

First Edition

G.BATISTA's ONE-HOUR GUIDE TO Pulling a Permit

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IN SOUTH FLORIDA

**THE MOST
COMPREHENSIVE
PERMIT GUIDE
AVAILABLE**

**Step-by-Step
to ensure
success**

p. 8

**Avoid
wasting time
and money**

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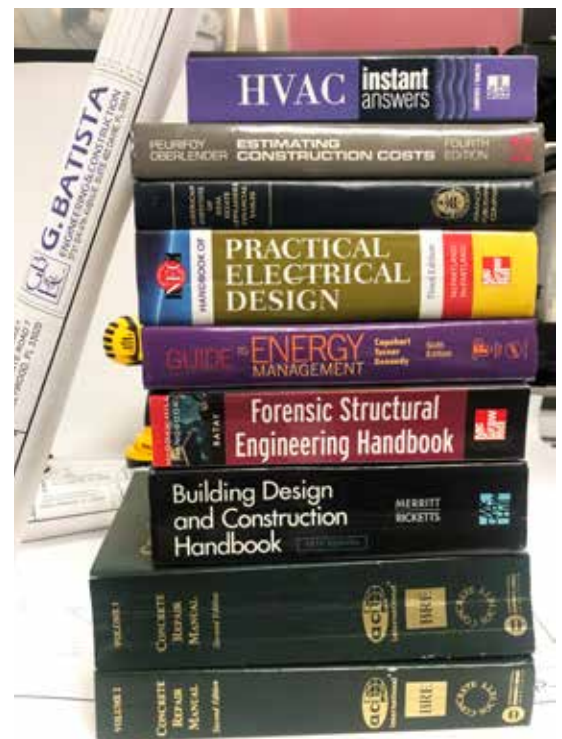


ABOUT THE AUTHOR



DID YOU KNOW?

Mr. Batista is one of the leading engineers in South Florida with over 30 years of experience in both engineering and construction.



For over 30 years, Mr. Batista has been a Licensed Professional Engineer and Licensed General Contractor in multiple states and is a well-respected member of the concrete construction and repair industry. Mr. Batista sat on the Broward County Board of Unsafe Structures and has been Director of the Board of the largest Hispanic Professional Engineering Association in the United States and has won several professional awards and recognitions.

In the year 2000, Mr. Batista began Real Estate Engineering, LLC and is the President of G. Batista Engineering and Construction, a prominent Engineering and Concrete Repair contracting company with multiple locations.

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INTRODUCTION



In the diverse and dynamic landscape of South Florida, the prospect of undertaking a construction or renovation project can be both exciting and daunting. While envisioning the end result is thrilling, the bureaucratic hurdles of obtaining the necessary permits can prove to be a challenging endeavor. “G. Batista’s One-Hour Guide to Pulling Permits in South Florida” is designed to simplify this complex process, empowering you with the knowledge and tools needed to tackle the permitting process head-on, whether you choose to embark on this journey independently or with the assistance of a professional.

South Florida’s unique geographical and environmental conditions, coupled with its evolving building codes and regulations, present a multitude of challenges when navigating the permitting process. This book aims to break down these barriers by guiding you through each step, shedding light on the intricacies of the system, and providing valuable insights and strategies for overcoming the obstacles you may encounter along the way.

Throughout this comprehensive guide, you will learn about the different types of permits, the various authorities involved, and the key factors to consider before embarking

on your project. We will explore the common challenges faced by property owners and contractors, such as dealing with zoning restrictions, environmental concerns, and adhering to the ever-changing building codes specific to South Florida. Additionally, this book will delve into the most effective techniques for streamlining the permitting process, fostering open communication with relevant parties, and ensuring compliance with all regulations.

Drawing from the expertise of seasoned professionals and real-life experiences, “G. Batista’s One-Hour Guide to Pulling Permits in South Florida” is not only a step-by-step guide but also a valuable resource that will equip you with the know-how to confidently manage the permitting process. By understanding the intricacies of this often-complex system, you can save time, money, and effort, ultimately transforming your dream project into a reality.

Embark on this enlightening journey with us, as we unravel the mysteries of South Florida’s permitting process, and pave the way for a smoother, more efficient experience, leading you towards the successful completion of your project.

It is important to note that this guide will delve into the basic components of the building permit process that are typical in South Florida (and in Florida as a whole). Each jurisdiction will have its own idiosyncrasies that could differ slightly from other jurisdictions, but at the end of the day, the basic process is the same. The employees at the Building Departments, which is where you go to have your permits pulled, are there to help you along on this seemingly-complicated process. I have rarely come across employees at the Building Departments that do not want to help in pulling a permit. It is always advisable to have some sort of contact with your building department should any unforeseen issues arise during your pulling of a permit, whether it is a small renovation, or a large multi-million dollar condominium construction.

