



Navigating Red Tape

BUILDING SUCCESS 101

Q: What's all that "alphabet soup" after my contractor's name, and how important are those acronyms in selecting a builder for my project?

A: Increasingly, builders and contractors are earning and promoting various professional designations that signify their commitment to solid business practices and construction methods. Gaining such certification is arduous but worthwhile, and helps ensure that the contractor is well-versed in all aspects of the job. Even so, consider conducting some research on the letters that follow a contractor's name and ask questions

Most people will never venture to the local building department; much less submit themselves (and their blueprints) to the bureaucratic process of obtaining a building permit, scheduling periodic inspections and complying with building codes.

That, of course, is a builder's job... and one that construction professionals take pride in making efficient and hassle-free for their clients. To be sure, working through the red tape takes experience, savvy and patience. Those who know the drill are able to navigate the approvals and inspection process with confidence.

Consider the potential mine field of regulatory issues that most contractors must map out and manage to ensure their projects are in full governmental compliance.

Plan Check. Before a set of blueprints or house plans can be used to build or remodel a house, the building department must review them to make sure the drawings comply with applicable building codes. The plan checker looks at structural design, weight loads, plumbing, heating, and electrical layouts and specifications, and other details in the plans. If everything is in order, the drawings are approved for construction.

Prior to plan check, however, an experienced and professional builder will review the drawings and make any adjustments to speed the process. Before submitting the plans, he or she may contact subcontractors or building materials suppliers for their input, as well. Such refinements and attention to detail help avoid "red-lining," causing a return of the plans unapproved and marked by the plan checker (in red pen) for necessary changes ... thus delaying the building process.

Permitting. A building permit -- a required document in most municipalities for almost any construction project -- is the document that a building inspector will review and refer to when he or she visits the building site as the project progresses toward completion. The building department will only issue a permit for an approved set of blueprints or plans, and the inspector will rely on the permit and plans on the job site to

about what they mean and how they are earned to gain a solid understanding of their value.

My certifications include the following:

1-CGB - Certified Graduate Builder

2-CGR - Certified Graduate Remodeler

3-CGP - Certified Green Professional

4-DDC is also certified by the EPA for lead paint demolition.

compare what's drawn (and approved) to what's actually being built. It is imperative, then, to submit a complete and comprehensive set of plans for approval and permitting ... and then follow those plans to the letter to avoid confusion, questions and potentially costly compliance issues that can stop the job cold until they are resolved.

Inspections. Inspections at key points of a project's construction are necessary to make sure the approved plans are being built as drawn. Professional builders and remodelers have a talent for managing their own work crews, subcontractors and suppliers. They seek to keep the project on schedule. A tight schedule, in turn, reliably and accurately pinpoints those key milestones so that an inspector can be called with plenty of time to schedule his or her visit and, once on site, make a thorough review of the progress and approve it to continue.

Other red tape. Increasingly, builders are required to submit reports regarding the environmental impact, energy use, zoning or land-use variances, and other regulatory compliance issues. Professional contractors are familiar with what's current in this respect, and can shepherd clients and their projects through the red tape to make sure their vision for their home becomes a reality.

Warm regards,

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