

San Francisco Construction Permitting Framework and Timeline

1. Purpose and Overview

San Francisco's construction permitting process involves multiple agencies to ensure projects meet code, safety, environmental, and accessibility requirements. This non-exhaustive guide summarizes at a high level how developers, architects, and construction project teams coordinate each step from entitlements to construction closeout, referencing the City's key guidance documents. For the more exhaustive list of requirements please review - <https://www.sf.gov/step-by-step--get-building-permit-house-review>.

Key Agencies:

- DBI (Department of Building Inspection) – Site, Building, Addenda permits and Record linkage
- DPW (Public Works) – Right-of-way, excavation, and encroachment permits
- SFPUC (Public Utilities Commission) – Stormwater, water, sewer, and power
- MOHCD (Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development) – Affordable housing coordination and fee deferrals
- SFFD, SFMTA, DPH, MOD – Fire, transportation, health, and accessibility reviews
- SFE: Manages Green Halo accounts, monitors compliance, and provides customer support.

2. Entitlements and Pre-Application

Projects must secure Planning Department approval or entitlements, including CEQA/NEPA environmental review, before DBI submission.

Optional pre-application coordination with DBI, SFPUC, SFFD, MOD, and Planning helps identify requirements such as the Stormwater Control Plan (SCP), Water Flow Study, water reuse, and right-of-way impacts.

3. Completeness Checks

Completeness checks verify that permit packages are ready for review:

- DPW: Ensures applications include correct plans, signatures, and fees.
- DBI: Conducted by the Central Permit Bureau for Site Permits/Addenda before Bluebeam routing. Confirms all materials submitted for electrical, mechanical, structural review including disability access checklist and Title 24 materials.
- SFPUC: Reviews SCP and power applications for complete data and calculations.

- PLN: Ensures that your permit application (Planning Entitlement or Building Permit routed to Planning) includes all necessary materials for zoning, land use, design, and environmental review before detailed evaluation begins.
- DPH: Maher Ordinance requirements
- MOHCD: Confirms completeness for City-funded projects before routing or funding release.

4. Site Permit Phase (DBI)

The DBI Site Permit authorizes zoning and design but not construction. Typical timeline: 6–12 months + 30-day appeal period.

Key components:

- Submitted at 100% schematic design (SD) or early design development (DD)
- Requires Preliminary SCP and Planning approval
- Fee deferral and MOHCD priority letters attached
- Includes sub-sidewalk vaults, curb ramps, encroachments
- Requires Tribal Notification (AB 168) and environmental documentation

5. Addenda and Building Permit

After the Site Permit, Addenda are submitted for construction components. Addendum 1 (foundation/underground) typically triggers Building Permit issuance.

Typical Addenda:

1. Foundations, underground utilities
2. Architecture, MEP, landscape
3. Specialized systems (fire sprinklers, ERRCS, PV, crane, etc.)

Addenda uploaded to DBI's Bluebeam review system (3–20 business days total). Track progress via DBI's Permit Tracking System. Common errors: missing stamps, incorrect Bluebeam formatting, or missing MOHCD priority letters.

6. DPW Right-of-Way Permits

DPW oversees all work affecting sidewalks, streets, and utilities.

Common DPW Permits:

- Street Improvement Permit (SIP)
- Minor/Major Encroachment
- Side Sewer
- Tree Protection/Removal/Planting
- Street Space, Contractor Parking, Temporary Occupancy

- Vault (Transformer) Permit

Timeline: 4–6 months (runs parallel with DBI). Involves coordination with SFMTA, BUF, SFPUC, and MOD.

7. Environmental and Health Compliance

Environmental oversight includes:

- Maher Ordinance (Article 22A): requires Site Mitigation Plan (SMP) to DPH.
- Article 38: Enhanced ventilation plan for projects in Air Pollutant Exposure Zones.
- Dust Control Plan (Article 22B): for contaminated soil disturbance.
- Asbestos surveys, soil testing, and other environmental assessments required at Site Permit stage.

8. Stormwater Control Plan (SCP)

Required for projects disturbing $\geq 5,000$ sq ft of ground area.

- Preliminary SCP before Site Permit issuance
- Final SCP before foundation or vertical construction
- Includes BMP design, maintenance, inspection, and recordation
- SFPUC approval required before DBI permit release

9. Power and Utility Coordination

Permanent Power (SFPUC WDT3 Process):

- Application through SFPUC and PG&E; includes System Impact and Facility Studies.
- Service Agreement executed before energization.

Temporary Power: handled separately via PUC or PG&E.

Utility Shutoffs prior to demolition:

- PG&E gas/electric (3 weeks–6 months)
- SFPUC water/sewer (via Side Sewer Permit)
- AT&T and other telecom disconnections

Sewer – Capacity Charges

Water – Service Installation

10. Construction-Ready and Closeout

Before construction start:

- Final stamped drawings and cost estimates
- Recorded encroachment permits

- Bonds and insurance
- Construction Site Runoff Plan (5,000+ sq ft)

At completion:

- Final SCP approval and recordation
- DPW/SFPUC final inspections
- DBI Certificate of Final Completion issued

11. DAC and OLSE Roles

The Disability Access Coordinator (DAC) ensures ADA and CBC compliance, reviewing curb ramps, accessible paths, and right-of-way improvements per Public Works Order No. 185854.

The Office of Labor Standards Enforcement (OLSE) ensures compliance with Prevailing Wage and Local Hire laws (Admin. Code 6.22(G)), requiring certified payrolls and Labor Compliance Bonds for City-funded projects.

12. Construction & Demolition Waste Tracking (Green Halo Program)

San Francisco requires construction and demolition (C&D) projects to comply with CalGreen and local zero waste goals by tracking material recycling and disposal through the Green Halo system.

This program is administered by the San Francisco Department of the Environment (SFE) in partnership with DBI.

13. Typical Timeline Overview

Phase	Duration	Lead Agencies	Key Actions
Pre-Application	1–3 months	DBI, SFPUC, DPW, MOHCD, SFE	Early coordination, completeness checks, Green Halo registration
Site Permit	6–12 months	DBI, SFPUC, MOD, SFE	Preliminary SCP, DAC review, completeness & Green Halo verification
Addenda/Building Permit	3–6 months	DBI, SFFD, MOD, SFE	Addendum 1 = Building Permit, labor compliance setup, Green Halo waste plan review
DPW Permitting	4–6 months	DPW, BUF, SFMTA	Accessibility, tree, and utility approvals
Utilities & Power	3–9 months	SFPUC, PG&E	SIS/FS, Will-Serve Letter
Construction	Variable	DBI, OLSE, DAC, SFE	Inspections, payroll tracking, accessibility field verification
Closeout	Variable	DBI, DPW, SFPUC, SFE	Final SCP, OLSE, Green Halo and DAC certification, CFC issuance

14. Key Takeaways

- Coordinate early with all agencies
- Site Permit does not authorize construction
- Track progress online via DBI Permit Tracking System
- Public Works and SCP approvals drive the critical path
- Affordable housing projects benefit from MOHCD priority processing
- Document all interagency coordination and maintain version control for addenda