

# Guide to Obtaining a Building Permit



From the City of El Cajon Building and Fire Safety Division



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## **Introduction**

Building codes and regulations provide an invaluable and necessary service to the public. They assure that the structures we live, work, and play in are structurally sound, resistant to earthquakes, and provide safe exiting in the case of an emergency (to name just a few examples). But aside from the obvious benefits of assuring a safe and sanitary building, they also help to promote and maintain property values by prohibiting the construction of hazardous and unsightly structures. They help protect the consumer from contractors who are not adequately trained, who try to cut corners at the expense of safety, or who simply make a mistake during the process of the construction project. They help to raise the quality of life within our city by assuring minimum standards for construction that are often taken for granted. This booklet provides a general guide to obtaining a building permit in the City of El Cajon. Though it is impossible to cover all of the applicable regulations or construction types, we hope this overview of the permit process will assist you with your project.

## **When is a permit required?**

In most cases a permit will be required for any type of construction work. As a partial list, this includes:

- New buildings or structures
- Commercial or residential additions (bedrooms, bathrooms, family rooms, etc.)
- Residential work (decks, garages, fences, fireplaces, pools, water heaters, etc.)
- Renovations (garage conversions, kitchen expansions, re-roofing, etc.)
- Commercial tenant improvements or renovations
- New or altered electrical systems
- New or altered plumbing systems
- New or altered HVAC (heating, ventilating and air-conditioning) systems

A permit is not required for:

- Fences not over 6 feet high (zoning regulations still apply)
- Single story detached storage sheds under 120 square feet in conjunction with a single family dwelling
- Retaining walls not over 3 feet high (with no surcharged loads)
- Partition walls not over 5 feet 9 inches high
- Decks not over 30 inches above grade with no structure below
- Painting, papering, or similar finish work
- Residential window awnings not projecting over 54 inches
- Simple repair work

If you have a question about whether your project requires a permit you can always call the Building and Fire Safety Division staff at (619) 441-1726 and they will be happy to answer your questions.

### **Zoning Requirements**

You should check with the Planning Division prior to planning your project to be sure that the zone of your property is compatible with the intended use. There may also be required setbacks or lot coverage issues that could affect your project. Depending on the project scope, you may be required to submit a site development plan (SDP), Conditional Use Permit (CUP), or other planning documentation before your project can be approved. Your project may also require approval by the Planning Commission and City Council prior to approval, so please check with the Planning Division well in advance of your intended start date for construction. The Planning Division can be reached at (619) 441-1741 (Small over the counter permits such as water heaters, reroofs, electrical upgrades, etc. are exempt from Planning review).

### **Over-the-Counter Permits**

Some permits can be issued "over the counter" with a single visit to the Building and Fire Safety Division. Simple permits for water heaters, reroofs, air conditioners, heating, electric circuits, switches and outlets, etc. can typically be issued without submitting plans or approvals from other departments. Be sure to review the section on "What documentation will you need to apply for a building permit" before coming to the Building and Fire Safety Division counter.

### **Over-the-Counter Plan Check**

The follow project types can be plan checked at the Building and Fire Safety Division counter by appointment on Wednesdays.

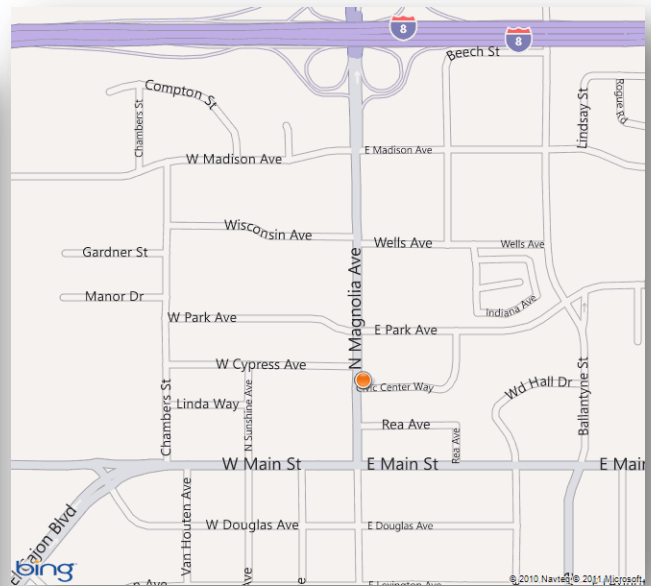
- Room additions less than 330 square feet
- Attached garages less than 1400 square feet
- Detached garages less than 800 square feet with no bathroom
- Sheds, workrooms, and accessory structures less than 800 square feet
- Medical tenant improvements less than 840 square feet
- Tenant improvements less than 1175 square feet

To obtain an appointment for a Wednesday over the counter plan check, please call (619) 441-1726. Be sure to review the section on "What Documentation Will You Need To Apply For A Building Permit" before coming to the Building and Fire Safety Division counter.

