

Cook County Department of Building & Zoning
Frequently Asked Questions
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Cook County Building & Zoning FAQ

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Permit Submission and Status

Question: I emailed my documents to intake. When do I get a response?

Answer: Entry time is typically 1-2 business days, but during summer and fall, up to one week.

Question: How often should I log in to the permit status?

Answer: We recommend twice daily to see any new response comments.

Question: Will Building & Zoning notify me of my status or changes?

Answer: If you register for email updates in the online permit status, the system will notify you of updates to comments.

Question: Intake won't accept my application due to an open application. What now?

Answer: We do not allow multiple open applications per owner / tenant. The previous application shall be completed and issued, or a new scope can be added to the previous submission. Provide a letter to permitcontrol.bnz@cookcountyil.gov requesting to add a new scope. If you don't plan on moving forward with the previous project, email info.bnz@cookcountyil.gov to cancel the previous application.

Question: How can I get an extension for my permit after it has been issued?

Answer: An extension requires a fee that is a percentage of the permit fee. Extension requests must be made to Commissioner Tim Bleuher, and both the decision and duration of the extension are at his discretion.

Question: How can I get an extension for my permit if it has not been issued and is still under review?

Answer: No fee is required, but requests must be made to the Commissioner, and both the decision and duration are still at his discretion.

Question: How do I void a permit?

Answer: Voiding a permit requires a written request to the Commissioner. Please include the reason for this request.

Zoning

Question: The comments say I need a variance. What does that mean?

Answer: A variance means replacement or proposed conditions do not comply with the zoning ordinance. A public hearing with the Zoning Board of Appeals will occur and a decision to grant the deviation from the zoning code requirements is needed.

Question: How do I get approval to remove trees?

Answer: Trees that are in poor health, dangerous and hazardous may be removed with written permission from Building & Zoning Commissioner Tim Bleuher. Healthy trees removed from the site, even if in the way of construction, shall be replaced per the Tree Preservation Ordinance.

Permit Payment

Question: I've paid my deposit. May I start work?

Answer: The deposit covers the cost of initial reviews. It is not authorization to begin. Only after Zoning, Architectural, Electrical, Plumbing & Permit Control approvals have been granted, after final payment has been made, and after the permit placard has been emailed to you, may work commence with notice to the local inspectors.

Question: Where do I go to look at a list of fees?

Answer: Our fees are published on the following webpage [<https://www.cookcountyil.gov/content/fees>]. If you have questions on an estimated fee, contact info.bnz@cookcountyil.gov. Due to varying complexity of certain projects prior to review, an accurate determination cannot be provided until permit submission.

Question: Can I pay by check or cash in-person, or is only credit card preferred?

Answer: Credit card payments are preferred. We cannot accept cash. If you pay by check for permits and registrations, the checks are made payable to "Cook County Collector". Please allow one week for check payments to be processed and 1-2 business days for credit card payments.

Plumbing Permits

Question: I have a question about: plumbing, sewer, water, septic, well, fire sprinkler, lawn irrigation, and/or gas installation. Who do I contact?

Answer: All registration and permit-related questions concerning the above listed trade classifications should be directed to Ciro Gaimari, Plumbing Inspector/Plan Examiner, at 312-603-0514 or by emailing Ciro.Gaimari@CookCountyIl.gov.

Question: Who fills out the Plumbing Permit Application form and when is it used?

Answer: The Plumbing Permit Application form is used only by the Plumbing Department-related trades when they are the only trade on the job. Plumbing related trades are: plumbing, sewer, water, septic, well, lawn irrigation, and gas installation. (Fire sprinklers are always applied for as full permit applications.)

Question: Which plumbing code do you enforce?

Answer: The Cook County Department of Building & Zoning enforces the 2014 State of Illinois Plumbing Code. That is the plumbing code that should be referenced on all drawings and documents. The plumbing code can be found on the "Ordinances and Codes" page: <https://www.cookcountyil.gov/content/ordinances-and-codes>.

Question: What is the easiest way to get a plumbing permit started?

Answer: Only the registered Plumbing Department-related trade contractor can use the Plumbing Permit Application form. The registered contractor applies directly to the Plumbing Department at Ciro.Gaimari@cookcountyil.gov.

Question: My plumbing contractor is not registered. What do I do?

