

————Your Guide to the————

abc's



 **of Building in Ross**

Thinking about building a new house, remodeling an old one, or just adding a pool? It can be hard to know where to start. Our ABC's brochure should help demystify the planning and building process and give you a clearer picture of how to make your home improvement dreams a reality.

APPROVAL

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First Things First...

The first thing you should do, of course, is think about your goals. What is on your property now and what do you want to change or create? Keep an open mind and consider different options for developing or redeveloping your property. This is also a good time to begin interviewing design professionals, such as architects and landscape architects.

It's (not?) so Hard to Find Good Help...

We are often asked to recommend architects and other professionals who have had good luck in the past getting projects approved in Ross. While it is definitely worth asking around about an architect's track record, we often receive excellent designs from architects who have never before worked in town. Likewise, while it is helpful for a designer to be familiar with Ross's regulations and the preferences of its citizens and elected officials; so long as you and your architect approach your project with an open mind and a willingness to communicate with Town staff and your neighbors, a lack of local experience need not be a hindrance. The quality of your architect's work and their ability to maintain an open and positive relationship with their clients (you!) and the Town are more important than previous Ross experience.

Include Us on Your Design Team...

Once you have an idea of what you want to do, you should get in touch with the Planning Department to discuss your property, your desired project, and the regulations that might affect you. For instance, the way your property is zoned will determine, among other things, how large a residence you are allowed, how much setback you need to maintain from property lines and how many parking spaces you need to provide. There are also regulations affecting construction near creeks and on steep hillsides, rules about tree trimming and removal, as well as the development of second units. Learning the rules and regulations that affect your property early in the process will save you time and money, as well as the heartbreak of falling in love with an unapprovable design or plan.

Different Projects, Different Approvals...

O.K., so you've studied your property, thought about your goals, maybe hired an architect or other design professional, and met with Planning staff to discuss your project. What comes next? Depending on the scope of your project and the circumstances of your property, your project will require one of three levels of approval. If the project is small, such as a kitchen or bath remodel, and has no visible effect on the exterior of a structure, you may be able to skip planning review entirely and simply file for a building permit from the Building Department. More significant, but still relatively small, projects such as window changes and second unit applications and minor design review items may be administratively reviewed by the Planning Department. Larger remodels, any request for a variance from Town regulations, as well as almost all new structures or demolition of existing houses will be evaluated by the Town Council.

Work with Your Neighbors...

There's no such thing as a free lunch, but there certainly is free neighbor input. Knowing your neighbors' thoughts and concerns can actually save you a bundle by limiting costly plan revisions and delays. A critical focus of the review process is ensuring new development is sensitive to neighboring properties. Applicants who solicit input from their neighbors early on in the planning process, and design accordingly, can bypass the unpleasant experience of learning just before the Council meeting that your neighbors hate your project and intend to fight it to the bitter end. Checking in with nearby property owners early and often not only makes you a good neighbor- it helps to expedite your project's approval!

Going Before the Council... Don't Panic!

Most construction projects will require Town Council approval. You will have to complete the relevant application forms (available from the Planning Department or via our website) and submit fees and supporting material to the planning department as outlined in the application forms and factsheets. The Council considers most projects within a month or two of our receiving your complete application at a public hearing. The Town will mail a notice describing your project to your neighbors. As part of our review, Planning staff will also put together a report to the Town Council discussing your application and making a recommendation to the Council. Both staff and the Council will make a site visit to inspect your property and your story poles. At the Council meeting, you, your architect and other citizens will have the opportunity to speak, the Council will consider staff's recommendation as well as public input, and will make its own conclusion on the application. The Town Council may approve your project with conditions, deny, or continue your application to another meeting.

BUILDING

Over the Counter...

There are four types of building permits that do not require complex building or planning review and can be picked up over the counter from the Building Department (located in the rear of Town Hall) during their regular morning hours: 1.) water heater replacement; 2.) furnace replacement; 3.) re-roofing with the same material or a roof repair; and 4.) replacing or upgrading an electrical panel.