## Where To Apply For A Building Permit

Your application for a building permit (for construction within the City limits of El Cajon) can be submitted to the City of El Cajon Building & Fire Safety Division at;

El Cajon City Administration Building  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor – Building & Fire Safety Division  
200 Civic Center Way  
El Cajon, CA 92020



## **What Documentation Will You Need To Apply For A Permit**

The documentation needed to apply for a permit can vary depending on the specific project. However, the following can be used as a general rule for documentation you will need to provide.

Simple over the counter permits (such as water heaters, reroofs, electric meter upgrades, etc.)

### **Contractors**

- A permit application with project description
- A workers compensation certificate
- Contractors State License information
- A current City of El Cajon business license
- For reroofs you will need a reroof application and Title 24 Cool Roof Documentation
- For meter upgrades you will need an SDG&E approved meter location form
- For HVAC installations documentation for compliance with Title 24 will be required

### **Homeowners**

- A permit application with job description
- Identification as the property owner
- For reroofs you will need a reroof application
- For meter upgrades you will need an SDG&E approved meter location form
- For HVAC installations documentation for compliance with Title 24 will be required

### **Plan Submittal Applications**

- A permit application with job description
- A special inspection program (as applicable)
- 4 Sets of building plans
- 2 Copies of (as applicable):
  - Truss calculations
  - Engineering calculations
  - Energy efficiency documentation
  - Soils reports
  - Green building compliance documentation, etc.

### **What should be included in your plans?**

Your plans will consist of numerous sheets detailing various aspects of the project as well as supporting documentation. In general, your submittal should include:

1. Four (4) complete sets of plans. Minimum size 8 1/2"x 11 ", Maximum size 30"x42" All sheets must be the same size.

2. Your submittal should include two (2) copies of soils reports, structural calculations, or other supporting documentation as required.
3. Plans should include a title sheet and shall consist of a "scope of work" block describing the work to be done including square footage of the area of improvement, addition, or building area. Plans should include information blocks for the *Legal Owner, Job Address, APN, Occupancy Classification, and Type of Construction*. Plans should also include information blocks for the building designer, or Architect and Engineer with wet stamps and signatures.
4. Plans shall include the following to scale:
  - a) Plot plan showing property lines, all buildings (new and existing), dimensions, and indicating off-street parking.
  - b) Floor plan (in full or in part) fully dimensioned, showing doors, windows, room finishes, electrical, plumbing, heating and air conditioning, etc. For additions and alterations show all adjoining rooms, fully dimensioned.
  - c) Structural details and cuts, minimum of two section's at right angles clearly showing construction materials, sizes and attachments.
  - d) Foundation plan, indicating bearing walls, details, width, depth, reinforcement, etc.
  - e) Two exterior elevations, indicating general appearance, windows, doors, finishes, roof cover, finish grade, etc.
5. In general, detail any special features, such as; stairway construction, fireplaces, balconies, bay windows, posts and beams, trusses, skylights, etc.  
*Note any specification that cannot be detailed.* (include two (2) copies of all applicable ICBO reports).
6. For energy compliance, provide two copies of the Title 24 energy compliance documentation with your plans (non-conditioned spaces such as patio covers do not need to include energy compliance documentation). All compliance features must be reflected on the plans such as insulation, dual glazing etc.



## **You've applied for your permit - What's next?**

Once you have applied for your building permit the review process will begin. Your plans will be routed to various City departments depending on the scope and type of project you are proposing. The following list of departments are those that may review your project based on the project scope.

### Planning Division

The Planning Division will review your project to determine if the parcel is zoned correctly for the intended use, to determine required setbacks, lot coverage, building height, and parking requirements. Depending on the scope of the project you may have to process a site development plan, planned unit development, conditional use permit, etc. Planning may also have small correction items that will appear on the Building and Fire Safety Division correction list. These corrections must be included on the final corrected set submitted to the Building and Fire Safety Division for permit issuance (see Building and Fire Safety Division below). For more information concerning the review process of the Planning Division, please call (619) 441-1741.