Answer: All issues regarding registrations of Plumbing Department-related trade classifications (plumbing, sewer, water, septic, well, fire sprinkler, lawn irrigation, and gas installation) should be sent via email to the Plumbing Department at Ciro.Gaimari@cookcountyil.gov.

Question: I have a plumbing-related emergency. What should I do?

Answer: In an emergency situation, it is best to make sure to hire a contractor that is already registered to do work in unincorporated Cook County. Ask for the contractor's Cook County registration card. If they are registered, our Department would already have copies of their licenses and certificate of insurance on file. Also, a registered contractor should know the procedure on what to do in an emergency situation with regard to permitting.

Electrical Permits

Question: My permit (full or electrical) is paid for and issued, and I need an electrical inspection. How do I schedule one?

Answer: You must call the field electrical inspector directly to schedule an inspection. Call between 7-9 am, Monday to Friday. Leave a detailed message including name, phone number, job address, and permit number. To find the appropriate field inspector for your township, follow this link: <https://www.cookcountyil.gov/service/building-permits>. Under "Downloads", click on .pdf "Field Inspectors by Township".

Question: What electrical code do you enforce?

Answer: The Cook County Department of Building & Zoning enforces the 2014 Cook County Electrical Code. That is the electrical code that should be referenced on all drawings and documents. You must remove ALL references to the National Electrical Code (NEC). The electrical code can be found on the "Ordinances and Codes" page: <https://www.cookcountyil.gov/content/ordinances-and-codes>.

Question: Where do I register as an electrical contractor?

Answer: To register as an electrical contractor, go to: <https://www.cookcountyil.gov/service/contractor-registration>. Click on "Electrical Contractor Registration Requirements".

Question: Where can I find a list of registered electrical contractors?

Answer: If you want to find an electrical contractor that is already registered, click on "Licensed Contractors" at the following link: https://secure.cookcountyil.gov/b_z/contractors_info.php. Under "Specialty Type", click "Electric".

Question: I am applying for a new house construction or remodeling permit. What do I typically need to satisfy the electrical requirements?

Answer: Submit the following: 1. Letter of intent from a registered electrical contractor on company letterhead addressed to Cook County Department of Building & Zoning. It must have a detailed scope of work. It must be signed by the supervising electrician. No proposals or estimates are accepted. 2. Floorplan drawing showing all electric: lights, switches, receptacles, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, etc. 3. Show size (in amperes) and location of electrical service panel. 4. State on drawings that all recessed lighting is IC rated. State that at least 75% of lamps are high efficacy. State that all receptacles are tamper-resistant.

Question: I am only doing electrical work (for example: electrical service upgrade). How do I apply for a permit?

Answer: A registered electrical contractor must submit a permit application. It must be completed in full and have the supervising electrician's actual signature. Here is the link to the application: <https://www.cookcountyil.gov/service/building-permits>. Under "Downloads", click "Electrical Permit Application".

Architectural Review

Question: Which building code do you enforce?

Answer: The Cook County Department of Building & Zoning enforces provisions of the 2009 International Building Code.

Question: Is a permit required for re-siding?

Answer: Non-structural siding is considered exterior finishes, and according to our ordinances, such work will not need a permit, BUT in the process of conducting such replacement, when structural sheathing is removed, replaced or repaired, a permit is required (our inspector can and will do field inspection).

Question: Who should apply and obtain the permit?

Answer: The home/business owner or the project's contractor can apply and obtain the necessary permits.

Question: When are handrails required on steps?

Answer: Handrails are required on at least one side of each continuous run of steps with four or more risers. Handrail height minimum of 34 inches and maximum of 38 inches is required. The spacing of the railing must be less than 4 inches, to prevent a small child from squeezing through.

Question: When are guardrails required?

Answer: Guardrails are required along open-sided walking surfaces, including stairs, ramps and landings, that are located more than 30 inches (762 mm) measured vertically to the floor or grade below, at any point within 36 inches (914 mm) horizontally to the edge of the open side. Guardrails shall be no less than 36 inches (914 mm) high, measured vertically above the adjacent walking surface, adjacent fixed seating or the line connecting the leading edges of the treads.

Question: How big do the windows need to be for bedrooms/sleeping rooms in basement and/or habitable attic?

