
Building Permit Process and Development Guide: Single Family Dwelling / Duplex

Before you buy a lot

Ensure the zoning suits your needs or intended use. Zoning dictates the land's use.

Review any covenants or encumbrances that are on the property's title. These can include considerations, requirements, or restrictions for things such as:

- Septic field location
- Driveway easements
- Utility right-of-ways
- Storm water infiltration systems
- Geotechnical requirements
- Riparian area
- Street lighting or trees
- Fire interface considerations
- Energy conservation
- Building scheme


Avoid unexpected costs, delays, or limitations at this early stage by knowing the zoning and covenants.

Getting ready to build

All residential buildings require provisions for water, sanitary and storm water dispersal.

- Think about the elevation of the sanitary and storm connections. A sanitary pumping system will be required if gravity drainage is not possible.

Building construction materials and installation methods, as well as provincial building codes and regulations frequently change. Some newer things to consider:

- Access and accessibility
 - Seismic requirements (earthquake resistance)
 - Radon gas mitigation
 - Structural engineer report for more complex building designs
 - Heating and cooling systems
 - Energy efficiencies and changes to energy sources
 - Water conservation
 - Building envelope design
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- Home warranties
- Wildfire interface
- Soil contamination (lots with previous industrial use)
- Fire department response times

Applying for a Building Permit (BP)

⚠ Important: Building permit applications are not processed until all documents and requirements are submitted.

The building permit process can be complicated. Before starting, review the resources and checklists found at www.northcowichan.ca/BuildingChecklists

Consider contacting the Planning Department to discuss your proposal in relation to land use and other areas of land development that may impact your building project.

North Cowichan Planning Department
Phone: 250-746-3104
Email: planning@northcowichan.ca


Once your design has been submitted for building permit approval, all the relevant information will be reviewed to confirm compliance, during this stage, you may be contacted to make minor changes or corrections.

Note: Excavations should not be started until the building permit has been issued. The permit process may identify a different location, and this also reduces the time the excavation is left open.

Building Permit review process

Planning, Engineering, and Building departments review BPs simultaneously. This speeds up the process, and is also why applications must be complete before the process can begin. Each department reviews building permit applications for compliance with policies, codes, and guidelines relevant to their area:

Planning Department


- Zoning: Proposed use of the building, building setbacks, building height, lot coverage and gross floor area.
 - Title: Covenants, septic siting, street lighting, street scale trees, and/or energy conservation measures.
 - Development Permit Areas: Reviews for (a) DPA 1 – General (b) DPA 2 – Marine Waterfronts (c) DPA 3 – Natural Environment (d) DPA 4 – Hazard Lands (e) DPA 5 – Farm Land Protection.
 - Archaeological Areas: Reviews maps for archaeological sensitive areas.
 - Urban Wildfire Interface: Reviews maps for high fire hazard areas and if necessary registers a fire interface covenant.
 - Retaining walls: Determines if a Development Permit is required.
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Engineering Department

- Title: Determines if the building proposal will impact any easements, rights-of-way, or covenants.
- Driveway:
 - Access visibility and accessibility for use and passing traffic,
 - Width and the transition to the sidewalks or street,
 - Slope
- Culvert requirements (if a culvert is required, request a cost and initiate the installation).
- Civil services:
 - Water: If municipal, is the supply adequate for the proposal, is a water meter required, has the existing water meter box been damaged.
 - Sanitary service: If municipal, does the connection invert elevation work with the proposal, is it adequate in size for the proposed use. If provided on site, collect VIHA septic system documentation and approval.
 - Storm service: If municipal, does the connection invert elevation work with the proposal, is a site storm water infiltration system required by covenant. If the storm dispersal is on site, where? What is the design, will it impact the building or the neighbouring property.
- Flood mapping: Reviews areas impacted by existing flood maps to ensure the building meets minimum safe floor elevations.
- Development Cost Charges (DCCs): A review to determine if development cost charges apply to the proposal. Example: A new secondary suite with a cost of construction over \$50,000 will be subject to DCCs based on services provided by the municipality, i.e. roads, parks and civil services.

Building Department

- Building Permit Application: Reviews the permit application for content and proposed construction value to determine permit fees.
 - Site Disclosure Statement for Soil Contamination: Reviews the provincial Site Disclosure Statement for correct content and if necessary, informs the Province of a potential contaminated site.
 - Title: Reviews to confirm that the title was requested within the past 30 days and that the owner matches the application or authorization form. Reviews covenants for possible geotechnical requirements.
 - Warranty: Reviews the BC Housing Home Owner Protection Office document for:
 - Correct legal address
 - The owner is the same as the title
 - If warranty is provided, ensures the builder is currently a registered builder and that it is the same builder on the BP application.
 - Potable water: If water is supplied on site, water sample test results are required prior to occupancy.
 - Septic: If the septic disposal is on site, ensures septic filing and final approval prior to occupancy.
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- Truss and beam document: Matches truss and beam document with the proposed building, verifies and determines if the imposed loads are considered in the building design to determine if a structural engineer is required.
- Energy Step Code: Reviews the Energy Advisor Report to confirm that the proposed building design has incorporated the required energy efficiency details and meets the current Step Code level.
- Building Code:
 - Reviews the entire building for building code compliance and works with the applicant on any necessary changes or engineer's design requirements.
 - Calculates the permit fees
 - Enters Statistics Canada report data
 - Adds any special conditions (as necessary)
- Issues the Building Permit:
 - Organizes the outgoing information from each department
 - Sends out complete Building Permit for applicant's signature

Once approved, you will receive your Building Permit and you can call to book your first inspection.

