



## MACON-BIBB COUNTY BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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October 19, 2020

Re.: Community Workshop Open Letter

Dear member of the Macon-Bibb County construction community,

On September 30, 2020, an online Community Workshop was held with those interested in the process realignment occurring at the Macon-Bibb County Building Division. During the meeting we had several questions about the permitting and plan review process, which I would like to respond to in detail. These questions are paraphrased below, with the response immediately following:

### 1) What are the plan review timelines in Macon-Bibb County?

Once the project has been accepted for review, the plan review timeframes are as follows:

Submittal Type	Approval / Initial Revision Comments*	Subsequent Review
Residential	5-business days	5-business days
Multi-Family	10-business days	5-business days
Minor Commercial**	10-business days	5-business days
Commercial	20-business days	10-business days

\*- The first day starts after the date of acceptance, which allows for internal routing

\*\*- Minor Commercial is classified as being under \$2 million in total construction valuation

It would be beneficial to explain the above information in-depth to provide an additional level of clarity on the process. The above timeline reflects the amount of time that we may take to review a project. It goes without saying that once a project is returned to the applicant the Building Division clock stops and then restarts when plans are returned to the Building Division in response to a request for revisions or changes.

As an example, the following is an overview of the process for a typical submittal:

- An applicant submits a permit application with plans and the plan review fee.
- The Permitting Staff examines the plans to confirm that all components are present that are necessary to complete the review process. This examination may occur through opening the paper plans at the front counter or viewing the electronic submittal online. We call this step the COMPLETENESS CHECK.

If your permit application and plans are returned for additional information, staff is required to provide in writing a form that identifies the missing information required during the Completeness Check process. The clock has not started at this point since the application has not been accepted.

- Once the Completeness Check step has been passed and the Permitting Staff accepts the application, a PERMIT APPLICATION NUMBER is assigned to the project. This Permit Application Number will eventually become your PERMIT NUMBER at time of permit issuance.

At this time, the plans are assigned to a Plans Examiner and the clock starts. For most projects this would mean that the Building Division has 10-business days to deliver an approval for permit issuance or a full letter outlining all items that must be resolved to approve the project.

- IF the Plans Examiner requires plan revisions or corrections the clock stops. The timeframe to make the revisions or corrections resides with the applicant. We have seen projects returned the next day or some that have taken upwards of several weeks. The Building Division does not control this step.
- Once revised plans are submitted for review, the Plan Examiner has 5-business days to complete the review of the corrected or revised plans.
- Once approved by the Plans Examiner, the Permitting Staff completes the administrative process to issue the permit. This process may include but not be limited to verification of any Macon-Bibb County Planning and Zoning approval or release, collection of permit fees, etc. This step is usually accomplished within a day.

So, to respond to the question: we have shortened the plan review process in Macon-Bibb County; however, this timeline does not take into consideration the length of time that plans are held by the applicant for revisions outside of the Building Division's direct control. This fact is sometimes not fully explained to the client of the applicant.

One method to shorten the plan review step is take advantage of the Pre-submittal Meeting process, which allows the design professional and/or contractor to meet with staff during the design stage of the project. This allows the Building Division the opportunity to identify code issues and pitfalls that may delay the project through the plan review process.

## **2) Do I need to submit plans for my project?**

Most individuals, when thinking of "plans" visualize a thick roll of blueprints with detailed construction drawings. We recognize that there is a hard cost associated with the creation of these plan sheets, but something tangible from the applicant is required to clearly explain the proposed scope of work, location of the work, and to demonstrate compliance with the adopted codes.

When taking a high-level view of the process, a permit is a contract between the municipality and the permit holder. Within this contract between the parties the permit applicant must clearly explain what is being constructed, and once approved for construction the Building Inspector holds the contractor to this permit or contract.

The building code defines a PERMIT as:

*An official document or certificate issued by the building official that authorizes performance of a specified activity. (Emphasis added)*

*(2018 International Building Code Section 202 (Definitions) PERMIT)*

To issue a permit we need to establish what is being constructed and where it is being constructed within a building or property. In addition to the activity and location it is vital that the municipality only approve projects that comply with the adopted codes. This requires enough information from the applicant to demonstrate compliance within the project scope, with no additional information being required beyond that point.

The adopted codes do not require “plans” to be submitted for a permit, but instead the adopted codes use the term CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS. This is defined below:

*Written, graphic and pictorial documents prepared or assembled for describing the design, location and physical characteristics of the elements of a project necessary for obtaining a building permit.*

*(2018 International Building Code Section 202 (Definitions) CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS)*

To answer the original question, the traditional concept of blueprints or plans are not always necessary to demonstrate the information needed for a permit. The adopted codes recognize that sometimes a written scope of work, which clearly identifies the construction and the construction location within property or building is sufficient.