Also, this guide serves as a basic outline and is not intended to address every item or issue that may arise during the permit application process. Every city and county must comply with the Florida Building Code requirements when reviewing permits for approval, but these jurisdictions also have the flexibility to establish their own requirements, making the process more complex for individuals who don’t frequently navigate it. This flexibility exists because different jurisdictions have unique needs and circumstances. The Florida Building

Code is one of the strictest and most comprehensive in the nation, constantly evolving, and it’s the building department, specifically the building official, who is responsible for enforcing it. Don’t be intimidated; the building department and its staff aim to assist citizens in complying with the building code and, most importantly, ensuring our safety by helping to prevent damaged and dangerous buildings to exist, minimizing construction and design issues, and ensuring everyone follows the same laws, rules and procedures.

Finally, this guide offers a basic overview of the permitting process in South Florida and is currently the most comprehensive resource available in the market. By understanding the key points in this guide, you’ll be better prepared than the majority of permit applicants (excluding professionals who regularly deal with permits) to efficiently pull a construction permit. However, if you prefer not to navigate the process yourself, there are companies that, for a fee, will guide you from start to finish. These companies are known as “permit runners” or “permit expeditors.” Refer to the inset for more information.

DID YOU KNOW?

DID YOU KNOW YOU CAN HIRE PERMIT EXPEDITERS?

“Permit Expeditors” (also known as “Permit Runners”) are companies that understand the intricacies of pulling a permit and, for a fee, will pull the permits from you from start to finish. These companies intimately understand this complex processes and at times specialize in certain building departments. Pulling permits is what I like to call a “high touch” business where person-to-person contacts can be very useful. Permits can often get “Stuck” when specific issues arise, and it is through these contacts with people within the building department that will efficiently solve these unforeseen problems. Search Google for “permit runners” or “permit expeditors” in your area.

So, why is pulling a permit so important?

Pulling a construction permit is a crucial step in any building or renovation project. This process is particularly important in South Florida due to a combination of factors that have significant implications for safety, legal compliance, and environmental protection. Here are some reasons why obtaining a construction permit is essential in South Florida:

- **Building Codes and Safety:** South Florida's building codes (Florida Building Code) are designed to ensure that construction projects meet specific safety standards, taking into account the region's unique geographical and environmental conditions. Compliance with these codes protects both the occupants and the structure itself from potential hazards.
- **Hurricane Resistance:** South Florida is prone to hurricanes and tropical storms, making it essential for buildings to withstand high winds and severe weather conditions. Construction permits ensure that projects adhere to the necessary hurricane-resistant design criteria, helping to minimize potential damage and protect lives.
- **Flood Zones:** Given its coastal location and low-lying areas, South Florida is susceptible to flooding. Construction permits help ensure that projects comply with flood zone regulations, such as minimum elevation requirements, to minimize the risk of flood-related damage.
- **Environmental Protection:** South Florida is home to unique ecosystems, such as the Everglades, unique underground water characteristics, and various coastal habitats. Construction permits help regulate development and ensure that projects comply with environmental regulations, protecting the region's natural resources and delicate ecosystems.
- **Legal Compliance:** Obtaining a construction permit ensures that your project complies with local zoning ordinances, land use regulations, and other legal requirements. Failing to secure the proper permits can result in fines, penalties, or even the forced removal of non-compliant structures.
- **Property Value and Insurance:** Proper permitting contributes to maintaining property values by ensuring

that all construction work meets the required safety and quality standards. Additionally, insurance companies may deny coverage or claims for unpermitted work, leaving property owners financially vulnerable in the event of damage or loss.


- **Future Transactions:** When selling or refinancing a property, prospective buyers or lenders may require evidence of proper permitting. Unpermitted work can lead to delays, additional costs, or even the cancellation of a sale or refinancing transaction.

Who needs to pull a permit?

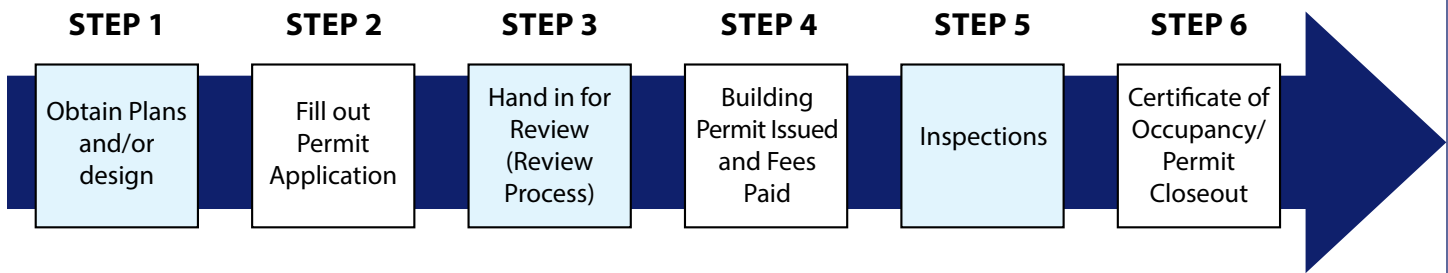
Any property owner, authorized agent, or contractor who wishes to build, expand, modify, repair, relocate, demolish, or change the occupancy or occupant capacity of a building or structure, or any outdoor area designated as part of the building's occupancy (single or mixed), or to construct, install, expand, modify, repair, remove, convert, or replace any electrical, gas, mechanical, or plumbing system regulated by technical codes, or to authorize such work, must first submit an application and obtain the necessary permit for the work.