Answer: All bedrooms/sleeping rooms, including in basement and/or habitable attic, are required to have one window or egress opening in each bedroom to be "Emergency Escape and Rescue Openings" regardless of what size and type the existing and/or new openings are. The minimum clear opening area of at least one window in each bedroom must be 5.7 square feet (5 square feet only for grade floor openings) with a minimal clear height of 24 inches minimum or an opening clear area of 5.7 square feet (5 square feet only for grade floor openings) with a minimal clear width of 20 inches minimum, to allow a firefighter and the occupant to escape in case of a fire. The bottom of the emergency escape opening must be equal to or less than 44 inches above the floor.

Basement window openings into a window well must have the following: a) the horizontal well dimension to be 36 inches minimum width and 36 inches minimum length, b) when the well is deeper than 44 inches from the top shall have a 12-inch ladder with rung space 3 inches from wall and 12 inches on center for full height of well.

Contractor Registration

Question: Why is the Child Support Declaration form required?

Answer: The Child Support Declaration is required due to an ordinance passed within Cook County in 1998 that states any entity, business, or individual looking to perform work in Cook County must be compliant with their child support obligations where applicable.

Question: Does registering for General Contractor mean that I am able to perform all trades required for the permit?

Answer: No, all trades are separate (\$150 each). General contractor means that you are only operating in the capacity of the supervisor. Anytime two or more trades are required for a specific job or permit, a general contractor will be required.

Question: Must I be registered with Cook County before I initiate the permit process?

Answer: No, you do not have to be registered to start the permit process. However, you will need to be registered before the permit will be finalized. Most E-Z permits (one-trade projects) and contractor registration can be done simultaneously to avoid long delays.

Question: As a homeowner, do I get to register for free?

Answer: As the homeowner, you are only allowed to be registered at no cost for the general. In this role, you will only be operating in the supervisor capacity unless you are performing the work yourself. In such case, each trade is \$150, which is determined by your scope of work and upon architectural review.

Question: Do each of my sub-contractors have to register individually?

Answer: Yes, every contractor performing work within the permit must be registered before the permit will be finalized.

Question: Why is my registration certificate not valid for a calendar year?

Answer: The registration certificate runs in conjunction with Cook County's fiscal year, which begins December 1st of each year. As a courtesy, we extend the privilege through the end of the subsequent year. Therefore, your registration date is determined by the date that you register. All renewals of the registration will be mailed out each December, and the renewal fee is \$75. Renewals can also be done electronically to avoid delays.

Question: Am I required to obtain a bond for a roofing permit?

Answer: No, roofing permits do not require a bond at this time.

Permit Control

Question: I've been issued my permit, but now I need to make changes. How is this done?

Answer: Once a permit is issued, no changes can be made to the original record. Submit a new application as a supplementing permit. Please complete the Building Permit Application, include a brief explanation of changes, and provide drawings for documentation of either contractor changes or revisions in the drawings. Do not resubmit all of the original documents and drawings from the previous permit unless a specific item is requested.

Question: All five sections (Zoning, Architectural, Electrical, Plumbing and Permit Control) show as complete. Now what?

Answer: Once you finish the technical reviews, the application will proceed to administrative approval, and the final amount due will be posted online with the deposit amount credited. Please allow 1-2 business days.

Question: What is the requirement for a letter of intent?

Answer: A letter of intent is a document created by the homeowner or contractor that will be performing a specific contracting trade on the project. If a hired company is performing the installation, whomever registered the company with the department shall state in the letter the property address, the trade being performed, and permit number, and shall print and sign their name at the bottom. Letters not signed will be rejected. Homeowners performing work shall state the property address, permit number, the trades performed, and whether they own and reside (or will reside) permanently at the residence, and shall print and sign their name.

Violations

Question: Do I need to appear in court if my violation has since been complied?

Answer: If you believe you are in compliance of the violation please email Samuel Banks, Assistant to the Commissioner, at Samuel.banks@cookcountyil.gov for written confirmation of compliance.

Unless the respondent has written notice that they are not required to appear in court or schedule a request for phone hearing from the Assistant to the Commissioner, the Department of Administrative Hearings (DOAH), or Cook County State's Attorney's Office (SAO), they must appear in court or schedule a request for phone hearing.

Question: I think I received a violation in error. What should I do?

Answer: If you believe you may have received a violation in error because you no longer own the home, you have no affiliation to the said property, etc., please email the violation number and a brief description to Ashley Borre, Administrative Assistant, at Ashley.borre@cookcountyil.gov.

Question: Can I find out a neighbor's violation information, or "what is being done about a property"?

