



Home Improvement Projects Frequently Asked Questions

The following responds to the most frequently asked questions regarding making improvements to a residential property on a Stanford Ground Lease (standard or restricted ground lease).

1. Why do I need Stanford University's approval to make a home improvement?

Stanford University, as landowner, has the legal right to monitor and approve development on its lands. Reviewing home improvement projects for compliance with Stanford University's building guidelines ensures that the character of the residence is maintained.

Home improvement projects that involve a supplier of labor, material and/or equipment must be reviewed by Faculty Staff Housing (FSH) because any material supplier or labor contractor has the right to place a mechanics' lien on your property for non-payment.

2. What is a mechanics' lien?

A mechanics' lien is a statutory encumbrance on your property that can be placed by those suppliers of labor, material and/or equipment who can make a claim of non-payment.

3. What is the Notice of Non-Responsibility and why is it displayed at the work site?

The Notice of Non-Responsibility is a legal document that provides notification to interested parties that the project is the financial responsibility of the lessee, not the University. The Notice also provides notification to interested parties that liens can be secured only to the leasehold (i.e. building and improvements) and not to the fee interest (i.e. land) of the property. The Notice of Non-Responsibility needs to be recorded with the County regardless of a project's need for a building permit.

Stanford University, as landowner, in compliance with the California Civil Code, is responsible for posting a copy of the Notice of Non-Responsibility in "some conspicuous place on the site" before construction begins. Notice of Non-Responsibilities will be issued for projects greater than \$50,000. A member of FSH will post a Notice within 10 days after FSH has "obtained knowledge of the work of improvement." The Notice must remain posted during the entire period of construction.

4. What types of home improvement projects require Stanford's approval?

For homes on a Stanford lease on or off campus, projects that involve a supplier of labor, material and/or equipment need to be reviewed and approved by FSH in order to protect Stanford against mechanics' liens. This includes interior or exterior renovations/remodel projects.

For campus homes on a standard ground lease; projects that involve additions/changes to a building or structure's exterior, landscaping, tree removal, gray water systems.

5. What types of home improvement projects do not require Stanford's approval?

For campus homes on a standard ground lease, interior renovation projects that do not affect changes to the building's exterior, water heater or sewer line replacement, solar projects, or electrical upgrades.

6. What types of projects generally require a building permit?

Permits are generally required for the following:

- i. Alterations, additions to or demolition of structures;
- ii. Interior renovations, including seismic upgrades;
- iii. Decks over 30 inches above grade;
- iv. Patio covers;
- v. Swimming pools and spas;
- vi. Fences over 6 feet in height;
- vii. Retaining walls over 4 feet in height;
- viii. Sheds larger than 120 square feet;
- ix. Re-roofing; and solar projects;
- x. Water heater or sewer line replacements.

Depending on the work, you may also need specialized permits from the City or County's building division jurisdiction, such as electrical, plumbing, or grading permits. Project specific information on the type(s) of permits which may be required may be obtained from the applicable City or County building department.

Please note, for Stanford campus homeowners on a standard ground lease, Santa Clara County permits will not be issued without Stanford University's approval for exterior renovations.

7. How do I contact the City or County's Building Department Office?

Santa Clara County Department of Planning and Development:

Main Office: 70 West Hedding Street, 7th Floor, East Wing, San Jose, CA 95110
408-299-5700

Hours: Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. — 5:00 p.m.

County website: <http://www.sccgov.org>

City of Palo Alto Building Division:

Main Office: 285 Hamilton Ave #1, Palo Alto, CA 94301
650-328-2496

Hours: Monday through Thursday 8:30 a.m. — 4:30 p.m.
Friday: 8:00 a.m. — 5:00 p.m. (Virtual Only)

City website: <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Departments/Planning-Development-Services>

City of Menlo Park Building Division:

Main Office: City Hall, 701 Laurel Street, Menlo Park, CA 94025
650-300-6704

Hours: Monday through Thursday 7:30 a.m. — 5:30 p.m.
Friday: Alternating Fridays closed, or open from 8:00 a.m.— 5:00 p.m.

City website: <https://beta.menlopark.org/Government/Departments/Community-Development/Building-Division>

8. What is the difference between Stanford's review and that of Santa Clara County for Stanford campus homeowners with a standard ground lease?

Stanford will review projects for compliance with the San Juan Residential District Building, Design, and ADU Manual. The County will review projects for compliance with County ordinances as well as state and local building codes. Santa Clara County will not accept plans for permit without the FSH approval stamp on each page for exterior renovations.

9. What are the setbacks for my Stanford campus property?

Setbacks can vary by neighborhood. A standardized setback has been adopted 9/1/2022 for the San Juan Residential District. Please refer to page 14 of the San Juan Residential District Building, Design, and ADU Manual. Please contact FSH at 650-725-6893 for your property's setbacks.

10. May I discuss my home improvement plans with FSH before I formally apply or before I have plans drawn up?

Yes. If you would like a preliminary consultation, please contact our office. For additions, it is most efficient if you have a copy of preliminary plans for your property showing the property lines and location of building(s) on the site.

