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Home Improvement Projects Frequently Asked Questions

The following responds to the most frequently asked questions regarding making improvements to a residential property on the Stanford campus.

1. Why do I need Stanford University's approval to make a home improvement?

Stanford University, as landowner, has the legal right to monitor and approve development on its lands. Stanford University has established land use standards which, together with Santa Clara County's standards, are designed to ensure that a quality residential area is maintained for current and future faculty and staff based on a consistent application of requirements. Reviewing home improvement projects for compliance with Stanford University's Building Regulations ensures that the character of the residential subdivision is maintained.

All home improvement projects that involve a supplier of labor, material and/or equipment must be reviewed by Faculty Staff Housing (FSH) because any material supplier or labor contractor has the right to place a mechanics' lien on your property for non-payment.

2. What is a mechanics' lien?

A mechanics' lien is a statutory encumbrance on your property that can be placed by those suppliers of labor, material and/or equipment who can make a claim of non-payment.

3. What is the Notice of Non-Responsibility and why is it displayed at the work site?

The Notice of Non-Responsibility is a legal document that provides notification to interested parties that the project is the financial responsibility of the lessee, not the University. The Notice also provides notification to interested parties that liens can be secured only to the leasehold (i.e. building and improvements) and not to the fee interest (i.e. land) of the property. The Notice of Non-Responsibility needs to be recorded with the County regardless of a project's need for a county building permit.

Stanford University, as landowner, in compliance with the California Civil Code, is responsible for posting a copy of the Notice of Non-Responsibility in "some conspicuous place on the site" before construction begins. A member of FSH will post a Notice within 10 days after FSH has "obtained knowledge of the work of improvement." The Notice must remain posted during the entire period of construction.

4. What types of home improvement projects require Stanford's approval?

All projects that involve a supplier of labor, material and/or equipment need to be reviewed and approved by FSH in order to protect Stanford against mechanics' liens.

5. What types of projects generally require a building permit from Santa Clara County?

Permits are generally required for the following:

1. Alterations and additions to or demolition of structures;
2. Interior renovations, including seismic upgrades;
3. Decks over 30 inches above grade;
4. Patio covers;
5. Swimming pools and spas;
6. Fences over 6 feet in height;
7. Retaining walls over 4 feet in height;
8. Sheds larger than 120 square feet;
9. Re-roofing; and
10. Replacing water heaters.

Depending on the work, you may also need specialized permits from the County, such as electrical, plumbing, or grading permits. Project specific information on the type(s) of permits which may be required may be obtained from either Santa Clara County Building Inspection Office and from the County's website.

Please note, County permits will not be issued without Stanford University's approval.

6. How do I contact Santa Clara County Building Inspection Office?

Stanford Office: 340 Bonair Siding
650-725-3873

Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 12:30 - 2:00 p.m.

Main Office: 70 West Hedding Street, 7th Floor, East Wing, San Jose
408-299-5700

Hours: Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

County website: <http://www.sccbuilding.org>

7. What is the difference between Stanford's review and that of Santa Clara County?

Stanford only reviews projects for compliance with the Residential Subdivision Building Regulations. The County will review projects for compliance with County ordinances as well as state and local building codes. Santa Clara County will not accept plans for permit without the FSH approval stamp on each page.

8. What are the setbacks for my property?

Setbacks vary by lot. Please contact FSH at 725-6893 for the setbacks for your property. For any given lot, Stanford's setbacks are usually more restrictive than those of Santa Clara County. In order to obtain Stanford's approval, plans must conform to the Stanford setbacks.

9. May I discuss my home improvement plans with FSH before I formally apply or before I have plans drawn up?

Yes. If you would like a preliminary consultation, please contact our office. For additions, it is most efficient if you have a copy of plans for your property showing the property lines and location of building(s) on the site.

10. When do I need to submit drawings?

In general, projects that include any of the following will require drawings:

1. Alterations or additions to or demolition of existing structures;
2. Interior renovations including seismic upgrades, but excluding new flooring, paint or wallpaper;
3. Patios/Decks;
4. Swimming pools and spas;
5. Removal of a tree;
6. Fences, hedges or retaining walls;
7. Sheds; and
8. Site drainage.

