Atlas: Permit Information and More at your Fingertips
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Outline

1. When are permits needed?
2. What happens if my client buys a property that was renovated without permits?
3. Intro to Atlas
4. Checking permit history and status on Atlas
5. What can I do to best protect my client?
When are Permits Needed?

Short answer: most of the time when work is done on a building. If a house is renovated for sale, it's usually a safe bet that at least one permit is required. The following work requires permits:

- Building an addition
- Interior or exterior changes to the building
- Partial or full demolition (including non-load bearing interior demolition)
- Repairs that are not standard maintenance
- Updated electrical, plumbing, or HVAC systems

This obviously covers a lot, so perhaps it's easier to explain what work doesn't require a permit:
When aren’t Permits Needed?

- Replacing doors or windows in a 1 or 2 family dwelling (so long as the size of the openings isn’t changed)
- Interior finishing work like: Painting, papering, and similar wall and ceiling finishes.
- Paneling or gypsum wallboard installed over existing wall surfaces and ceiling material
- Conventional floor coverings that are not comprised of fibers.
- Carpeting and similar floor coverings that are not installed in exit access corridors, exit passageways, or vertical exits.
- Cabinets, countertops, movable cases, counters, and partitions less than 6 ft. tall.
- Detached sheds less than 200 square feet, playground equipment, and pet equipment.
How Do Permits Work?

• A Permit applicant will submit a permit application to the Department.
  
  • Applications may require architect or engineer sealed plans, depending on the proposed scope of work.
  
  • An L&I plan reviewer will review the plans to ensure that the proposed work meets Code. If so, the permit is approved and is ready for issuance (once the applicant pays the fees).

• Once the permit has been issued, the responsible contractor is required to schedule and pass various permit inspections. During these inspections, the Department verifies that the work is progressing in accordance with the approved plans.

• These permit inspections culminate in a final inspection, once all work is completed. If the final inspection is passed, the permit is “completed” or “finalized”. If the permit includes a Certificate of Occupancy, this is when it will be issued.

• Permits expire if left open and inactive for a period of 6-months, or if left open for more than 5-years.
What happens if my client buys a property that was renovated without permits?

- When L&I discovers the unpermitted work, they will issue a Notice of Violation to the current property owner, regardless of who owned the property when the work was done. The current property owner will be named as the “responsible party” for the violations, even if they did nothing wrong and unknowingly inherited the violations from the prior owner.

- “Responsible party” is not an accusation or allegation that the property owner caused the violations. It is a reference to the property owner’s legal responsibility to maintain their property in compliance with the Philadelphia Code.

- The current owner will then be responsible for addressing those violations. This will often require the current owner to obtain permits for work that already occurred.

- The current owner can point the finger at the prior owner and say that the prior owner should be responsible, and they may even have a legal cause of action. However, L&I will not get involved in this dispute, and the current owner will be legally responsible to correct the violations.
What happens if my client buys a property that was renovated without permits?

• Retroactively legalizing construction work can be difficult— the owner may be required to obtain plans for the work that was completed, and if some of the work is covered up (as is often the case with plumbing, HVAC, or electrical work), destructive inspections may be required.

• While the owner is addressing the violations, the L&I violations will progress through the Code Enforcement process.

• Unappealed violations that are open for more than 60 days are referred to the Law Department, which will file a lawsuit against the responsible party seeking an order to correct the violation and, most of the time, fines for the period that the violation was open.

• Violations carry a statutory fine of at least $300 per violation per day. A Judge will hear the facts of the case and determine the fine.
Atlas

https://atlas.phila.gov/

- OPA Information
- Deeds
- Zoning (District, Pending Legislation, Overlays, Appeals, RCOs)
- Nearby (Zoning Appeals, 311 Requests)
- L&I (Permits, Zoning History, Inspections, Violations, Licenses)
OPA Information

28 S 2ND ST
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19106-2802

Property Assessments

Property assessment and sale information for this address. Source: Office of Property Assessments (OPA). OPA was formerly a part of the Bureau of Revision of Taxes (BRT) and some City records may still use that name.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPA Account #</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OPA Address</td>
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See more at Property Search

Deeds
Deed Information

- Lot Measurements
- Deed Info
- Recording History
Permits

28 S 2ND ST
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19106-2602

Permits (16)

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See 11 older permits at L&I Property History

Zoning Permit Documents (3) formerly "Zoning Archive"

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### Permit Details

This will read “completed” when the permit has passed final inspection.
Other L&I Information

- Historical Zoning Documents
- Permit Inspection History
- Violation History and Status
- Business Licenses (rental, vacant property, dumpster, etc)
Protecting Your Client

- If work that requires permits has recently occurred in a property, check Atlas to see that the work was permitted and that those permits were completed.

- Check Atlas to see if there are any violations open at the property. Open violations will hold up the issuance of a property certification. They also run with the land.

- Inform your clients that they risk being on the hook for compliance costs and violation fines if the City discovers unpermitted work and they become the owner of the property.
Thank you!

- Please submit any general questions here: www.phila.gov/li/get-help