



COMMERCIAL PERMITTING 101

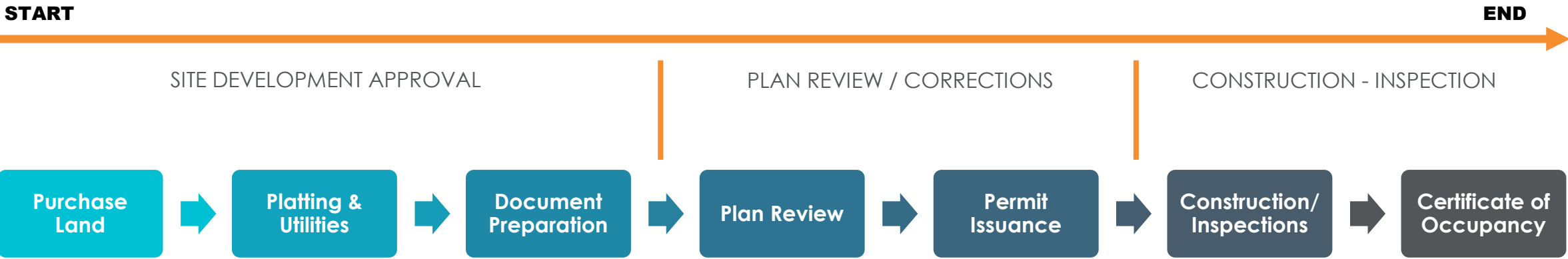
HOUSTON PERMITTING CENTER
BUILDING CODE ENFORCEMENT



PURPOSE

This document is a brief overview of the typical commercial building permit process for the City of Houston. Please contact Building Code Enforcement for assistance with specific questions pertaining to your commercial project. Contact information is located in the last slide. For permit information pertaining to new and remodeled single family dwellings refer to the document [Residential Permitting 101](#)

PLANNING & RESEARCH



PLANNING & RESEARCH (CONTINUED)

Before you buy, consider the following...

- ✓ Whether you can financially and legally build your proposed project
- ✓ Deed restrictions and property liens
- ✓ Survey and property lines (Ensure that your structure can be built in the proposed location)
- ✓ Utility availability (Assess if water and sanitary capacity and utilities are available and/or if additional fees may be required)
- ✓ Platting (May be required if there is a change of use or occupancy for the property)
- ✓ Parking (Determine requirements for the type of occupancy proposed)
- ✓ Setback (May be required where the proposed business abuts a major thoroughfare)
- ✓ Floodplain (Refer to Chapter 19 of the Code of Ordinances)
- ✓ Existing Certificates of Occupancy
- ✓ Check open records for any previous uses, certificates of occupancy, and any conditions that will require plans and construction permits
- ✓ Check if the property is in the Houston Airport System (HAS) Tier 1 or Tier 2 since certain occupancy types are not allowed

DESIGN PREPARATION

What codes are in effect?

- 2021 International Building Code
- 2021 Uniform Mechanical Code
- 2023 National Electrical Code
- 2021 Uniform Plumbing Code
- 2021 International Fire Code
- 2021 International Energy Conservation Code, or ASHRAE Standard 90.1-2019
- 2021 Swimming Pool and Spa Code (with Houston Amendments)
- 2021 International Existing Building Code (with Houston Amendments)
- City of Houston Design Manual
- City of Houston Code of Ordinances



Does my project require an engineer or architect?

Refer to flow charts from the Texas Boards of [Architectural Examiners](#) & [Professional Engineers](#).

What is the project's scope of work?

- New Construction (ground up)
- Build out (first time or first generation tenant improvement)
- Remodel (extensive and minor)
- Repair (replacing like for like materials)
- Expansion/addition (new square footage)
- Change of Use (e.g., change storage warehouse to auto repair shop, change retail to restaurant).

See also: The [Houston Amendments](#) and the [Design Manual](#).

DESIGN PREPARATION

Does the project require a specialized consultant or an additional step?

- Historical Review
- Sprinklers
- Fire Alarm
- Asbestos Survey
- TDLR Accessibility Review
- Elevation Certificates
- Electronic Locks

Does the project include work to be performed in the City right-of-way and/or easement?

- Plan & Profile drawings must be submitted and approved by the [Office of the City Engineer](#) prior to construction.

