

City of Charleston

Priority Status

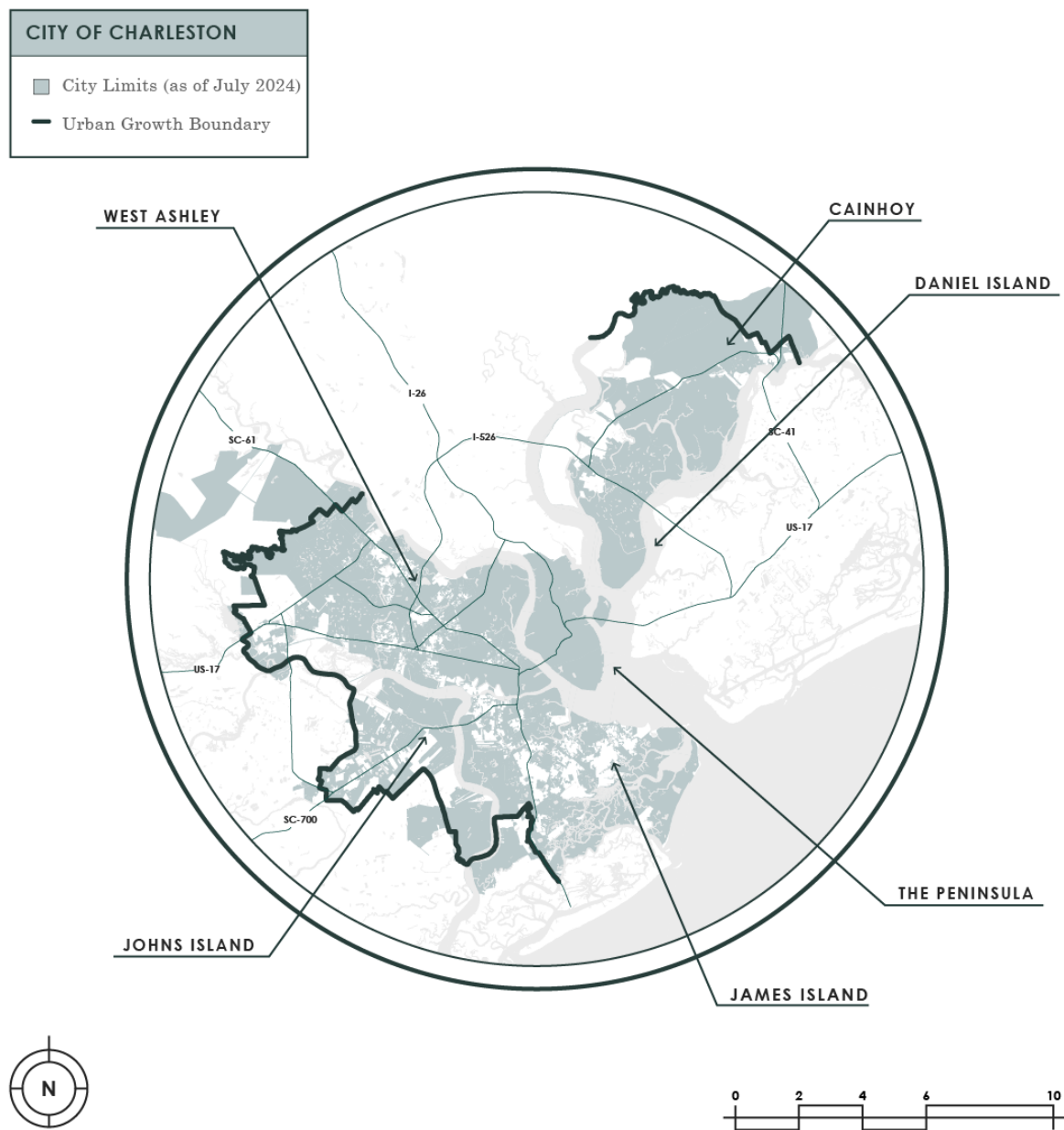
Affordable Housing

Program

Guidebook

Welcome to Charleston!

