors of equal size
- install or remove internal, non-load bearing partitions or walls

Who should get the permit- property owner or the contractor?

As the property owner, you are legally responsible to make sure that a building/zoning permit is obtained when required. Your contractor or design professional can make application for the permit, but the property owner is responsible for ensuring that a permit has been issued prior to any work commencing.

Do I need a contractor?

This depends on the scope of the project and your level of knowledge and skill. You can do the work yourself or hire a contractor. If you decide to hire a contractor, you will need to provide their name, contact information and appropriate insurance coverage.

Can I do my own plumbing and/or electrical work?

All plumbing work must be done by a plumber licensed in Onondaga County and requires a permit from Onondaga County Department of Health Plumbing Control in addition to the building/zoning permit. Electrical work can be done by the homeowner but requires an electrical permit. The following third party electrical inspection agencies are the **ONLY** approved Electrical Inspectors in the Town of Skaneateles:

New York Board of Fire Underwriters	315-463-8552 (main office) 315-685-3710 (inspector)
Commonwealth Electrical Inspection Services	585-624-2380 (main office) 315-889-5253 (inspector)
The Inspector	800-487-0535 (main office) 315-247-9162 (inspector)

What things should be considered when choosing a contractor?

- the contractor's experience in the type of construction proposed
- the contractor's references
- the reliability of chosen contractor
- arrange for a written contract to make sure the contract covers all the work including who prepares construction drawings and who calls for required inspections

- before signing the contract, check the construction drawings to ensure they comply with your desires and needs
- confirm that the contractor can provide the appropriate insurance to complete the application and request written documentation for verification
- confirm the type of warranty being given, and, on a large contract you may want to obtain legal counsel before signing
- confirm whether the contractor is obtaining the building/zoning permit or if you are expected to. If the contractor is applying for the permit, make sure you see the permit before allowing work to start.
- it is recommended that you make final payment only after the building department has completed a final inspection and a Certificate of Occupancy/Compliance has been issued.

What is a Certificate of Occupancy/Compliance?

A Certificate of Occupancy/Compliance (C of O or C of C) is a written statement certifying that the construction work is in conformance with the NYS Building Codes, Zoning Code of the Town of Skaneateles and other applicable laws and regulations. This is issued by the Codes Enforcement Officer (CEO) upon satisfactory completion of all work authorized by the building/zoning permit and receipt of all inspection certificates such as plumbing, electrical and septic. In some cases an as-built survey is also required. **You cannot use or occupy the space until a C of O or C of C has been issued.**

What happens if I don't get a permit?

The property owner may be subject to legal action for failure to obtain a building/zoning permit. If you start a project requiring a permit without obtaining one, the CEO can issue a "Stop Work Order" which remains in effect until you obtain a permit. Permit fees for projects started without the required permit will be doubled. If the work doesn't meet the code requirements you may have to redo the work at your expense. Work performed without a permit may affect an insurance claim arising from the renovation and could also delay the sale of your property.

How much does a building/zoning permit cost?

The fee for a permit is based on the value of the proposed construction or alteration. Valuation is the anticipated market value of the proposed construction project and includes **all labor and materials** for which the permit is issued. Determination of the value is based on average construction costs per square foot as established in the current Building Valuation Data (BVD) table published by the International Code Council. Please see the published fee schedule for specifics.

How long does it take to get a building/zoning permit?

It varies based on the nature of the project, the completeness of the application when submitted and the workload of the building department when the application is received. If there are no zoning issues it will take approximately 5-10 business days but could take longer.

How long is a building/zoning permit good for?

Construction or use for which the permit is issued must commence within one year after the date of its issuance and construction carried out diligently to completion within 18 months after the date of its issuance. The Codes Enforcement Officer

may grant one six-month renewal if it is determined that the delay in commencement or completion of construction is without the permit holder's negligence and beyond the reasonable control of the permit holder.

If my property has lake frontage or is located within the Lake Watershed Overlay District (LWOD) do I need any additional permits or approvals to construct a house, addition, deck or shoreline structure?

In most cases the answer is yes. The Town & Village Comprehensive Plan and supporting studies of lake water quality issues have established justification for protecting the quality of the lake's water and have enacted specific regulations on land uses within the Skaneateles Lake Watershed to assure the protection of the quality of the lake's water resources while allowing flexibility of land use consistent with maintaining this quality. Obtaining these additional permits and approvals can take several months, so plan ahead. We suggest that you contact the Planning & Zoning Office and schedule an appointment to discuss your project.

Other questions?

Call the Planning and Zoning Office at (315) 685-1384 (8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.)

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