Architectural Barriers

- Projects over \$50,000 require a TDLR number for the architectural barriers act. For more information visit <https://www.tdlr.texas.gov/ab/ab.htm>

LICENSING & REGISTRATION

Who can purchase what permits and when?

- The building permit may be purchased by the owner, agent, contractor. General Contractors are not required to be licensed.
- Licensed contractors can purchase trade permits after the building permit has been sold.
- **Electrical**
Master Electrician must be licensed by the [Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation](https://www.tdlr.state.tx.us/) (TDLR) and be registered with the City of Houston. For more information about the COH registration process refer to <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/media/1001/download?inline>
- **Mechanical**
Air Conditioning Contractor must have a type A or B license from the [Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation](https://www.tdlr.state.tx.us/) and be registered with the City of Houston. . For more information about the COH registration process refer to <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/media/2051/download?inline>
- **Plumbing**
Master Plumber must be licensed by the [Texas State Board of Plumbing Examiners](https://www.tspb.state.tx.us/) and be registered with the City of Houston. In some instances, a homeowner may obtain this permit.

LICENSING & REGISTRATION (CONTINUES)

- **Sidewalk/Driveway**

Only a bonded contractor with a \$2,000 surety bond may obtain this permit. Bonds should be submitted to the Permits Office at permits_office@houstontx.gov

- **Fire Alarm**

Fire Alarm contractors must be licensed/registered with the [Texas Department of Insurance- State Fire Marshal's Office](#) and be registered with the City of Houston. Copies of the licenses should be email to the Permits Office at permits_office@houstontx.gov.

- **Fire Sprinkler**

Fire Sprinkler contractors must be licensed/registered with the [Texas Department of Insurance- State Fire Marshal's Office](#) and be registered with the City of Houston. Copies of the licenses should be email to the Permits Office at permits_office@houstontx.gov.

APPLICATION & PLAN REQUIREMENTS

- **Electronic Building Permit Application.** Applicants must complete the building permit application electronically using [iPermits](#). For submittal instructions, visit <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/our-services/eservices>.
- **Declaration In Support of Application For City of Houston Building Permit** ([Individual Owner](#) or [Corporate/Other Business Entity Owners](#)) – Verify if the property has Deed Restrictions and whether this project would be in violation. For more information [click here](#) or contact the Harris County Clerk's office at (713) 274-8680.
- Complete set of plans
- [Fill & Grade Worksheet](#)
- Storm and Water Utility Letter
- [Wastewater Capacity Reservation Letter](#)
- [Plan Review Prerequisites Form \(CE-1105\)](#) - Ensure prerequisites are met and submit all the items listed on it applicable to your project.
- Asbestos Survey
- Energy Software Report
- [HFD Owner's Statement of Intended Use for Storage Occupancies](#)

IMPORTANT NOTE

Addresses are critical and must be verified for new construction!

THINGS TO REMEMBER

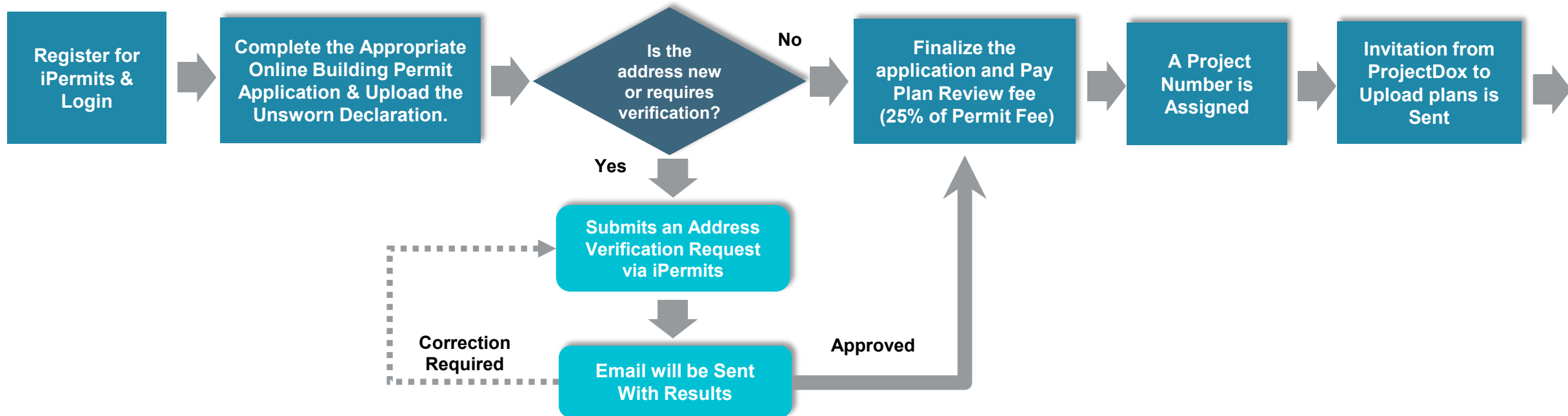
Frequently Missed Plan Review Prerequisites

