



Northfield Planning & Zoning Department

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Do I need a zoning permit?

Short Answer: Yes; if you're wondering this, you probably do!

Long Answer: You need a zoning permit before you can proceed with any kind of **Land Development**, which is defined in the Northfield Zoning Regulations:

“The division of a parcel into two or more parcels, the construction, reconstruction, conversion, structural alteration, relocation or enlargement of any building or other structure, or of any mining, excavation or landfill, and any change in the use of any building or other structure, or land, or extension of use of land.”

Most people know they need a permit to build something – an addition to their home, a garden shed, a deck – but many do not realize that they need a permit to change the use of their property. This means that if a property is in residential use, and the owner wants to have a business in it, the owner needs to get a permit. If it is being used for a single family, and the owner wants to put in an apartment, a permit is needed. A property that has been in disuse will need a permit for any sort of use.

There are three activities for which you do **not** need a permit, although it is still a good idea to check with the Zoning Administrator (ZA) to be sure.

- free-standing structures of under 500 cubic feet not on foundations (example: tool shed 8x8x7; dog house, play house, etc)
- repairs to existing structures that do not increase the size or change the use (example: replace rotten deck with new deck of identical size)
- interior renovations that do not change the use of the structure

2. How do I apply for one?

Blank permit application forms are available three places:

- Folders on the ZA's desk
- Town Clerk
- Municipal web site: northfield-vt.gov

You can submit them by mail or by dropping them on the ZA's desk. You must submit a completed and signed application form; a site plan; and the application fee in order for your application to be complete.

If you have any questions or need help to fill out the application forms, the ZA will be happy to help. You can stop by during Office Hours, leave a phone message, or send an e-mail. The ZA will respond to inquiries within three business days.

3. How long will it take to get a permit?

Short Answer: One to three months from the date you submit a complete application.

Long Answer: It depends on who has to review it.

The Zoning Administrator can approve Single Family Homes and Two-Family Homes, and Additions and Accessory Structures associated with Single-Family Homes and Two-Family Homes. Once you submit a complete application, the ZA has 30 days to act on it by approving it, denying it, or referring it to someone else for review. The ZA usually acts on applications within two weeks.

The Zoning Board of Adjustment can grant Variances, approve Conditional Uses, and hear Appeals of the ZA's decisions. Their meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of each month, although they only meet if there are scheduled Hearings. Please see the Zoning Calendar for current application submission deadlines.

The Planning Commission approves Subdivisions, Signs, and Site Plans (required for all Conditional Uses and all Permitted Uses other than those approved by the ZA), as well as providing interpretation of the Zoning Regulations. The Planning Commission meets on the third Monday of each month. Please see the Zoning Calendar for current application submission deadlines.

If your property is located in the regulatory **Floodplain**, then your complete permit application and supporting materials must be reviewed by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. This will add an extra 30 days, minimum, to the processing of your permit application. The Zoning Administrator will assist you in preparing your supporting materials for the state review process; there is no additional fee.

4. Once I have the permit, how soon can I start my project?

Short Answer: Fifteen days

Long Answer: There is a 15-day appeal period following the issuance of every permit (except sign permits) during which you must display the yellow permit placard. This period is meant to inform your abutting landowners (neighbors) of your project, and give them an opportunity to appeal the decision to issue the permit.

5. What if I build without a zoning permit?

Short Answer: This can cause serious problems and major expense for you.

Long Answer: In Vermont, a zoning defect clouds the property's title. This means that when a homeowner tries to refinance his home mortgage, or applies for a home equity loan, or tries to sell her home, or passes a property to family members through a will, any zoning problem will stop the process. If it turns out that a change made to a property was not permissible, that change will have to be undone, deconstructed.

If you have already made a change to your property without a permit, please talk to the Zoning Administrator as soon as possible so that a permit may be issued and your property brought into compliance with the law. There is no fine for a permit after building, but there is the possibility that the project may have to be undone.