

Building Plans and Submissions

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What plans are required?

All building plans have to be submitted to the relevant Local Authority for approval.

The National Building Regulations & Building Standards Act (No.103 of 1977) stipulates that no person may erect, alter, add to, or convert any building without the prior approval of the Local Authority.

If you want to obtain a copy of the National Building Regulations & Building Standard Act it can be purchased from the SABS online store [here](#) .

To find details of building guidelines and regulations online is a mission itself. There is no one single place that you can access this information from your relevant Local Authority. Some websites are exhaustive in their content, supplying you with all the necessary forms, whilst others having you running around in circles.

In the Before you Build section of this website you will find a list of websites and contact people to assist you in the "planning" phase of your building. (It is by no means a complete list and All About Building would welcome additional contact details and information from the relevant departments, architects, builders, in fact anyone who can shed some light on easy and quick access to information so that all the relevant material can be found in one single place.)

If you are undertaking renovations or putting in a pool you will require plans. Whenever the nature of the work involves excavation of land, electricity supply, plumbing and drainage, you must contact your Local Authority to find out exactly what is required.

If you are intending to erect a boundary wall, Council approval is required.

If you are putting in a swimming pool, there are rules and regulations that have to be complied with and a plan is required.

If you have decided to add another storey to your existing dwelling you will require an engineer's report and plans must be submitted.

Another very important aspect is if your building is going to be used by the public you will require a fire protection plan.

Generally you don't require plans for internal renovation provided you are not knocking out load-bearing walls "walls that are integral to the support of the building." If they are support walls, you will require planning approval.

Internal remodelling like putting in a new bath or revamping the entire kitchen do not require plans, but if you are putting in a fireplace you DO require approval as there are fire regulations involved. Choosing an Architect or Draughtsperson

It is very tempting to use someone who has a basic knowledge of drawing plans - like your cousin's friend who completed one year of architecture at uni or tech, because it is so much cheaper. But the ultimate cost of not using a professional person (an architect or draughtsperson) who can "walk" the plans through from concept to council for submission and ultimately obtain that final approval can be a costly mistake.

You should look at examples of various architects' work and contact their clients to get references. Drive around new housing estates and look at the houses being built. Get contact details and telephone numbers of those architects whose designs appeal to you.

First and foremost discuss fees and get it in writing.

If you are planning to submit your plans yourself once they have been drawn, check that you have everything in place. It can be very frustrating to submit your plans thinking everything is in order only to find yourself facing extensive delays, for example, the engineer's form. But, if you do decide to do the submissions yourself you will need the following:-

- Application forms obtained from your Local Authority
 - Plans
 - Standard forms from engineers who've consulted on the plans
 - A copy of the title deed
 - Zoning certificate
- Whom do I contact to get building plans approved?

In South Africa local authorities (municipalities) administer building approval. Since the introduction of the National

Building Regulations (NBRs) in 1985, all local authorities in South Africa have applied these functional requirements when checking building plans that have been submitted for approval.

(Please see the Useful Contacts page in the Before you Build section of this website for some useful contact details.)
The Process of Submitting Plans for Approval

You or your architect/draftsperson must prepare one set of building plans for submission by colouring in the plan as set out in the National Building Regulations.

If, for example, your building is hanging off a cliff, or on a steep slope, or requires any kind of structural engineering work, then a person who is Registered with the Engineering Council of South Africa must sign the drawings and also sign a form (obtainable from your local authority) taking responsibility for the structural engineering work; this form must also be completed by you (the owner of the property, who is the "applicant").

A copy of the Title Deed must accompany the application, as well as a completed application form and a Zoning Certificate.

If your building project is anything other than a residential house, approval should first be obtained from the Fire Department, who will stamp the drawings.

If the zoning certificate stipulates that a Site Development Plan is approved prior to the commencement of building work, then the approved Site Development Plan must be submitted as well (if this process has not been followed, it is necessary, then, to employ a Town Planner to submit a Site Development Plan to the Land Use Management Department for assessment and approval before you can submit a building plan).

A fee for submission of the plan will be calculated on presentation. The fee must be paid to the cashier immediately. You will then be given a receipt for the payment.

Waiting for approval is an exercise in patience!

The waiting time for approval is approximately six weeks. Phone and request updates from your architect or draughtsperson or, if you have submitted the plans yourself, it is advisable after about four weeks to phone in and ask for an update, just in case something has been forgotten and your file laid to one side. This can cause extensive delays, so make sure you find out that they have everything they require and that the plan is moving through the relevant department. All you require is your reference number given to you when you submitted the plans or your erf number.

The City of Johannesburg website allows homeowners to do an online search to track plans. Hope the other government departments follow suit soon! What drawings must be submitted with a building plan application?

The National Building Regulations require that the following be submitted:

- A site plan
- Layout drawings (layout drawings include plans at each level, sections through the proposed building(s) and elevations; drainage must be indicated on the layout plans).

Building site inspections

At various intervals in the building process compulsory building site inspections are required. They are:

- An excavation inspection (foundation trenches)
- An open drain inspection
- A final inspection

If you have contracted a builder to do your building, all of these requirements will be seen to by the builder. If you are owner-building, make sure you contact your local municipality and speak to the building inspector there and ask for all the necessary information.