11. When do I need to submit drawings?

In general, projects that include any of the following will require drawings:

- i. Alterations or additions to or demolition of existing structures;
- ii. Interior/exterior renovations including seismic upgrades, but excluding new flooring, paint or wallpaper;

- iii. Patios/Decks;
- iv. Swimming pools and spas;
- v. Removal of a tree;
- vi. Fences, hedges or retaining walls;
- vii. Sheds; and
- viii. Site drainage;
- ix. Solar projects.

12. Which type of projects do not require drawings?

The following projects generally do not require drawings, however, they do require a project application and a check for the processing fee:

- i. Painting the interior or exterior of a home;
- ii. Installing new flooring;
- iii. Repairs to existing patios/decks;
- iv. Repairing or replacing a roof;
- v. Replacing a water heater; and
- vi. Repaving a driveway.

13. Where can I obtain existing plans of my house?

Many plans for campus properties can be obtained by contacting FSH.

14. If my project requires drawings, what are the requirements?

Please submit one (1) set of plans in electronic format. The drawings should be drawn to scale and labeled with the identification of the preparer (architect, engineer, contractor or designer), including license number if applicable. Plans should include *at a minimum*:

- **Contact Information:** Lessee's and the preparer's names, addresses, telephone and e-mail address.
- **Site Plan (Plot Map):** A drawing showing the relation of new construction or renovations to all property lines, setbacks and easements. A scale with a north arrow. Include all structures on the lot; lot dimensions; streets; on-lot paving, location and height of all fences and retaining walls; and existing trees over 6" in diameter labeled by species.
- **Floor Plan or Landscape Plan:** Drawings clearly identifying the changes, especially additions and/or demolition areas.
- **Elevations:** Minimum of two elevations with height clearly defined. Only required for building modifications that affect the exterior of the structure.

15. Are my plans/drawings returned?

The plans are reviewed and stamped for approval. After your project has been approved, one set is filed at the Stanford University Maps and Records Office. A copy is returned to the owner in electronic format. The plans can be submitted to the City or the County's building division to obtain permits if required.

16. What does my contractor need to know about underground utilities, such as water, sewer and electrical lines?

Before schematic drawings are finished please contact FSH to request existing utility locations from Maps and Records Office. This review will avoid interruptions of service and/or costly project delays.

At least 48 hours (2 working days) prior to construction please contact Underground Services Alert ("USA") at 1-800-227-2600. USA will notify all utility service providers in your area. These services will then come to the site to mark underground utility locations to avoid damage and/or loss of service which could be caused by the construction.

17. What are the construction hours?

Please contact your City or County's building division (see question 7 above for contact information).

18. What do I need to do to remove a tree?

For campus homeowners, contact FSH to determine if it is a Stanford street tree. If yes, Stanford will evaluate and remove the tree if necessary. For non-Stanford street trees, submit an arborist report, which includes the location of the tree to be removed, the species, size, health, and location of the replacement tree(s) if required. Lessees should also check with your City or County for its tree removal ordinance.

19. How might Santa Clara County's historic preservation process affect campus homeowner's remodel/demolition projects?

Santa Clara County has a Historic Preservation Ordinance. If the County has placed a house on its Historic Heritage Inventory, the County will not allow demolition without Board of Supervisors approval. If a house is not only on the Inventory but is also designated as a Landmark, Board of Supervisors approval is required for exterior alterations as well as for demolitions. The Ordinance and listed houses are available on the Santa Clara County website at https://library.municode.com/ca/santa_clara_county/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=TITCCODELAUS_DIVC17HIPR#TOPTITLE. Also review Historic Resources FAQs.

20. Are there other reviews of my project plans that might be required?

Prior to the approval of any work on a building that is 50 years old or older, a review of the property's historical value for consistency with Santa Clara County policies or other local jurisdictions may be required. Demolition, additions, and exterior alterations will trigger additional review. If the home is determined to have historic value, project changes may be required.

21. After the drawings are prepared, what are the next steps?

The lessee, architect, designer or contractor submits the following to FSH:

- A completed Home Improvement Project Application.
- A completed Construction Notification form (if required), for projects lasting greater than thirty (30) days.
- One (1) set of plans or drawings in electronic format (if required).
- Payment of the project application fee. Payment by credit card or check made payable to

Stanford University are the only acceptable forms of payment. No cash payments will be accepted.

FSH will review the project within ten (10) work days to approve or discuss recommendations for changes. If approved, the lessee and his/her contractor or architect will be notified. The letter of approval along with one (1) set of approved plans will be sent via e-mail to the appropriate party. The letter of approval and stamped drawings will enable the appropriate party to apply for the necessary City or County permits.

22. Where can I obtain the application form and regulations regarding home improvements?

The Project Application, Construction Notification, and Building Regulations applicable to your Ground Lease are available online at <http://fsh.stanford.edu> or at the FSH Office.

If you have any questions, please contact FSH at 650-725-6893 or at fshousing@stanford.edu.