

Scope and design

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If you're thinking about building, renovating or extending a building, take some time to get your ideas together.

You need to understand the building process so that:

- the end result is safe, healthy and durable
- you protect your rights
- you meet your legal obligations.

Get familiar with the process before you start, so that you can plan well and build safe, healthy buildings for people using them now and any future users.

As well as complying with the Building Act and the Building Code:

- most building work will require a building consent to show how it meets the requirements of specific Building Code clauses (if you need one, you usually can't start work without one. An exception could be urgent work undertaken in an emergency)
- some building work (such as structural work or work on the external envelope of the building) may be restricted building work. If so, you'll need a licensed building practitioner to design it, build it, or supervise the work
- you also need to find out about the land and any need for resource consent or approvals related to the district plan.

Building work is any work done in relation to the construction or alteration of a building. This includes any work on your home, premises or other structure, such as a garage, retaining walls and fences. Some demolition and earthworks also require a building consent.

Generally, the only work you don't need a building consent for is simple or low-risk work.

Certain gas and electrical work is also exempt, but that's because you need someone with the specific qualifications to carry it out.

At every stage of the process ask yourself the following key questions:

- Am I allowed to do this?
- Do I need a resource or a building consent, or both?
- Who do I need to talk to?
- What are my obligations?
- How long will it take?
- How much will it cost?
- What can I do if it goes wrong?

[Stages of the building process \(https://www.building.govt.nz/getting-started/stages-of-the-building-process/\)](https://www.building.govt.nz/getting-started/stages-of-the-building-process/) tells you what to expect.

[Check if you need a consent \(https://www.building.govt.nz/projects-and-consents/planning-a-successful-build/scope-and-design/check-if-you-need-consents/\)](https://www.building.govt.nz/projects-and-consents/planning-a-successful-build/scope-and-design/check-if-you-need-consents/) includes information about exempt work.

Your council can be your best ally

Your local district or city council is your primary point of contact. Depending on its size and the area it covers, there could be many people to deal with or there might be just be one or two. Either way, these are the roles they will cover:

- Customer service - handle your initial queries and provide you with guidance and information. They may be supported by qualified resource consent and building control staff, or they may refer detailed queries to experts.
- Resource consent - often called 'planning officers' or 'consents officers', they will deal with your specific queries about the Resource Management Act, local plans, and resource consent requirements. They will probably also be the people processing your resource consent application if you need one.
- Building control - also called 'building officials', they will deal with your specific queries about the Building Act, the Building Code and building consent requirements. They will probably also be the people processing your application for a building consent, carrying out inspections and signing-off your project.

Council processes vary. Ask your contact at the council whether you need to talk to anyone else, and ask about the processes you should follow. Information may also be available on your council's website.

[Resource consent \(https://www.building.govt.nz/projects-and-consents/planning-a-successful-build/scope-and-design/check-if-you-need-consents/resource-consent/\)](https://www.building.govt.nz/projects-and-consents/planning-a-successful-build/scope-and-design/check-if-you-need-consents/resource-consent/) has more information.

Get project-specific information before you build

Your council can tell you what you will need to do for your project, in relation to the land, resource consent, building consent or any other permits. If you ask them, they will produce a project information memorandum (also called a PIM) for a fee. A project information memorandum can be particularly useful in the design phase of a significant project such as a new residential house or major renovation.

A project information memorandum will tell you what the council knows about:

- the proposed site, including details of:
 - anything relevant to the project
 - any special features of the land (including natural hazards or the presence of hazardous contaminants)
 - heritage features of any building
 - existing stormwater or wastewater services related to the project, the site or surrounding land
 - any development contribution fee, contributing to infrastructure and council services
- the need for resource consent due to Resource Management Act (RMA) requirements
- the need for other approvals due to:
 - the location of underground pipes, natural hazards, soil types and other ground conditions
 - relevant provisions of the council's district plan, council bylaws, Fire Service Act 1975, Local Government Act 2002, Historic Places Act 1993, Fencing Act 1978 and any other legislation.

When PIMs are useful

A project information memorandum can be particularly useful in the design phase of:

- a new house
- significant additions to a house (especially if you're changing the building footprint (land building covers) or adding another storey)
- a new commercial building
- significant external additions or alterations to a commercial building
- external or internal additions or alterations to historic buildings
- large scale building projects, carried out in stages (for example, hospitals, shopping malls, sports stadiums, museums, schools)
- building over two or more allotments (subdividing an allotment of land or a building)
- building across network utility operator's assets or public stormwater or sewer systems (for example, a building on road reserve)
- buildings on land subject to one or more natural hazards (for example, coastal projects subject to inundation/tidal effects, or structures adjacent to a cliff that may be affected by falling debris, subsidence).

Applying for a PIM

When you apply for a project information memorandum, you need to explain:

- intended use of the building
- location, description and external dimensions of the proposed building
- any change of use, subdivision details, or previous building consents issued for the project
- proposed vehicle access, stormwater and wastewater disposal, and connections to public utilities
- precautions to protect any existing drains, sewers, wells or water mains
- matters potentially relevant under the Resource Management Act (such as modified site contours).

You should include preliminary design plans with your application. This might include:

- a good site plan
- a floor plan
- elevation drawings.

You do not need to provide comprehensive, technically detailed drawings and specifications at this stage. They will be required for your building consent application.

The council can request any other information it reasonably requires relevant to the proposed building project. For example, your application should include enough information to determine if there are any associated Resource Management Act planning issues. This includes information such as land contours and drawings showing the sunlight access plane.

You need to apply for a project information memorandum on the prescribed form (below), and pay the council fee. You can also get the form from your council's offices or download it from their website. They may have noted additional information they require, specific to your region.

Your council has to issue a project information memorandum within 20 working days of an application. They can stop the process at any point if they need more information from you.

PIM application

[PDF 86 KB]

<https://www.building.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/building-officials/guides/form-2-project-memorandum-application.pdf>

Application for project information memorandum and/or building consent

Related content

[Stages of the building process \(https://www.building.govt.nz/getting-started/stages-of-the-building-process/\)](https://www.building.govt.nz/getting-started/stages-of-the-building-process/)

Understand building project stages, from initial scoping and design through to consents, construction and completion.

[Check if you need consents \(https://www.building.govt.nz/projects-and-consents/planning-a-successful-build/scope-and-design/check-if-you-need-consents/\)](https://www.building.govt.nz/projects-and-consents/planning-a-successful-build/scope-and-design/check-if-you-need-consents/)

Learn what building work needs a consent, and what may be exempt.

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- with compliance with the Building Act, it is published under section 175 of the Building Act
- with a Weathertight Services claim, it is published under section 12 of the Weathertight Homes Resolution Services Act 2006.