- Water and Wastewater Availability Letters
- Engineered structural plans (sealed and signed)
- Hazmat/Hi Piled Form or Exemption Form
- Code Analysis
- Access Management Form (Traffic)
- Submitting final design plans and not preliminary plans

Wastewater Capacity Reservation (WCR) Letter

- Prior to submitting plans, complete the WCR application online via iPermits. For instructions refer to <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/media/5911/download>
- Response will be sent to you (WCR letter)
- Pay impact fees
- Submit impact fee receipt and WCR letter with plans

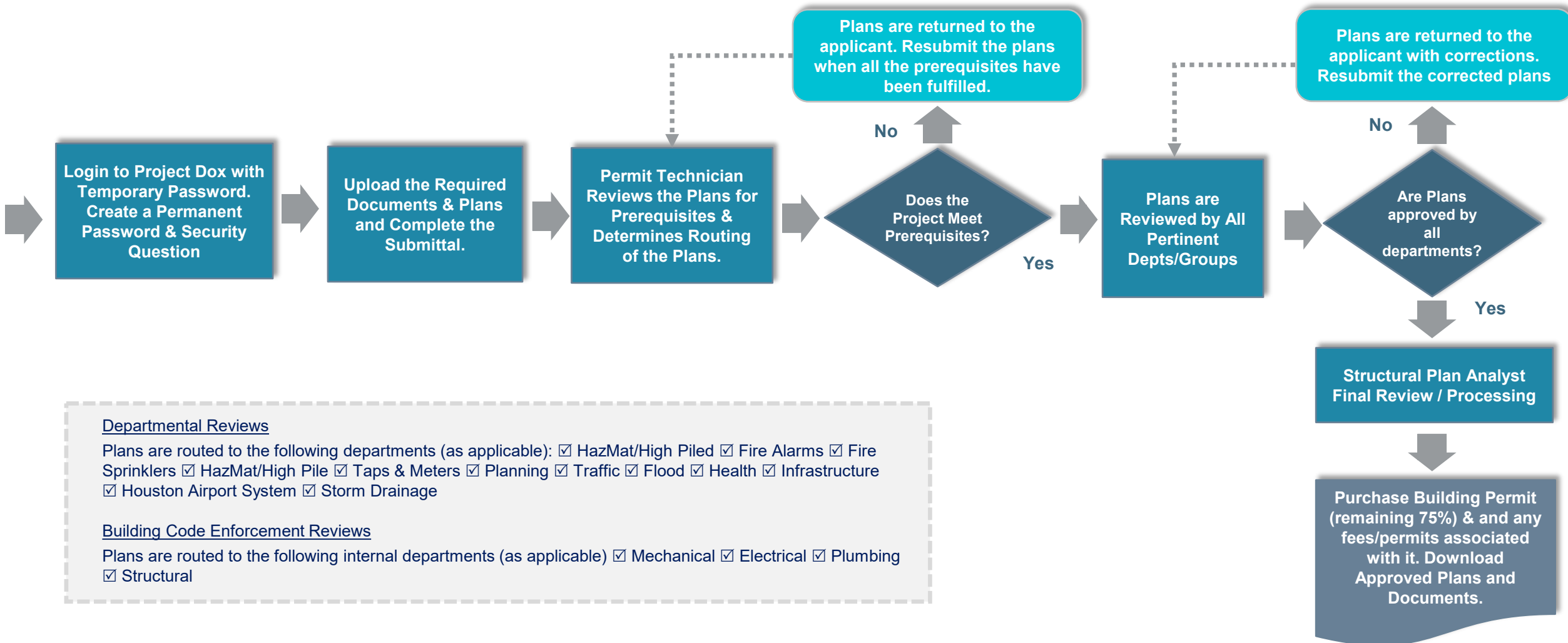
APPLICATION PROCESS



Wastewater Capacity Reservation Letter

If your project requires a Wastewater Capacity Reservation Letter, the application must be submitted separately through iPermits (preferably before submitting your plans). For more information, visit <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/infrastructure-development-services/impact-fee-administration>

