

How to get building permits in Belize

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The building season for many foreign investors in Belize starts now. We have compiled this information that may be useful for those first time builders in Belize. The info has been vetted by the Central Building Authority prior to its release. If you want to build a structure of whatever kind – a residence, apartment building, resort and tourist facilities, commercial and institutional and industrial buildings, agricultural structures, a pier and other over-water structures, detached out buildings, and moveable buildings, to name a few building types – whether temporary or permanent, the building owner is required to secure a building permit before construction starts. If you want to add-on to, remodel, or renovate an existing structure the building owner is required to secure a building permit before construction starts. The primary authority for the review and approval of building plans and issuing building permits is the Central Building Authority, 3rd Floor, Coastal Zone Management Building, Princess Margaret Drive, Belize City, Belize; Tel.: 223-2616; Fax.: 223-5738; E-mail: centralbuildingauthority@yahoo.com; Paul Satchwell, P.Eng., Director. The Central Building Authority has delegated the responsibilities to review and approve building plans and issue building and occupancy permits, in their respective jurisdictions, to the Local Building Authorities in Belize City, the City of Belmopan, and in each of the Towns constituted under the Town Councils Act. Depending on the nature of the building project other governmental agencies may also be involved in the overall permitting process.

Belize Building Act, 2003

The “Belize Building Act, 2003” (the “Act”) was Gazetted on 1st February 2003. The Act was approved by the House of Representatives and the Senate of Belize “to control building operations in the interest of public health and safety and to enable the introduction of regulations prescribing standards relating to the use of material and methods of construction,…” The provisions of the Act apply to the construction of any building or structure in Belize.

The Act establishes the Central Building Authority (the “Authority”) to administer the provisions of the Act. The Authority shall appoint a professional engineer or architect to be the Director of Building Control (the “Director”). The Director shall sign and issue all building permits, enforcement notices and other related documents. The Authority may appoint Building Inspectors to review plans and other documentation submitted in support of an application for a building permit, and inspect construction to determine compliance with the terms of the building permit.

Any person who proposes to construct a building shall submit to the Authority an application for a permit to build. Every application for a permit to build shall be made in writing and shall be accompanied by such drawings, descriptions, calculations and specifications as the Authority or the Director may require. The Director shall reply to the applicant by either issuing a permit or rejecting the Application. If an Application is rejected a letter shall be issued identifying the items in the Application and attached documents that need to be clarified, strengthened or added in order for the Application to be approved. A permit for the construction of a building shall be granted when the Director is satisfied that the operation involved will be conducted in accordance with building regulations. Within seven (7) days following the completion of construction of any building, the building owner shall submit written notice to the Director stating the date of completion and applying for permission to occupy and use the building.

Central Building Authority: Application For Review

The Central Building Authority’s “Application for Review” (“Application”) is a standardized form which, in general, is a written description of the building project for which the building permit is being applied. As mandated by the Act, every Application shall be accompanied by such drawings, descriptions, calculations and specifications as the Authority or the Director may require. The Application identifies the following drawings to be included with the Application:

i. Site Plan showing property boundaries, adjoining and adjacent roads, easements, alleys and footpaths, the position and nature of all electric power supply lines, the location and size of all water supply and waste disposal lines, and the position of existing and any proposed building or buildings and parking area(s) on the same lot.

ii. Floor Plan for each floor of the building(s), including basement or foundation, mezzanines and roof.

iii. Elevations for each face of the building(s), showing relative heights.

iv. Cross Sections (2 minimum) through the building(s) including foundation. Cross sections should indicate building materials and relative heights throughout the building, including the roof.

v. Electrical (PUC Approved) and plumbing schematic drawings and basic specifications including septic tank, soak-a-way, etc.

Note: The Authority requires that the electrical drawings and related documentation must receive approval from the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) before submitting such drawings and related documents to the Authority.

vi. Structural engineering drawings and basic specifications of building(s) and water retaining structures, where applicable.

The Authority recommends that four (4) complete sets of the above described plans, drawings, specifications and other data and documentation should be submitted to the Authority with each Application. Once approved, one set of the approved documents shall be retained by the Authority; one set is to be retained by the owner; one set is to be retained by the architect and/or engineer; and one set is to be kept at all times at the construction site.

The plans, drawings and other construction documents for buildings less than one thousand (1,000) square feet and not more than one story high do not require the signature of an architect or engineer. However, depending upon the complexity and use of the building, the Authority reserves the right to require that the plans and specification for certain building less than one thousand (1,000) square feet be prepared, designed, stamped and signed by an a registered professional architect and/or civil or structural engineer licensed to practice in Belize. The Authority requires that plans and specifications for buildings between one thousand (1,000) square feet and three thousand (3,000) square feet and up to two stories should be prepared, designed, stamped and signed by either a registered professional architect or civil or structural engineer licensed to practice in Belize. The Authority requires that plans and specifications for buildings over three thousand (3,000) square feet and/or more than two (2) stories should be prepared, designed, stamped and signed by both a registered professional architect and a civil or structural engineer licensed to practice in Belize.

The text of the body of this article which describes the Belize Building Act, 2003 and the Central Building Authority: Application for Review was drawn from the Act and the Application, respectively. The language presented in these two sections may have been modified to help clarify the discussion topic, however, the author has attempted to neither interpret nor editorialize regarding any of the legal or regulatory information presented. A copy of the Act may be requested from the Authority, the Ministry responsible for Housing, or repositories housing copies of the Laws of Belize. A copy of the Application may be requested from the Authority. Many of the registered professional architects and civil or

structural engineers licensed to practice in Belize also have books of the Application forms or can secure them from the Authority. The cost of Application fees is calculated on the basis of the square footage area of the building(s) for which the building permit is being applied. The Authority will make their fee schedule available to prospective applicants upon request.

Kindly ensure your building permits are in order to avoid undue delays. If you are thinking of starting to build now then ensure you calculate the processing of the plans and permits in a timely manner.

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