The City of Charleston is made up of geographic parts as unique as the people who live in them and bound by the natural features of the Lowcountry. When building in Charleston, design teams must take into consideration fire districts, special hazard flood zone protection areas, and design guidelines for wind ratings.



The City consists of five major areas: West Ashley, James Island, Johns Island, Daniel Island/Cainho and the Peninsula. These areas are separated by major waterways like the Ashley, Wando and Cooper rivers. Off the Peninsula, the City limits are fragmented as shown in the map. Hundreds of tidal creeks, wetland, islands and preserved forests dictate Charleston’s boundaries and where development can and cannot occur.



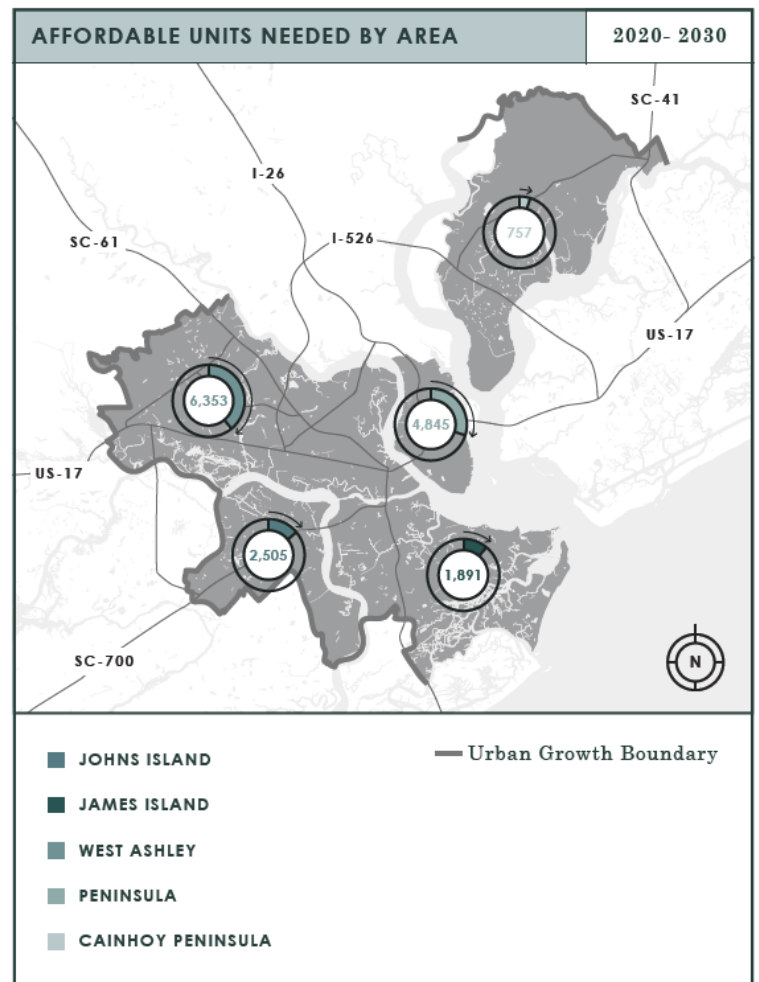
Overview

What is the Priority Status Program?

The Priority Status Affordable Housing Program provides benefits and advantages during the development review process to residential and mixed-use developments. The program is managed by the City of Charleston's Department of Planning and Preservation in partnership with the Department of Housing and Community Development.

The Priority Status Affordable Housing designation must be certified by the Department of Housing and Community Development and may require that the recipient enter an agreement with the City of Charleston if no public funding is being provided.

Click here to view the resolution for the Priority Status Policy passed by City Council on January 24, 2023



City of Charleston Comprehensive Plan, 2021

City of Charleston's Needs and Goals

As part of the comprehensive plan, affordable housing needs and goals were assessed as depicted in the image above. This graphic outlines the City by area, highlighting a total need of 16,351 affordable units.