PLAN REVIEW PROCESS



OUTSIDE DEPARTMENTS/GROUPS

Utility Analysis

The Utility Analysis (Water/Wastewater) group is responsible for managing wastewater flows through wastewater capacity reservations (WCR), managing water demands through water/storm drainage commitment letters, review process which provides information on water, wastewater and storm drainage requirements for new development or for existing development that will require additional water and/or wastewater capacity.

- ☐ Impact fee receipt (or exemption form)
- ☐ Wastewater Capacity Reservation Letter (WCR)¹
- ☐ Point of connection

¹ Applicable for: a.) New development or for existing development that will require additional water and/or wastewater capacity, b.) If the main water line is < 6" or > 20" and c.) If the sewer line is < 8".

- ☐ For Impact Fee / WCR Credit
 - Demolition project number or
 - Previous water account or
 - HCAD tax statement

Planning (Development Services)

The Planning & Development Department reviews development site plans, (new construction and additions) for compliance with the City Code of Ordinances (Chapter 42), parking regulations (Chapter 26), tree and shrub regulations (Chapter 33); determine property use and setbacks (Chapter 42).

DEPARTMENTS/GROUPS

Flood Plain Management

The Flood Plain Section manages all development in the flood plain by reviewing plans, monitoring and inspecting construction activities as required by the Code of Ordinances. An archive of historic Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) panels that are no longer “effective” as determined by FEMA are maintained by this office.

Traffic

The Traffic Department reviews plans for driveways, sidewalks, culvert parking lots as well as conversions. It issues permits for private street paving work, and addresses right-of-way issues.

Storm Water

The Storm Water review ensures that site drainage complies with all mandated policies directing runoff to the city right-of-way and may not overflow to an adjacent property.

PHASED PERMITTING

The City of Houston allows phased permitting for each stage of construction prior to submitting or permitting the next phase. This process may be useful for fast-track projects where design continues beyond the schedule to break ground.

Below are some examples of partial permits:

- Site Grading
- Site Paving and Underground Utilities
- Site and Foundation (requires recorded plat)
- Superstructure (concrete buildings, or non-rated steel)
- Shell only
- Shell and core
- Buildouts by floor (noncombustible only)



NOTE: Phased permits must be obtained in order of construction. For more detailed information, refer to the [Form CE-1198 Phased Construction Permitting Options](#)

DEFERRED SUBMITTALS

Deferred submittals are allowed for elements of a building that are not typically designed by the time the general design plans are submitted for code review. However, they will need to be submitted for review prior to installation.

Examples of Deferred Items:

- Truss details
- Curtain walls
- Pre-cast concrete (non-rated)
- Metal buildings (non-rated)
- Pre-fab storage racks (non high-pile)

Note: Sprinkler plans, fire alarm and electronic lock plans are required to be submitted separately, not deferred.



OTHER PLAN REVIEW SERVICES AND OPTIONS

One Stop Plan Review: Review of minor remodels/lease space buildouts in a shorter period of time when certain restrictions are met. Refer to [Form CE-1042](#) to find out if your project qualifies.

Expedited Review Service (ERS): Expedited option available for projects that have been through one complete review. Other qualifications and criteria apply. Refer to [Form CE-1251](#) for more information. There is a fee for this service.

Quick Start Program: For projects exceeding \$1 million valuation with a limited number of reviews remaining, a 24-hour turnaround is available.) Refer to [Form CE-1071](#) for more information.



INSPECTIONS AND UTILITY RELEASES

- Licensed contractors can purchase trade permits after the building permit has been sold.
- Once permits are purchased, work may begin
- Plans and permits must remain on the job site for inspections
- Inspections are required at various stages of construction

Most inspections can be scheduled online at https://www.pdinet.pd.houstontx.gov/cohilms/webs/Inspection_Lookup.asp or by calling the IVR at 713.222.9922.

