



**Permitting your
Backyard Shelter:
Guide and Checklist
to Navigating your
Zoning Laws**

Introduction

Creating a backyard shelter offers a unique opportunity to extend your living space, embrace the outdoors, and add value to your home. However, the journey from concept to construction involves navigating a series of critical considerations to ensure your project is both successful and compliant. This eBook is designed to serve as a comprehensive checklist, guiding you through each step of the process.

From understanding local zoning laws to selecting materials and planning for maintenance, we'll cover the essential aspects you need to consider. Our goal is to help you make informed decisions, whether you're building a cozy garden retreat, a functional outdoor office, or a versatile family play area. By adhering to this checklist, you can approach your backyard shelter project with confidence, knowing that you've addressed the biggest concerns and considerations.

Let's embark on this exciting journey together, transforming your backyard into a personalized oasis that meets your needs, reflects your style, and enhances your quality of life.





Chapter 1: Understanding Zoning Laws and Building Permits

Before you break ground on your backyard shelter, it's crucial to navigate the maze of zoning laws and building permits. These regulations are in place to ensure safety, compliance, and harmony within communities. Ignoring them can lead to costly fines, legal issues, and the potential dismantling of your structure. This chapter will guide you through understanding and adhering to these regulations.

Planning Permits vs. Building Permits

A planning permit and a building permit serve distinct purposes in the construction and development process, and understanding their differences is crucial for any construction project, including backyard shelters. A planning permit, sometimes referred to as a zoning permit, is concerned with the use of land and the appearance of the proposed structure within the community. It assesses whether the project meets the local planning scheme, including zoning regulations, overlays, and other spatial considerations. This permit evaluates the impact of the construction on the surrounding area, focusing on aspects like environmental sustainability, community amenity, and aesthetic integration with the neighborhood.

On the other hand, a building permit is more technical and focuses on the construction details of the project. It ensures that the proposed structure will be built in compliance with building codes and standards, addressing safety, structural integrity, and accessibility. The building permit

process involves the review of detailed plans and specifications by a building surveyor, who checks for compliance with national and local building regulations. This permit is required before any construction work can begin and may require inspections at various stages of the project to ensure ongoing compliance with the approved plans.

While both permits are essential for legal and safe construction, the key difference lies in their focus: planning permits are about where and what you can build in relation to the community and the environment, whereas building permits are about how the structure is constructed to ensure safety and compliance with building standards.



Speeding/Skipping Planning Requirements

Planning permits for small-scale projects, such as backyard sheds or auxiliary structures, can sometimes be obtained more swiftly, and in certain cases, might even be bypassed due to specific local regulations designed to simplify smaller, low-impact constructions.

These simplified processes or exemptions are typically based on the structure's size, purpose, and location. In most counties there are specific guidelines that allow for the construction of accessory structures, including sheds and other auxiliary residential structures, without the need for a planning permit, provided they meet certain criteria.

These criteria might include limitations on the structure's square footage, height, and proximity to property lines. For example, Sonoma County may permit sheds of up to a certain size (e.g., 120 square feet) to be built without a planning permit, as long as they are not intended for use as a residence and meet setback requirements.

This approach streamlines the process for homeowners, making it easier and faster to add small structures to their property without navigating the full planning permit process.

Navigating Building Codes

Building codes are regulations that establish minimum standards for the construction and safety of buildings. However, these codes often do not apply to auxiliary structures, such as sheds or garages, that do not have plumbing or are not zoned as residential. This means that the construction of these structures may not be subject to the same level of scrutiny and oversight as residential buildings, potentially resulting in safety hazards for the occupants.

In order to ensure the safety and compliance of these structures, it is important for homeowners to work with a reputable backyard shed provider. These providers can often provide simple plans that will satisfy the building department, ensuring that the structure meets all necessary codes and regulations. Additionally, they may have experience working with local building departments and can help navigate any necessary permits or inspections. This can give homeowners peace of mind knowing that their auxiliary structure is safe and compliant with building codes.

Planning and Permitting Checklist

- Research Local County Requirements:
 - Call the county office to inquire about necessary permits and regulations for building a shed. Ask about “Art Studio” designations, or “Auxiliary Residential Structures” or “Backyard Office”
 - Be honest and direct with the county planner. Tell them you want the minimum hassle and ask them what building would require the least paperwork and permits.
 - Find out specific zoning regulations for your area that may affect the shed's size, location, and design.
- Understand Zoning Regulations:
 - Determine the zoning category of your property and understand how it affects your project.
 - Check for any restrictions specific to backyard sheds or auxiliary structures in your zoning category.
- Determine Property Setbacks:
 - Identify the required minimum distances (setbacks) from property lines, fences, and other structures for your shed.
 - Ensure compliance with these setbacks to avoid issues with neighbors or permit approval setbacks.
- Check Square Footage Requirements:
 - Verify if there are any minimum or maximum square foot requirements for sheds in your area.
 - Understand how these requirements impact the size and design of your planned shed.
- Contact Shed Provider for Compliant Plans:
 - Reach out to your shed provider to see if they offer plans that comply with local permits and regulations.
 - Utilize these plans to expedite the permit approval process and ensure compliance.
- Prepare and Submit Permit Application:
 - Gather all required documents, plans, and application forms needed for the shed permit.
 - Submit the permit application to the appropriate local authorities, along with any required fees.
- Schedule Property Inspection (if required):
 - Arrange for a property inspection as part of the permit process, if necessary.
 - Prepare your site for inspection, ensuring clear access and visibility to the proposed shed location.
- Follow Up on Permit Application:
 - Keep in touch with the county office to check the status of your permit application.



By meticulously following this checklist and completing all necessary steps, you can navigate the permit process efficiently, ensuring that your backyard shed project moves forward smoothly and in compliance with all local regulations.

We are passionate about helping you swiftly and painlessly get setup with a backyard sanctuary.

Sign up for a free consultation at zomes.com