The City engaged Bloomberg associates for a current needs assessment and developed strategic goals which includes creating 3,500 affordable housing units by 2030.



Priority Status Incentives & Eligibility

Incentives

Single Point of Contact

The Affordable Housing Development Coordinator serves as a single point of contact for priority status projects throughout the entire development and approval process.

Abbreviated TRC Review

Priority Status Affordable Housing projects will receive a reduced review timeline of 17 days.

Fee Waivers

- Per the Planning and Preservation Department (P&P) fee schedule, all fees issued by the P&P department are waived.
- Per Sec. 2-274.f.1, all main building permit fees for mixed-use, multi-family and single-family construction are waived.

Zoning Incentives

- Parking minimum reductions
- Density bonuses
- Flexible subdivision design standards (varies by zoning district)

Priority Agenda Placement

Priority Status projects will have primary placement on all Planning & Preservation Department board reviews and meetings.

TIP

When seeking design & engineer teams, we recommend seeking firms with a proven track record working on successful projects in Charleston.

Eligibility Requirements

Priority Status affordable housing projects include new construction or rehabilitation projects that meet the definition of affordable housing as in Chapter 54 of the Code of the City of Charleston (Zoning Ordinance), that are certified by the City's Department of Housing and Community Development, and meet one or more of the following criteria:

1. The project designates fifty percent (50%) or more units as "Affordable Housing;"
2. The project receives funding from a public agency for affordable housing production;
3. The City contracts directly with the contractor and/or subcontractor for project work; or
4. The City utilizes city employees to do project work.

Affordable Housing Definition

For the purposes of this guidebook and determining Priority Status eligibility, Affordable Housing is defined as single-family, two-family or multi-family dwelling units, used exclusively for residential uses, where occupants have, in the aggregate, household income of less than or equal to 120% of median area income for owner occupied units, or eighty 80% of median area income for rental units.



Building & Site Design Criteria

Climatic and Geographic Design Criteria

The chart below details the design criteria based on natural occurrences. The detailed information can be located in the [International Residential Code](#) as well as the [South Carolina Building Code](#).

CITY OF CHARLESTON, SC												
2021 South Carolina Building Codes												
CLIMATIC AND GEOGRAPHIC DESIGN CRITERIA												
GROUND SNOW LOAD	WIND DESIGN				SEISMIC DESIGN CATEGORY	SUBJECT TO DAMAGE FROM			ICE BARRIER UNDERLAYMENT REQUIRED	FLOOD HAZARDS	AIR FREEZING INDEX	MEAN ANNUAL TEMPERATURE
	Speed	Topographic effects	Special Wind Region	Wind-borne Debris Zone		Weathering	Frost-line Depth	Termite				
5 lb/ft ²	150 mph	No	No	2	D ₂	Moderate	0 inches	Very Heavy	No	City Entered NFIP/Initial FIRM 04/09/1971 Berkeley County Current Effective FIRM - 12/17/2018 Charleston County Current Effective FIRM - 01/29/2021	<1500	66.1° F

Wind & Seismic Maps

- [Berkeley County](#)
- [Charleston County](#)

Current Adopted Building Codes

- [2021 South Carolina Building Code](#)

FACT

Every three to four years, SC state adopts new Building Codes.

Fire Districts

Properties zoned as business or industrial are considered to be in the Fire District. Find detailed restrictions in Sec. 7-1 of the [City's Code of Ordinances](#).

Trees

Apart from the aesthetic benefits, shade, and habitat for animals that trees provide, they are also vital pieces of stormwater infrastructure

Please visit the Zoning Division's [page](#) for information on grand trees, protected trees and how to obtain a tree removal permit.

Stormwater

The stormwater design standards manual outlines submission requirements, approval processes, technical design standards, and general information to improve water quality, illicit discharge and minimize stormwater runoff impacts. Please view the [Stormwater Design Standards Manual](#) for more detailed information.