Answer: If you are not the responsible named party(ies) on the violation and would like information pertaining to a violation on a property, a FOIA request will need to be completed. Please follow the link below, for more information.

<https://www.cookcountyil.gov/service/freedom-information-act-offices-under-president>

Question: How do I register a vacant building?

Answer: You may register a vacant building online at the following link:
<https://www.cookcountyil.gov/service/vacant-building-ordinance>.

Question: How do I deregister a vacant building?

Answer: Please email Ashley.borre@cookcountyil.gov to deregister a vacant building.

Question: Can I fill out a FOIA request for drawing, site plans, blueprints?

Answer: These types of requests are exempt from FOIA.

Rental Dwelling Licenses

Question: Do I need a rental dwelling license?

Answer: You need a rental dwelling license if you own a rental unit in a building with four or more total units. You only need to own and rent one unit to qualify.

Question: Where can I apply for a rental license?

Answer: You can apply for a rental license online. Please follow the link: <https://bzpermits.cookcountyil.gov/rental-dwelling>.

Question: When are rental licenses due?

Answer: Rental licenses are an annual fee. Invoices go out mid-July, and payments are due September 15th.

Question: How long is a license valid?

Answer: Rental dwelling licenses are valid for a year.

Question: If I have a question concerning the rental dwelling program who should I contact?

Answer: If you have a question concerning the rental dwelling license please email RentalDwelling.BNZ@CookCountyIL.Gov.

Question: Can I pay my invoice online?

Answer: You can pay your rental dwelling invoice online. Please follow the link <https://www.cookcountyil.gov/service/payments>.

Zoning Certificates

Question: What is the fastest way to get a zoning certificate issued?

Answer: The fastest option is to complete the online zoning certificate request form at the following link: <https://bzpermits.cookcountyil.gov/zoning-certificate>.

You may also complete the form by hand, and either scan and email it to Rubina Alam, Zoning Administrator, at Rubina.Alam@cookcountyil.gov or send the paper copy to: Cook County Department of Building & Zoning, 69 W. Washington St., Suite 2830, Chicago, IL 60602.

Question: Will Cook County be able to publish a zoning certificate for my address?

Answer: Cook County can publish zoning certificates ONLY for properties in the unincorporated areas of Cook County. If a property is in an incorporated municipality, only the local building and zoning authority, NOT Cook County, can publish the zoning certificate.

Question: When and how do I pay for a zoning certificate?

Answer: Applicants can only pay AFTER they receive an invoice from Cook County. Once the zoning certificate request has been submitted, Cook County staff will review the request and, if the property is eligible to receive a zoning certificate, staff will process the request and email the invoice to the applicant. The fastest and easiest way to pay the invoice is online at the following link: <https://bzpermits.cookcountyil.gov/web-payments/>.

Applicants may also mail a check, made out to “Cook County Collector”, to: Cook County Department of Building & Zoning, 69 W. Washington St., Suite 2830, Chicago, IL 60602. Please include the invoice stub in the envelope and write the invoice number and/or zoning certificate number in the memo section of the check.

Question: How much does a zoning certificate cost?

Answer: A zoning certificate costs \$100 per property identification number (PIN). Most but not all requests include only one PIN.

Business Occupancy Certificates

Question: What is required to operate a business in a residential property?

Answer: Every business must notify Cook County of its operations and provide all requested information and documents. All businesses in residential properties must send a completed Home-Based Business Occupancy Affidavit to Cook County. The affidavit is available at the following link: <https://www.cookcountyil.gov/file/1929/download?token=6mqaXjMn>

Only certain types of business may operate in residential properties, depending on the zoning district. Certain businesses may require the granting of a Special Use permit. To confirm whether your business may operate at a particular residential location, please contact Rubina Alam, Zoning Administrator, at Rubina.Alam@cookcountyil.gov.

Question: How long does it take for a certificate of business occupancy to be issued?

Answer: The application process typically takes about one month to be completed, but it could take longer if the property has active permits, violations, or other complexities.

Applicants must send various supporting documents with the application, including: a lease or deed to the property, a plat of survey, architectural drawings, images and descriptions of exterior signs, and a detailed description of the business. Not providing these or other mandatory documents can delay the issuance of the certificate.

If a property has an active permit, violation, or unpaid inspection invoice, Cook County may not conduct the mandatory annual occupancy inspections that are required for the certificate of business occupancy to be issued.