### Building and Fire Safety Division

The Building and Fire Safety Division will check your plans for compliance with building codes and regulations. These include (but are not limited to) disabled access regulations, earthquake resistance, exiting requirements, general building construction, energy efficiency, green building compliance, etc. This stage of review is what is commonly referred to as plan check. Once the plans have gone through plan check you will be notified of corrections that must be made on the plans. Corrected sets must be returned to the Building and Fire Safety Division with all corrected items shown on the plans. You may also be asked to provide additional documentation/approval, such as school fee forms, hazardous materials questioner, asbestos abatement form, ICC evaluation reports, etc. Once a final check has been conducted of the plans (and approval to issue received from all departments reviewing the plans) you will be notified that your permit is ready for issuance. For further information concerning Building and Fire Safety Division review please call the Building and Fire Safety Division at (619) 441-1726.

### Private Development

The Private Development Division may review your project based on the project scope for necessary public street, alley, drainage and sewer improvements, easement access, right of way dedications, grading and erosion control requirements, etc. If requirements are made, a letter will be sent by the Building and Fire Safety Division to the property owner listing the Private Development requirements, along with an acceptance form which must be returned to the Building and Fire Safety Division. A right of way certificate and/or written release is required from Private Development before your building permit can be issued. For more information concerning the Private Development review process please call (619) 441-1653.

### Fire Safety Review

Your plans may be reviewed for compliance with Fire Code, required sprinkler or alarm systems, hazardous materials, high piled combustible storage, etc. Comments may be made which must be included on the final set of corrected plans, or a requirement may be placed on the project which must be completed before final inspection. If reviewed by the Fire Department a release must be received before your building permit can be issued. If you have any questions about Fire Department review of your plans please call (619) 441-1600.

### Storm Water

The Storm Water Section of the Public Works Department may review your project for compliance with storm water pollution regulations. Through meetings or written comments, the Storm Water staff will advise you of measures that must be taken to decrease or prevent pollution from entering the storm water systems. Projects involving at least 500 square feet of disturbed soil will require an Erosion Control Plan that must be approved by Storm Water staff before a building permit can be issued. Storm Water inspections for construction sites are completed to ensure construction soils and pollutants remain on site. For more information on Storm Water requirements please call (619) 441-5580.

### **How Much Time Will It Take?**

The amount of time it takes to review your plans can vary depending on current workloads and the complexity of the project. Typically, you will receive a call for plan check corrections within three weeks of your plan submittal. Review by other departments may take additional time.

### **Correcting Your Plans**

Once you have received a call stating that your plans are ready for corrections the next step in the process is to pick up your plans and return them to your designer to make the required corrections (electronic submission of corrected plans may be available. Check with your plans examiner). When corrections have been made return the plans, along with any requested supporting documentation, to the Building and Fire Safety Division for recheck. The plans will be rechecked for compliance with the Items on the correction list and (providing that these items have been corrected) the permit will be priced out and the plans stamped for issuance. Once all departments reviewing your plans have released the project you will be notified that your permit is ready to issue.



## Issuing The Permit

You will receive a call from the Building and Fire Safety Division once your permit is ready for issuance. If you are a homeowner you will need to have your driver's license or other form of identification when you come down to get your permit. If you are a contractor you will need to have proof of workers compensation insurance (or fill out an individual contractor form), your state contractor's license, and a City of El Cajon business license.