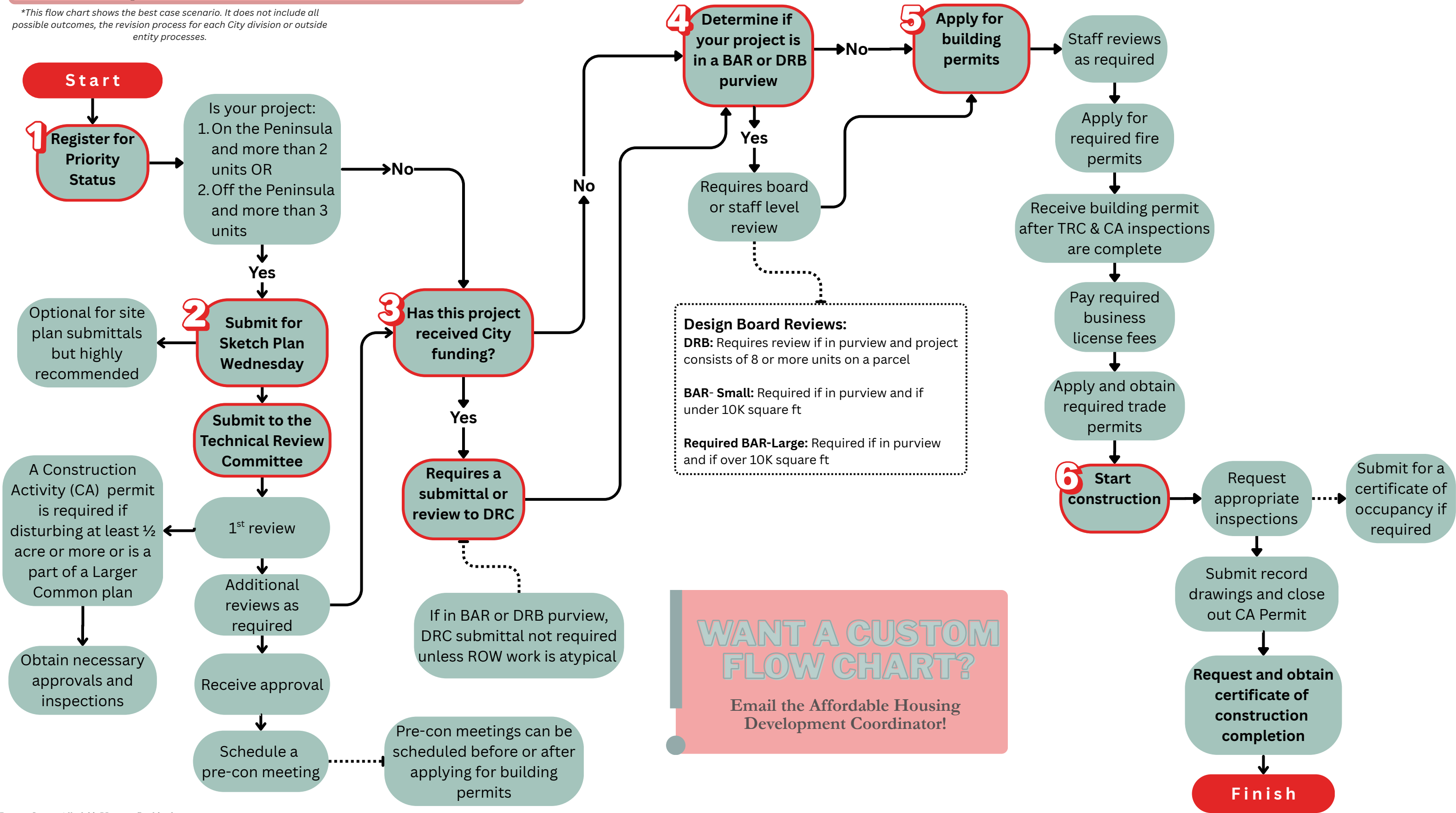


79 Cooper Street, 2024

Priority Status Flowchart

This flow chart will help you navigate the City’s submittal and permitting process. By following the numbers here and throughout the following pages, you can determine the path your project needs to follow based off the intricacies of your project.