- Temporary Utilities may be obtained after all permits are purchased. (A Temporary Cut In/ Temporary Gas - Permit must be purchased)
- All revisions must be approved prior to Final Inspection
- All deferred submittal items must be completed prior to Final Inspection
- After all inspections are complete, request Certificate(s) of Occupancy
- Remodels/Repairs are usually issued a Certificate of Compliance

BUILDING CODE ENFORCEMENT INSPECTIONS

STRUCTURAL INSPECTIONS

- ✓ **Pier / Foundation** - Schedule before placement of concrete
- ✓ **Windstorm** - Schedule prior to exterior sheathing installation to verify fasteners/straps
- ✓ **Frame** - Schedule after MEP rough-ins and prior to installing insulation and sheetrock. Note: Truss plans should be approved at this time.
- ✓ **Lath/Brick Tie** - Schedule after frame inspection has been approved
- ✓ **Insulation** - Schedule after frame inspection has been approved
- ✓ **Building Final** - Schedule after the entire project has been completed to verify that all life safety and grading items have been installed and are working properly



PLUMBING INSPECTIONS

- ✓ **Ground, Sewer, Water Service, Storm Drainage, Lawn Sprinklers** - Schedule before pipes are covered
- ✓ **Rough-in** - Schedule before sheetrock is installed
- ✓ **Gas/Final** - Schedule when work is complete

BUILDING CODE ENFORCEMENT INSPECTIONS

ELECTRICAL INSPECTIONS

- ✓ **Ditch Cover** - Schedule when underground conduit is put in
- ✓ **Rough-in** - Schedule when walls and ceiling are wired
- ✓ **TCI** - Schedule when temporary power is needed to check wiring
- ✓ **Meter Loop Services/Final** - Schedule after all work is completed

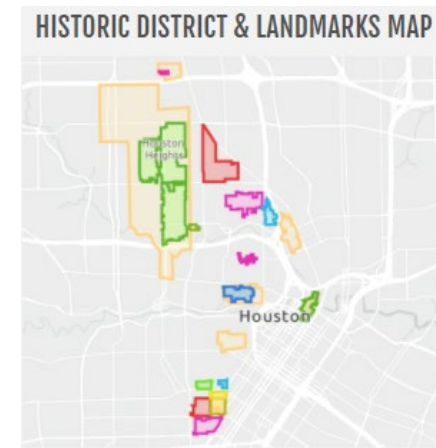
MECHANICAL INSPECTIONS

- ✓ **Duct Seal** - Schedule before insulation and sheetrock is installed
- ✓ **Cover** - Schedule before insulation and sheetrock is installed
- ✓ **Grille Seal** - Schedule before insulation and sheetrock is installed
- ✓ **Final** - Schedule after work is complete



RESOURCES & OTHER INFORMATION

- **Building Code Enforcement Permit Fees:** <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/help/fee-schedules>
- **City Fee Schedule:** https://cohweb.houstontx.gov/FIN_FeeSchedule/default.aspx
- **Water & Sewer Rates:** <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/infrastructure-development-services/impact-fee-administration#agency-links-1976>
- **Tax Increment Redevelopment Zone (TIRZ):** TIRZs are special districts created by City Council to attract new investments to an area. TIRZs help finance the cost of redeveloping or encouraging infill development in an area that would otherwise not attract sufficient market development in a timely manner. Taxes attributable to new improvements (tax increment) are set-aside in a fund to finance public improvements in the zone.
- **Historic Designation:** As a designated City of Houston historic building, your property will be exempt from compliance with Energy Code requirements in the Building Code. You are eligible for a 50% discount on building permit fees if the Houston Archeological and Historical Commission (HAHC) issued a Certificate Of Appropriateness (COA) for the approved work. Historical Preservation Ordinance regulates exterior alteration, new construction, relocation or demolition of any historic structure, object or site.



RESOURCES & OTHER INFORMATION

- **Open Records:** The Open Records Section provides permit records and residential plans beginning in 1988 to the present. Register and submit your request at [https://houstontx.govqa.us/WEBAPP/_rs/\(S\(x14z2kpr2bi4qf1133vkwa4v\)\)/SupportHome.aspx](https://houstontx.govqa.us/WEBAPP/_rs/(S(x14z2kpr2bi4qf1133vkwa4v))/SupportHome.aspx)
- **Reporting Unpermitted Work:** An anonymous complaint can be submitted to the City of Houston 311 Help & Information Section for work without a permit. A tracking number will be assigned and can be used to follow up with their office regarding the concern.

An investigator will conduct a site visit and inform the responsible party of the required actions and time frame.