Regular Building Permits...

Building permit applications for larger more complex projects can only be filed after you have completed the planning approval process. To begin the building permit process, you must file three additional sets of plans (size 36" x 24") with the Building Department. Two sets must contain both architectural and structural plans, the third set is forwarded to the County Assessor's office. Most projects will also require soil reports, structural calculations, and Title 24 energy calculations. If your planning approval was conditioned on submission of additional information, such as a tree protection plan, you will also need to submit that information at this time. Within twelve months of receiving Town Council approval, you must pull a building permit and begin construction or your planning approval will lapse.

Getting Approved...

A plan check fee is due at the time you submit for a building permit. The fee is based on the Building Official's determination of the project valuation, and is 65% of the permit fee. The Planning Department will review your plans to ensure that they are the same as the plans the Council approved and to verify that all conditions have been satisfied. Once planning approves your plans, the Building Department will review them for Building Code compliance. The whole process usually takes from four to six weeks from the time complete plans are submitted. Before you are issued a building permit, all contractors working on your project must have an up-to-date Town business license.

Inspections...

After a building permit is issued and work begins, regular building inspections by the Building Inspector are required as described in the list provided with the building permit. Inspection appointments must be made at least 24 hours in advance. The planning department may also make inspections to check on the progress of construction or in response to any complaints or questions it may receive regarding site construction.

Why Can't You Put it in the Road?...

Before any work can be done in the right-of-way, you need to obtain an encroachment permit from the Department of Public Works. Work in the right-of-way might include trenching for a service or utility, paving your driveway, or landscaping in front of your property.

COMPLETION

Working on the Clock...

Take a drive through Ross on any given weekday and you'll probably need all ten fingers and all ten toes to count the number of construction projects going on at one time. It's a fact of life that everyone in Town is going to have to put up with some construction noise and inconvenience. In the hope of limiting the hours of construction-related pain, the Town has put in place strict time limits for construction projects. Contractors are not allowed to work on weekends, holidays, or after 5 p.m. on weekdays. The Town's Construction Completion Ordinance strictly regulates how much time you are given to finish your project and provides for substantial, automatic penalties for slow-paced projects.

Getting a Final...

Once you complete construction, it's time to schedule a final inspection. The Building Inspector will make a final on-site inspection to be sure that everything has been built as it was approved and to code. On projects that went through planning review, planning staff will stop by to verify that the project was built according to the approved plans and that all the conditions of planning approval were met. Once the final inspection has been approved by the Planning and Building Departments, your project is complete and, so long as it was done on time, your deposit will be refunded to you.

That's All Folks..

Now that the construction debris has been removed and you've sweated through the final inspection, you have time to relax and enjoy the fruits of your labor and daydream about future home improvement. Don't think too longingly about that new kitchen or family room though, you can't pull another building permit for at least nine months.

For More Information

Address Post Office Box 320
Ross, CA 94957
Fax (415) 453-1950
Website www.townofross.org

Planning Department

Elise Semonian, Senior Planner
phone: (415) 453-1453, Ext. 121
email: esemonian@townofross.org

Building Department

Mel Jarjoura, Building Official
email: mjarjoura@townofross.org
Bob Haggett, Building Inspector
phone: (415) 453-1453, Ext. 170
Simone Jamotte, Secretary
phone: (415) 453-1453, Menu Option 3
email: sjamotte@townofross.org

Town Administration Office

Gary Broad, Town Manager
phone: (415) 453-1453, Ext. 107
email: gbroad@townofross.org
Linda Lopez, Administrative Manager
phone: (415) 453-1453, Ext. 105
email: llopez@townofross.org

Department of Public Works

Mel Jarjoura, Director of Public Works
email: mjarjoura@townofross.org
phone: (415) 453-1453, Menu Option 3
Robert Maccario, Street Superintendent
email: rmaccario@townofross.org
phone: (415) 453-1453, Ext. 163