**This flow chart shows the best case scenario. It does not include all possible outcomes, the revision process for each City division or outside entity processes.*





Priority Status Project Path

Step 1

Priority Status Registration

1. Customer Self Service (CSS)

Before registering for your affordable housing project, a CSS account will be required. Having a CSS account allows the user to apply for plans, permits, pay fees and track project and inspection statuses online. Follow [this link](#) to register for an account.

2. Register your project:

You are ready to register your project if you can confirm the address and/or TMS number, type of housing, proposed affordability period and proposed estimated number of units and income limits. Follow [this link](#) to complete your registration.

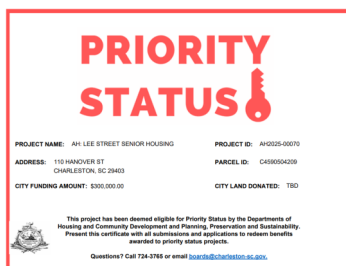
3. Determination of Eligibility:

After registration is submitted, the [Housing and Community Development staff](#) will review the project details and contact the applicant to discuss whether the project meets the criteria for Priority Status.

4. Priority Status Certification:

If your project is deemed eligible for Priority Status, it will be designated in our permitting

software, and a Priority Status Certificate will be issued. The certificate must accompany all project submittals to ensure the project receives all benefits.



Step 2

Sketch Plan Wednesday (SPW)

Sketch plan Wednesdays are biweekly meetings held between City Staff and the applicant/engineer team to discuss the conceptual nature of a project. It is optional for site plan submittals but required for major subdivisions to submit for SPW before submitting to TRC.

Contact the [TRC Coordinator](#) for more information

Technical Review Committee (TRC)

The [TRC](#) was created to help those who want to develop in Charleston navigate the many levels of review by and among multiple departments.

The TRC comprises representatives from Planning, Engineering, Zoning, Fire Marshal, GIS, Parks, ADA, Stormwater and Traffic & Transportation.

Priority Status projects will be reviewed within 17 days from the deadline submittal. Market rate projects can take anywhere from 17-52 days depending on the number of reviews, the project type, if project falls in a special protection area and the construction activity permit type. View timeline matrix [here](#)

Red Flag Meetings

At any point during the TRC review process, a red flag meeting can be scheduled through the Affordable Housing Development Coordinator to discuss any concerns or roadblocks with City staff.

Construction Activity (CA) Permits

Typically, CA permits are applied for after the first submittal to TRC and are reviewed concurrently and extend past the TRC review. Construction activity permits are required if project is disturbing 1/2 an acre or more or if part of a larger common plan.

If a CA permit is not required, you may still need to submit a simplified record drawing and a Covenants for Permanent Maintenance of Stormwater Facilities (CPMSF) if it meets stormwater or engineering requirements as found in the SWDSM.

FACT

Approval of TRC is required before a pre-construction meeting can commence.

Pre-Construction Meetings

Pre-construction meetings are typically scheduled after the project receives stamped TRC. The purpose of this meeting is to receive a list of anticipated pre-construction site inspections based off the full scope of work. Meeting minutes are required to be kept by the applicant and verified by city staff prior to inspections being performed.

TIP

Make sure to reference your pre-con meeting minutes to ensure a smooth permitting and inspection process.



Esau Jenkins, 2025

Step 3

Funding

If your project has received any City funding including land donation, a review by the Design Review Committee (DRC) is required. For funding opportunities, visit the Housing and Community Development [webpage](#).

