



CAPE COD CERTIFIED

CAPE COD HOME

Cape Cod Building Permits: Town-by-Town Guide for Homeowners (All 15 Towns)

A free field guide from the people who actually live here.



The permit is the part of a home project everyone wants to skip and nobody should. On Cape Cod, building permits protect your safety, your insurance, and your home's value at resale — and skipping one is a mistake that surfaces at exactly the wrong moment (usually when you're trying to sell). Each of the Cape's 15 towns runs its own building department, and some add layers most homeowners don't expect, like historic-district review. Here's what every Cape homeowner needs to understand about permits. (Permit requirements and processes are set by each town under the state building code and change — always confirm with your specific town's building department before you start.)

When you need a permit

Massachusetts (and your town) generally require a building permit for structural work, additions, many renovations, decks, and major systems. Rules of thumb:

Project	Usually needs a permit?
Additions, new structures, decks	Yes
Structural changes, moving walls	Yes
New/replacement roof, siding	Often yes
Electrical, plumbing, gas work	Yes (specific trade permits)
Windows/doors (altering openings)	Often yes
HVAC / heat pump installation	Yes
Minor cosmetic (paint, flooring)	Usually no

When in doubt, call the building department and ask. It's free, and it saves you from the far costlier problem of unpermitted work.

Each town runs its own building department

The Cape's 15 towns — Bourne, Sandwich, Falmouth, Mashpee, Barnstable, Yarmouth, Dennis, Brewster, Harwich, Chatham, Orleans, Eastham, Wellfleet, Truro, and Provincetown — **each have their own building department, inspectors, forms, and fees.** The state building code is uniform, but the local process, timelines, and any extra requirements are town-specific. Always work with *your* town.

The extra layer: historic districts

This is the one Cape homeowners forget. Several towns along **Route 6A (the Old King's Highway Historic District)** — including parts of Sandwich, Barnstable, Yarmouth, Dennis, Brewster, and Orleans — require **historic-district committee approval for exterior changes visible from a public way**, on top of the building permit. Provincetown and some other areas have their own historic review as well. If your home is in one of these districts, factor in that extra approval step and timeline before you plan exterior work.

The permit process, in broad strokes

1. **Check with the building department** whether your project needs a permit (and whether historic or conservation review applies).
2. **Submit the application** with plans/details; trade work needs the appropriate licensed professional.
3. **The licensed contractor typically pulls the permit** (a homeowner pulling their own permit takes on liability — usually let the pro do it).
4. **Inspections happen** at required stages; work must pass.
5. **Final sign-off / certificate** closes out the permit.

Why never to skip it

- **Safety** — inspections catch dangerous work.
- **Insurance** — unpermitted work can jeopardize claims.
- **Resale** — unpermitted additions and work surface in inspections and title, kill deals, or force expensive after-the-fact permitting.
- **It's the law** — and towns do enforce.

Don't-miss cautions

- **Conservation review** may also apply near wetlands, the coast, or in flood zones — another town department to check with.
- **Beware contractors who suggest skipping permits** — it's a red flag about the contractor, and the liability lands on you as the owner.
- **Confirm historic-district status early** — it can add weeks to an exterior project's timeline.

Don't miss: one phone call to your town's building department before any project bigger than paint. Each Cape town is a little different, some add historic or conservation review, and that free early conversation tells you exactly what you need — turning permitting from a scary unknown into a routine, protective step that keeps your project legal, safe, and resale-proof.

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