## Mobile Home Permits

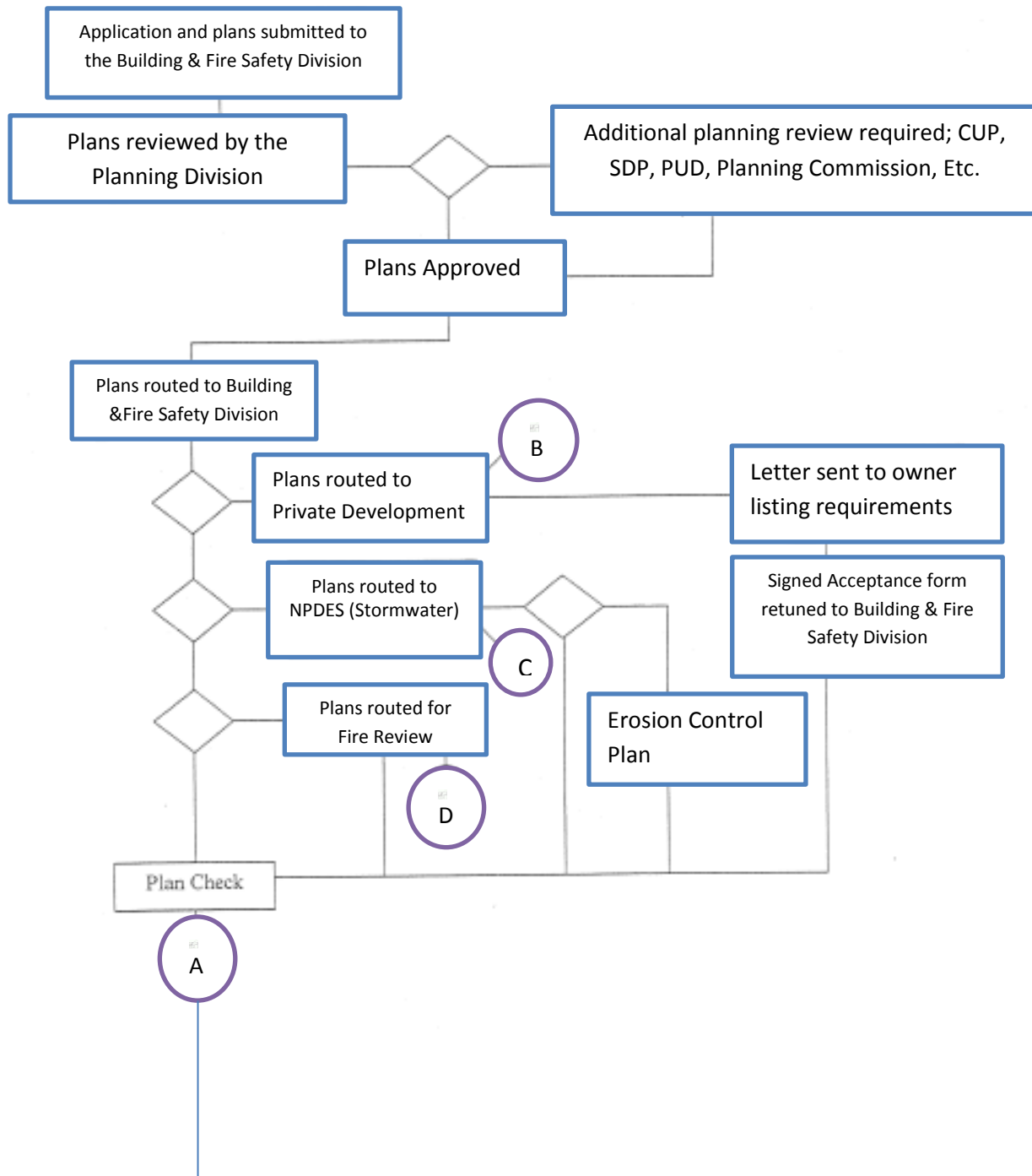
Permits for the set up or alteration to a mobile home are handled differently from other building permits. Alteration of the interior of a mobile home is permitted through the State of California Department of Housing and Community Development. The southern office of Housing and Community Development can be reached by calling (909) 782-4420. Mobile home permits for the following permit types can be obtained locally through the City of El Cajon Building Division.