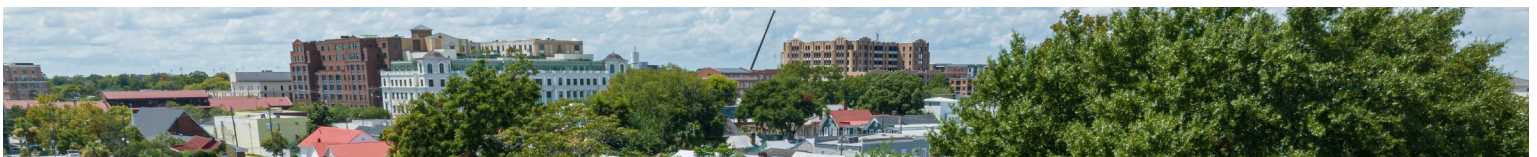
Design Review Committee (DRC)

The purpose of the Design Review Committee is to review any changes which affect the visual quality of a property.

If your project falls within DRB or BAR purview, it will not require a submittal to DRC unless work in the right of way (R.O.W) is atypical.

What goes before the Committee:

- Any City-funded project that includes alterations of the interior and exterior of buildings, parking lots, parks, playgrounds, and open spaces
- Alterations to City streets and sidewalks
- Projects or developments that the City either finances, sponsors, or funds



Step 4

Design Review Purviews

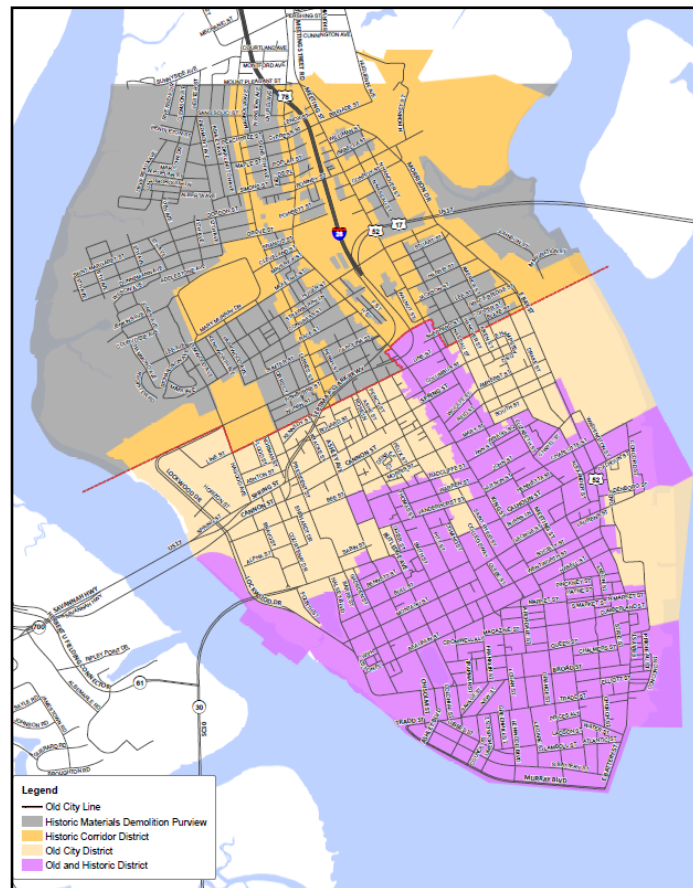
Board of Architectural Review (BAR-Small/Large)

Projects could require a review by the BAR staff or board if new construction or exterior renovations or alterations are taking place in one of their many purviews.