The complaint can be submitted via phone by contacting the City of Houston 311 Help & Information Section at 713.837.0311 or online at:

<http://hfdapp.houstontx.gov/311/index.php>



ONLINE TOOLS

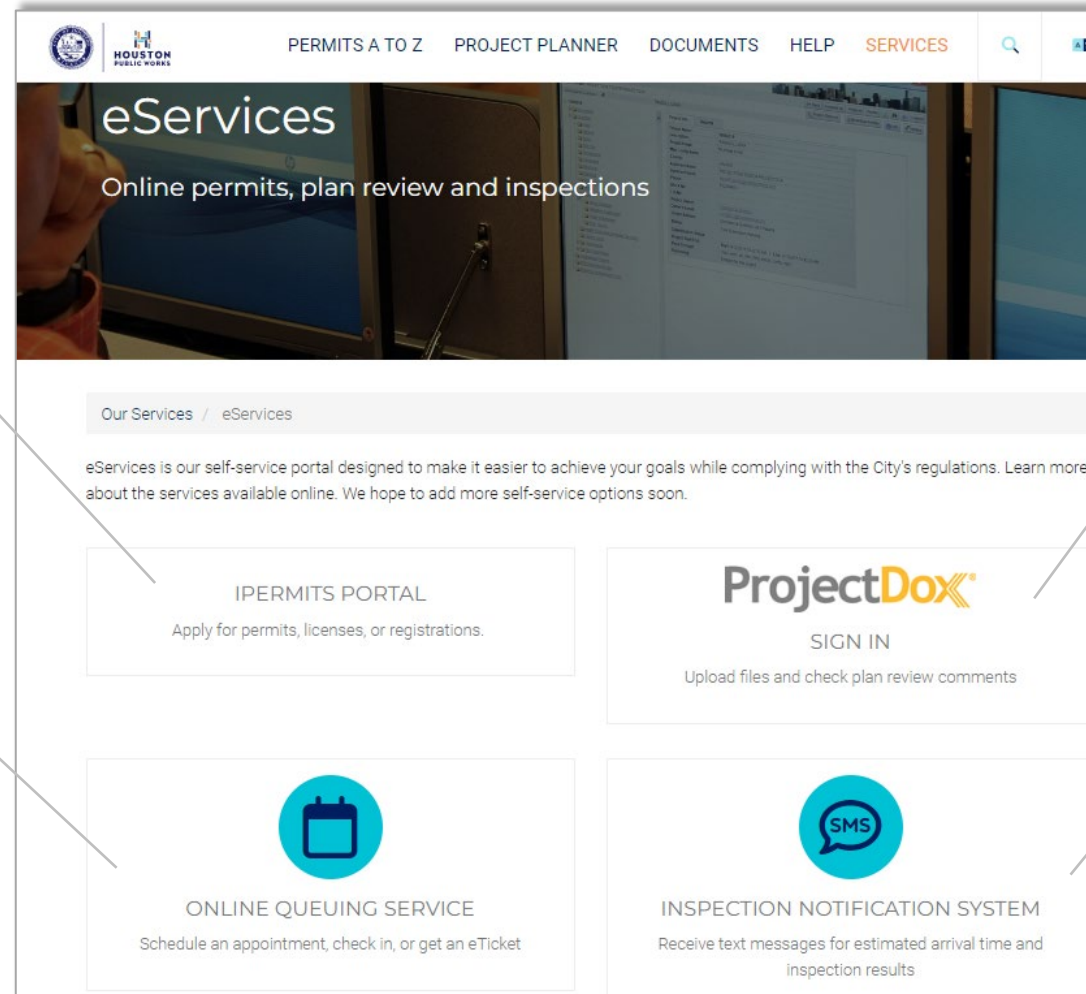
eServices Webpage - <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/our-services/eservices>