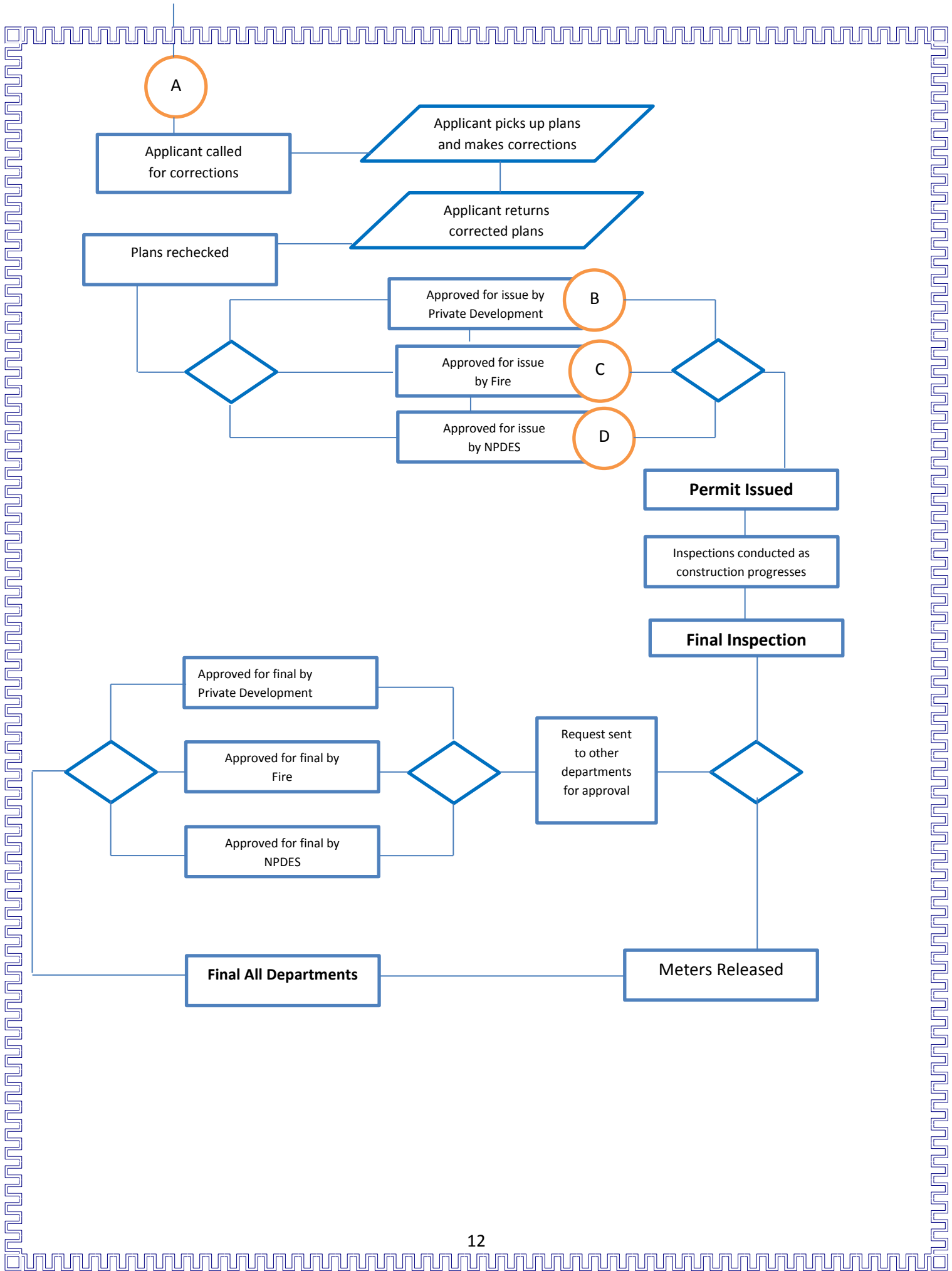
- Permits for mobile home set up
- Permits for mobile home accessory structures, including decks, cabanas, carports
- Permits for mobile home infrastructure such as lighting, plumbing or electrical systems

All mobile home permit applications must include the signature and approval of the park manager. Forms for mobile home permit applications can be obtained from the Building and Fire Safety Division.



## Flowchart of the Permit Process





## Forms You May Need And Where To Get Them

To apply for a permit you will need a permit application. If your project entails additional square footage to a residential or commercial building you will also need the Certification of Easements Form. These and other forms are available on the City website at [www.cityofelcajon.us](http://www.cityofelcajon.us) or may be obtained from the City of El Cajon Building and Fire Safety Division directly. Additional forms may be necessary depending on the project scope, but the two forms listed above will be sufficient to submit for plan check.

## What To Do After You Have Your Permit (Calling For Inspections)

After you have obtained your building permit you may begin your construction project. At certain phases of your construction project you must call for an inspection from the Building and Fire Safety Division. The inspection request line for inspections within the boundaries of the City of El Cajon is (619) 441-6210. The following list of inspections are those which are common to most construction projects

Underground Plumbing	Call before any underground plumbing is buried or covered.
Underground Electric	Call before any underground conduit is buried or covered.
Foundation/Footing	Call when the foundation is formed and all steel and hold downs are in place.
Reinforcing Steel or Grout Inspection	Call at each lift of a masonry wall before the wall is grouted.
Roof Sheathing	Call when the roof nailing is complete but before application of roof covering materials.
Gas Pipe Test	Call then the gas piping system is complete and under test pressure.
Rough Electric	Generally, conducted at frame inspection when all rough electrical is in place and before application of wall coverings.
Rough Plumbing	Generally, conducted at frame inspection when all rough plumbing is in place and before application of wall coverings.
Rough Mechanical	Generally, conducted at frame inspection when all rough mechanical is in place and before application of wall coverings.
Frame	Call when all framing is complete (including installation of exterior doors and windows).
Insulation	Call when insulation is complete but before application of wall coverings.