11. Which type of projects do not require drawings?

The following projects generally do not require drawings, however, they do require a project application and a check for the processing fee:

1. Painting the interior or exterior of a home;
2. Installing new flooring;
3. Repairs to existing patios/decks;
4. Repairing or replacing a roof;
5. Replacing a water heater; and
6. Repaving a driveway.

12. Where can I obtain existing plans of my house?

Many plans for campus properties can be obtained by contacting Stanford University's Maps and Records Office located at 327 Bonair Siding.

13. If my project requires drawings, how many should I submit and how detailed do they need to be?

Please prepare three (3) sets of plans for submission. The drawings should be drawn to scale and labeled with the identification of the preparer (architect, engineer, contractor or designer), including license number if applicable. Plans should include *at a minimum*:

- **Contact Information:** Lessee's and the preparer's names, addresses, telephone and fax numbers.
- **Site Plan (Plot Map):** A drawing showing the relation of new construction or renovations to all property lines, setbacks and easements. A scale with a north arrow. Include all structures on the lot; lot dimensions; streets; on-lot paving, location and height of all fences and retaining walls; and existing trees over 6" in diameter labeled by species.
- **Floor Plan or Landscape Plan:** Drawings clearly identifying the changes, especially additions and/or demolition areas.
- **Elevations:** Minimum of two elevations with height clearly defined. Only required for building modifications that affect the exterior of the structure.

14. Why do I need to submit three (3) sets of plans?

After your project has been approved, one set is filed at the Stanford University Maps and Records Office, and two sets are returned to you and can be submitted to Santa Clara County for their review if necessary. After they have approved the project and granted the applicable permit(s), the County will return one set of plans to the applicant as the officially-approved job copy.

15. What does my contractor need to know about underground utilities, such as water, sewer and electrical lines?

Before schematic drawings are finished please contact the Maps and Records Office to determine existing utility locations. This review will avoid interruptions of service and/or costly project delays.

At least 48 hours (2 working days) prior to construction please contact Underground Services Alert ("USA") at 1-800-227-2600. USA will notify all utility service providers in your area. These services will then come to the site to mark underground utility locations to avoid damage and/or loss of service which could be caused by the construction.

16. What are the construction hours?

Please refer to the Santa Clara County Noise Ordinance available on line at:
<http://www.sccgov.org>.

17. How can I obtain more information regarding Santa Clara County's new Green Building Requirements which went into effect in 2009?

Please refer to the Santa Clara County Building Inspection website at:
<http://www.sccbldg.org>.

18. What do I need to do to remove a tree?

Contact FSH to determine if it is a Stanford street tree. If so, Stanford will evaluate and remove the tree if necessary. For non-street trees, submit a plan showing the location of the tree to be removed and the species, size, and location of the replacement tree. Lessees should also check with Santa Clara County for its tree removal ordinance.

19. How might Santa Clara County's historic preservation process affect my remodel/demolition?

Santa Clara County reviews applications for demolition and discretionary permits to screen for properties listed in the Santa Clara County Heritage Resource Inventory and for potential historic significance in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act. The most common activities requiring a discretionary permit are grading, Architectural and Site Approval (ASA) Committee reviews, and variance requests. Historic resources on the property can include but are not limited to buildings, landscaping, and archaeological artifacts. As a guideline, applications for demolition and discretionary permits for properties with resources that are 50 years or older will require screening and review. Please note, that there may be circumstances where a property with resources less than 50 years old may be considered significant according to the criteria for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources. For more information, please refer to the Santa Clara County website at
http://www.sccgov.org/scc_ordinance/TOC094.HTM

20. After the drawings are prepared, what are the next steps?

The lessee, architect, designer or contractor submits to FSH a Residential Subdivision Project Application, three (3) sets of plans for the proposed project and a check made payable to Stanford University for the processing fee. FSH will review the plans and either approve them or make recommendations for changes. If approved, the lessee and his/her contractor or architect will be notified. The letter of approval along with two (2) sets of stamped, approved plans may be picked up at FSH, or mailed to the appropriate party. The letter of approval and stamped drawings will enable the appropriate party to apply for the necessary County permits.

21. Where can I obtain the application form and regulations regarding home improvements?

Both the Residential Subdivision Project Application and the Residential Subdivision Building Regulations are available online at <http://fsh.stanford.edu> or at the FSH Office.

If you have any other questions, please contact FSH at 650-725-6893 or at fshousing@stanford.edu.