



CATAWBA COUNTY

BUILDING SERVICES

www.catawbacountync.gov

WHEN DO I NEED A BUILDING PERMIT?

One of the most commonly asked questions received by the Catawba County Permit Center is:

“Do I need a permit to build this?”

This document should help clarify when a permit is required in Catawba County. The first thing that must be discussed is the difference between a building permit and a zoning permit. A zoning permit is issued by the planning department of the local jurisdiction, whether it is the county or a city in which the project is being built. If the property is located within the planning jurisdiction of a city, the planning department of that city will have jurisdiction over the zoning requirements. If there is no city jurisdiction, the Catawba County Planning Department will have jurisdiction.

THE ZONING PERMIT

The requirements for a zoning permit are set by the local Jurisdiction and not the building inspection department. This permit allows the applicant to place the building/project within that jurisdiction and insures that the project adheres to the local ordinances. The zoning permit **MUST** be issued to the applicant before a building permit can be issued.

THE BUILDING PERMIT

The North Carolina General Statutes defines when a building permit will be required. You can view the NCGS at the following link:

[Enacted Legislation Statutes For Counties](#)

[Enacted Legislation Statutes For Cities](#)

However, after reading this, most of us are still very confused. The following definition should help clarify

when a Building Permit is required from Catawba County.

“No person shall commence the construction, reconstruction, alteration, repair, movement, removal, or demolition of any building without a permit.”

This statement means that no work of any kind can be done without a permit. Then there is the following exception:

“No permit shall be required for the construction, installation, repair, replacement or alteration costing five thousand dollars or less in a single family or farm building as long as the work does not include the addition, repair or replacement of load bearing members or structures.” (Note that this will not apply to a commercial building).

The bottom line is, as long as the project is for a single family dwelling or farm and costs less than \$5,000 and does not involve any load bearing members (footings, floor joists, rafters, beams, girders, exterior walls, or headers) a building permit is NOT required. This will allow simple alterations in the house such as painting, molding, additional walls, or even adding an interior doorway or opening in a **non-bearing** wall without a permit. (Note: All exterior walls are considered load bearing and will require a permit. Even the enclosing of a carport for example will require a permit.)

HOW ABOUT A PERMIT FOR AN ACCESSORY STRUCTURE?

In the case of an accessory structure (detached storage building) for a single family dwelling, there is another exception. A building permit is not required for a detached accessory structure as long as the structure does not *exceed* twelve feet (12') in **ANY** dimension. This means if the building is only 10 feet wide by 12 feet long by 11 feet tall, a building permit will not be required (A zoning permit may still be required). Please note that this only applies to detached accessory buildings for single family and duplex dwellings. If the accessory building is located on commercial property it will require a permit regardless of the size. If the building is attached to an existing building it will be classified as an addition and permits will generally be required.

HOW ABOUT AN ELECTRICAL, PLUMBING OR MECHANICAL PERMIT?

ELECTRICAL

Each of these permits varies slightly, depending on the nature of the work. An electrical permit is required to do ANY work. There are no exceptions!

PLUMBING

A plumbing permit is required if you install, alter, or repair any portion of the water distribution piping, drain piping or vent piping. However, in one or two family dwellings, you are allowed to replace “like” fixtures such as replacing a sink, or toilet, as long as the water supply lines are not altered or the water trap in the drain line is not altered. The replacement of a water heater will always be considered as altering the distribution lines and will always require permits. A permit will always be required for a commercial building regardless of like fixtures. Also, any work performed by a Plumbing or Mechanical Contractor that requires a license in that field, will also require a permit regardless of “Like” fixtures.

MECHANICAL

The mechanical/heating system is similar to the plumbing in that the vent registers, thermostat, and filters can be changed, but nothing that will alter the original design of the system. The relocation of a duct system to another room will be a design change. Also, as in the plumbing, this is for a one or two family dwelling only. A commercial building will always need a permit.