Drywall Nail	Call when drywall has been installed and nailed but before application of drywall tape or mud.
Exterior Lath	Call when paper and lath have been installed but before application of stucco.
Temporary Power Pole	Call when you have set a temporary power pole for construction purposes.
Steel and Bonding	For a swimming pool call before application of gunite.
Pool Fence/Pre-Plaster	For a swimming pool call before application of plaster when all electrical and fencing is in place.
House Sewer	Call before the house sewer has been buried or covered.
Water Heater	For water heater replacement, call after water heater installation.
T-Bar Grid	For grid ceiling systems call before installation of ceiling tiles when all work above the grid is complete.

### **How To Process A Plan Change**

If a change occurs which will require a change in your plans prior to inspection simply bring your plans and permit in to the Building and Fire Safety Division for a plan change. If your plan is drawn by an architect or engineer this will typically involve revised sheets with a new stamp and signature. Simple changes can typically take place at the Building and Fire Safety Division counter. More complicated changes may take several days to process.

### **What To Expect After A Final Inspection (Final Clearances)**

The building inspection final may be only part of the process of finalizing your building permit. Other departments (who reviewed your plan during the plan check process) may now need to inspect to make sure that all of their requirements have been met. The Building and Fire Safety Division will request an approval from all departments who commented on your plans. These departments will then go out and inspect the property for compliance with their respective requirements, landscaping, street and alley improvements, fire hydrants, etc. Once the Building Division receives an approval from all departments we will finalize the permit and notify the local utility company that the meter has been released for the property. You may then call the utility company to arrange for a meter installation.

## Miscellaneous (But Helpful) Information

- Restaurants:  
If you are constructing or altering a restaurant or food processing facility you will be required to obtain Health Department approval prior to being issued a building permit. Typically, the corrected set of plans you return to the Building and Fire Safety Division will include the approval stamp of the Health Department. The Health Department will also inspect the property prior to final approval.
- Hazardous Materials Questionnaire:  
If you are constructing or altering a commercial/industrial building you will be required to fill out the hazardous materials questioner. If your business falls into a regulated category you may have to obtain approval from Hazardous Materials and/or Air Pollution Control District before your plan can be approved.
- School Fees:  
New residential buildings or additions of 500 square feet or more require the payment of school fees. These fees must be paid at the individual school districts. Your plans examiner will prepare the school fee forms for you during the plan check process.
- Permits for airport improvements:  
If your project is taking place at the airport you will be required to obtain approval from the Director of airports before your plans will be approved. This will typically take place when your plans are returned for correction. The Director of airports will stamp your corrected set of plans prior to return to the Building and Fire Safety Division.

## Safety Hints

- ✓ Be sure to follow all Cal-OSHA regulations for jobsite safety. Cal-OSHA can be contacted at:  
Cal-OSHA San Diego  
7575 Metropolitan Drive, Ste. 204  
San Diego, CA 92108  
(619) 767-2060
- ✓ Clean up debris frequently, and put tools away after each day's work.
- ✓ Never do wiring work with electricity turned on, with wet or sweaty hands, or while standing in water.



- ✓ When replacing fuses or circuit breakers, always use a replacement with the same rating.
- ✓ When using a ladder, check to be sure it is firmly supported, and extends a minimum of three rungs above the level as which you need to stand.
- ✓ Watch for nails and other sharp debris when walking around the construction area.
- ✓ A hard hat and steel toed shoes are always recommended.

### **Numbers to Know**

Building and Fire Safety Division	(619) 441-1726
Building and Fire Safety Division Fax	(619) 441-1743
Planning Division	(619) 441-1742
Public Works	(619) 441-1653
Fire Department	(619) 441-1601
Storm Water	(619) 441-5580
Dept. Environmental Health	(619) 441-4883