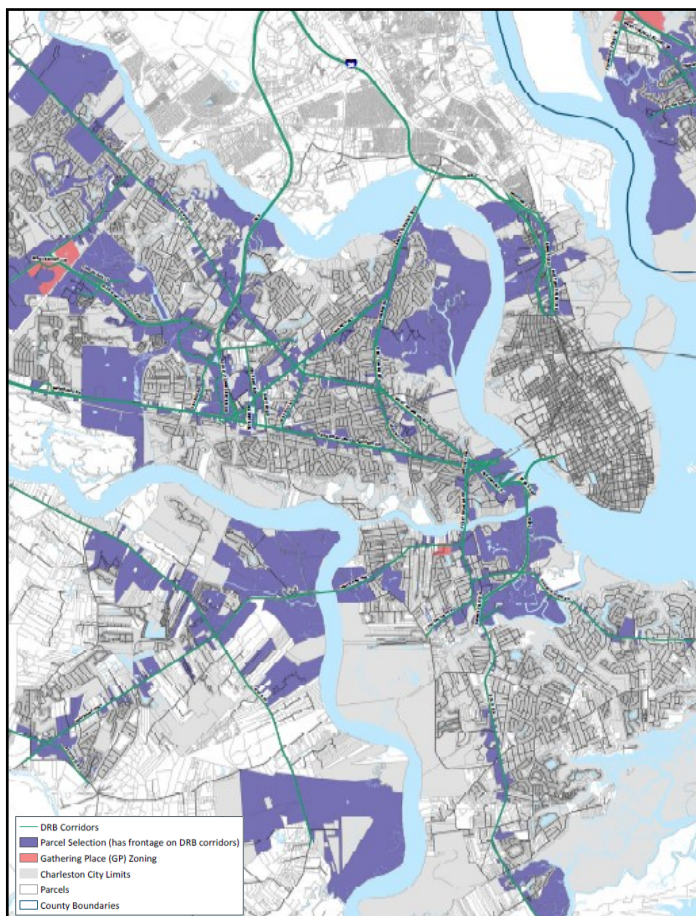
Visit the [BAR web page](#) for detailed submittal requirements.

FACT

TRC plans will not be stamped until the project has received all necessary Board approvals.



BAR Jurisdiction Map (click the image to view in browser)



DRB Jurisdiction Map (click the image to view in browser)

Design Review Board (DRB)

A review by the DRB board or staff may be required if your project falls within a designated corridor and consists of 8 or more units on a single lot of record.

The DRB focus areas are located off of primary corridors outside of the historic districts.

Visit the [DRB web page](#) for detailed submittal requirements.

FACT

Each design board process could have three reviews: conceptual, preliminary & final.

Step 5

Submitting for Building & Fire Permits

All building permit types can be applied through CSS. All fire permit submittals are to be submitted through permits@charleston-sc.gov.

Building Permits

Residential construction can fall under three permit classifications:

Single Family/Duplex: Detached, duplexes, and townhomes that are three stories or less with separate exits.

Multifamily: Three or more dwelling units.

Commercial: Three or more dwelling units with mixed use space.

Trade Permits

Trade permits can only be issued after the main building permit has been approved and issued. Trade permits include electrical, mechanical, plumbing and gas.

Read more about permit types and requirements on the Permit Center's Application and Guidelines [page](#).

Fire Permits

Fire permits are reviewed through the City's Fire Marshal Division and consist of sprinkler, alarm, suppression, fire service underground and ERRC.

Step 6

Business Licensing

A business license is required to be obtained prior to the issuance of any permits. This is required for all contractors and subcontractors that are generating income within City limits.

Building Inspections

Building inspections occur after permits are issued. Requests made before noon are scheduled for the next business day, while those after noon are scheduled for two business days out.

FACT

Permits can only be issued to an appropriately South Carolina licensed individual.

Required inspections depend on construction type and details can be found [here](#).

CA Inspections and Permit Closeout

In addition to completing CA inspections, a record drawing and CPMSF may be needed to confirm design compliance and maintenance responsibility by the property owner. After completing all CA permit requirements, a Notice of Termination (NOT) must be submitted to SCDES to terminate the state's permit coverage.

Certificate of Occupancy (CO)

A CO is required to operate any business within City limits. This includes leasing offices within multifamily buildings. For submittal instructions, please visit CO [webpage](#).

Temporary CCC

A TCCC can be requested if a project has outstanding CA inspections but has completed building, fire and trade permits.

Certificate of Construction Completion (CCC)

A Certificate of Construction Completion is the last step before your project is considered finished with the City. A CCC is required to occupy and use any newly constructed buildings. Read more about the CCC process [here](#).