**Quick Link to
iPermits**
*(Register &
Apply for a Permit)*

**Schedule an
Appointment**

**Quick Link to
ProjectDox**
(Upload & Submit Plans)




**Register to Receive
Inspection
Notifications**



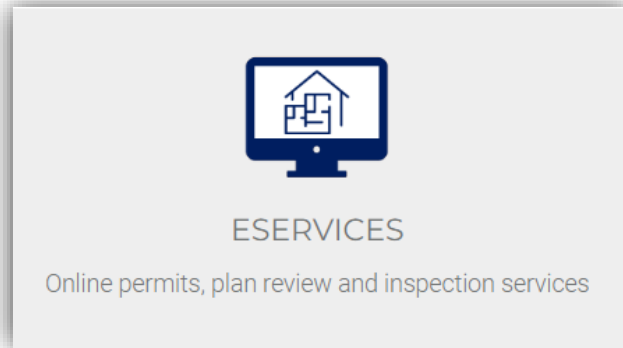
ONLINE TOOLS

HPC Webpage - <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/>

- **Project Status**: Customers can check the status of the review of their plans and view correction comments (if any). There is also a tool to schedule inspections and review inspections results and comments. Additionally, customers can check a project's plan submittal history.
- **Sold Permits Search**: The City of Houston Building Code Enforcement (BCE) Group has a tool available online that allows users to search for permits sold by BCE in the last three years using different search criteria, such as: job address, applicant name, permit type, zip code, building use.
- **Fee Estimator**: Online tool that allows customer to estimate their building permit fees. This calculation is based only on one project with the information you provide. It does not apply to master projects or phased projects. Additionally, it does not include fees assessed by other Departments

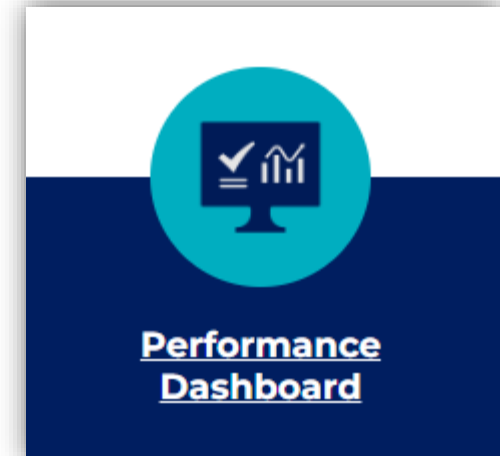
PROJECT STATUS	SOLD PERMITS SEARCH	FEE CALCULATOR
		
Use your 8-digit project number to check your plan review or inspection status	Search for permits sold over a rolling 3-year period or search by council district	Estimate the building permit fee for your project
<input type="button" value="Check Plan Review Status"/>	<input type="button" value="Search the last 3 years"/>	<input type="button" value="Commercial project"/>
<input type="button" value="Check Inspection Status"/>	<input type="button" value="Search by council district"/>	<input type="button" value="Residential project"/>
<input type="button" value="Check Plan Submittal History"/>		

ONLINE TOOLS



- **EPR User Guides**: The eServices webpage has several guides that can assist you with the electronic permitting process.
- **Live Chat**: On the HPC home page and the eServices page you can also find the link to chat support which is available Monday - Friday: 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM

- **Performance Dashboard**: Interactive dashboard which provides an at-a glance view of our daily performance including total plans in the system for review and number of business days of oldest plan. Visit <https://dashboard.publicworks.houstontx.gov/> to access it.
- **Forms & Documents**: Most of our guides, forms and other documents can be accessed at <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/resources>



CONTACT US OR VISIT US ONLINE

- **Building Code Enforcement:**
www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/building-code-enforcement.html
- **Permits/Inspections/Plan Review**
<https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/our-services/eservices>
- **Planning & Development**
www.houstontx.gov/planning
- **Houston Fire Department**
www.houstontx.gov/fire
- **General Information**
www.houstontx.gov/311
- **Flood Maps**
www.tsarp.org
- **Houston Public Works Main Webpage**
www.publicworks.houstontx.gov/home
- **City of Houston Main Webpage**
www.houstontx.gov
- **Houston Permitting Center (General Information)**
832-394-9000
houston.permittingcenter@houstontx.gov



- **Commercial Plan Review**
832-394-8810
commercial.planreview@houstontx.gov
- **One Stop Plan Review**
832-394-8820
onestop.planreview@houstontx.gov
- **Development Services (Planning)**
832-394-9091
pd.siteplanreview@houstontx.gov
- **Taps and Meters**
832-394-8888
taptechs@houstontx.gov
- **Traffic**
832-394-9153
hpc-traffic.permits@houstontx.gov
- **Impact Fee Administration**
832-394-8888
wcrtechs@houstontx.gov
- **Floodplain Management Office**
832-394-8854
fmo@houstontx.gov
- **Storm Plan Review**
832-394-9124



thank you!



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