Prior to creating elaborate plans, please contact the Building Division to see what is necessary for your project. The Building Division welcomes this dialog, since at a minimum we need to understand what you are proposing to construct for permitting purposes, but also to save you money and to expedite the approval.

### **3) Can I submit a single sheet plan for review and approval?**

Within our information handouts, we do explain that a Cover Sheet is required; however, there are exceptions.

The purpose of the Cover Sheet is to provide a central location for the necessary project information. This may include but not be limited to:

- Project address
- Contractor's name and contact information
- Brief Scope of Work, which is a written description of the work requested under the permit
- List of all Adopted Codes used for the project
- The Building Construction Type, which is necessary to understand what types of materials can be used in the building under the adopted codes. Some buildings limited combustible materials (wood) and limit the framing to steel studs.

- Occupancy Type, which also places prescriptive requirements based on how the occupants use the building
- Design Occupant Load, which is the calculated number of occupants for egress and life safety purposes
- Area of the work or building square footage. This is needed for a Certificate of Occupancy and to understand the area of the construction activity

If the applicant can provide the required Cover Sheet information, with the drawings or information to clearly show the construction for permitting purposes. Then a single sheet can be used for permitting the project; however, we do ask that you provide us with a blank space on the single sheet for our approval stamps and comments.

#### **4) Will Macon-Bibb County issue a permit based on a “Conditional Plan Review Approval”?**

This question came up during our Community Workshop and again in private conversations with some applicants. A Conditional Plan Review Approval, as explained to me is where the applicant has undergone the plan review process but seeks immediate project approval, with the understanding that the plan review corrections will be deferred.

This runs contrary to the requirement to provide construction documents or plans for a project that clearly show compliance with the adopted code. Furthermore, issuance of the permit, with a detailed plan review letter outlining all project compliance issues opens the municipality up to some shared responsibility, since the project was approved and permitting in a state of non-compliance.

As an example, suppose a structural issue was discovered on the initial plan review. This design flaw is with an engineered metal building, which has the components fabricated offsite. The project is “Conditionally Approved”, and the building owner unknowingly purchases the building based on the initial plan. Who is liable for the structural field repairs to the factory-built components that were shipped to the jobsite? Is it Macon-Bibb County, the contractor, or the building owner?

The Building Division will not issue “Conditional Approved” permits; however, we will issue foundation only permit that will allow the project to start while addressing other issues within the construction documents or plans. In addition, the Building Division will issue “Shell Only” building permits, which will allow for a future permit to finish the building interior for occupancy.

#### **5) When do we need to submit plan changes or revisions that occur during construction?**

The intent is to always have construction documents (plans) that accurately convey how the building is constructed, with the construction documents also demonstrating compliance with the adopted codes. However, during construction the scope of the project evolves for several reasons that may include but not be limited to financial reasons, the owner request changes, the contractor request changes, the Building Inspector request changes to address a code issue, etc.

When these changes occur during construction, the previously approved plans must be altered to reflect the revisions. Depending on the complexity of the changes or revisions, they can be handled in the field by the assigned Building Inspector. The contractor can submit the revised details to the Building Inspector to be reviewed, approved, and digitally uploaded into the archived plans.

Examples of revisions that can be approved by the Building Inspector include the following:

- Changes to structural details, but not the overall structural design
- Changes in the type of construction materials being used on the project. These changes must comply with the adopted codes since the Building Inspectors may not approve alternate methods or alternate materials in the field.
- Changes to add electrical lighting fixtures, receptacle outlets, etc.
- Changes to add or shift mechanical supply and/or return air duct locations.
- Changes to add plumbing fixtures, without increasing the size or location of restrooms. Examples being: adding a drinking fountain, adding a sink to a breakroom or office wet bar, etc.

All other changes are addressed through the plan revision process, which requires a plan submittal and payment of a review fee. Once submitted, these changes to active construction projects are expedited through the review process to minimize construction delays.

## **6) Can we schedule face to face meetings at the Building Division office?**

At the beginning of the pandemic, Macon-Bibb County limited access for customers entering the building. These restrictions have recently been relaxed for scheduled meetings only.

Presently we are now offer Pre-submittal Meetings through Zoom (online) or in person at the office. These Pre-submittal Meetings are scheduled for Tuesdays and Thursday afternoons. If you wish to have a direct meeting in the office to discuss your current or future project, please contact me for an appointment. Walk-in meetings will not be accepted.

We plan on holding an in-person Community Workshop in January to address additional questions from the Macon-Bibb County Construction Community. This meeting date will be fixed sometime in the month of December and this meeting will be widely advertised to seek a large audience.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me directly at (404) 938-3422, or via email at [dwilkins@maconbibb.us](mailto:dwilkins@maconbibb.us). Our office is always willing to schedule a meeting to discuss your project and questions.

Sincerely,



Don Wilkins, C.B.O., C.F.M., M.C.P.  
Chief Building Official