When do you need to pull a permit?

Permits are necessary for the construction of new structures, pools, and additions such as screen enclosures, fences, sheds, and carports, as well as for new plumbing, electrical, or air conditioning installations. Exterior repair work, including window, door, siding, or roof replacements, also requires a permit. Interior modifications, such as removing a wall or altering or repairing electrical or plumbing systems, including hot water heater or gas appliance replacements, mandate a permit too.

Permitting requirements are usually very similar from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. However, there may be some differences. To determine the specific permit and associated requirements needed for your particular project, it is always best to consult with your local building department. Typically, no permit is needed for interior painting or wallpapering, ceiling fan installation in an existing outlet, setting up portable playground equipment in your backyard, or resurfacing a floor or applying other interior surface treatments. 


OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS



While the specific process for pulling a permit may vary slightly depending on the local jurisdiction and the scope of the project, the following steps outline the general procedure:

- **STEP 1 - Obtain Plans and/or Design:** You know what you want done. You need to first figure out how to put it on paper so that the Building Department will understand exactly what it is that you want done. For this, you will likely have to seek the advice of an engineer or an architect (depending on your needs). Research the specific requirements for your project and location. You'll then need to gather all necessary plans, such as site plans, architectural drawings, engineering calculations, and other supporting materials, to submit with your permit application. These documents must adhere to the local building codes and regulations.
- **STEP 2 - Fill out the Permit Application:** Your Building Department will provide you with the necessary application to fill out. You can typically get this application online or at the permitting office.
- **STEP 3 - Hand in for review (Review process):** After you have all your documentation, you will need to submit them to the appropriate permitting office in your jurisdiction including associated fees. This may be a city or county building department. The permitting office will review your application and plans to ensure they comply with all applicable building codes, zoning ordinances, and other regulations. This process may involve multiple departments, such as planning and zoning, fire, and public works. The review period can vary depending on the project's complexity and the permitting office's workload. If the permitting office requests revisions or additional information, you'll need to address their concerns and resubmit the updated documentation. This process may involve working closely with architects, engineers, or other professionals.


- **STEP 4 - Building Permit issued:** Obtain the permit: Once your application is approved, the permitting office will issue the necessary permits.
- **STEP 5 - Inspections:** You'll need to display the permits at the construction site and ensure that all work is carried out according to the approved plans and specifications. Throughout the construction process, you'll need to schedule inspections with the appropriate departments to verify that the work is being performed according to the approved plans and in compliance with building codes. Inspections may be required at various stages of construction, such as during foundation work, framing, and final completion.
- **STEP 6 - Certificate of Occupancy Issued and Permit Closeout:** After all inspections are passed, and the project is complete, the permitting office will issue a Certificate of Occupancy (for new structures) or a Certificate of Completion (for renovations or additions). This certificate indicates that the construction work is compliant with all relevant codes and regulations and that the structure is safe for occupancy. You will also need to take the often-overlooked step of closing out the permit (more on that later).

Remember that this is a general outline of the process, and specific steps or requirements may vary depending on your local jurisdiction and the nature of your project. Always consult with the local permitting office and relevant professionals for the most accurate and up-to-date information. 

STEP 1 - OBTAIN PLANS AND/OR DESIGN

Finding the right design professional to help you create plans for your construction project is essential to ensuring a smooth permit application process. Here's a basic outline of the process to find and hire a design professional:


- **Determine your needs:** Start by defining the scope of your project and the specific services you require from a design professional. This may include architectural design, engineering, interior design, landscape design, or other specialized services.
- **Research potential professionals:** Look for architects, engineers, or designers with experience in the type of project you are planning. You can search online, ask for recommendations from friends or colleagues, or consult professional associations, such as the American Institute of Architects (AIA) or the National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE).
- **Review portfolios:** Examine the portfolios of potential design professionals to evaluate their past work, style, and experience. Look for projects similar to yours and assess the quality of their designs.
- **Check credentials:** Verify the credentials of potential design professionals. They should hold relevant licenses or certifications, such as being a registered architect or a licensed professional engineer in your state. You can typically check their license status through your state's licensing board or professional association websites.
- **Request proposals:** Contact several design professionals to discuss your project and request proposals. Provide them with information about your project's scope, timeline, and budget. A proposal should outline their services, fees, and estimated project schedule.
- **Interview candidates:** Schedule interviews with the top candidates to discuss your project in more detail and ask any questions you may have. This is an opportunity to evaluate their communication skills, compatibility with your vision, and their overall approach to the project.
- **Compare proposals and fees:** Review the proposals and fees from each candidate, considering the scope of services, the level of detail in their plans, their experience, and their proposed timeline. Don't automatically choose the lowest fee, as other factors like experience and design quality are crucial.
- **Check references:** Contact the references provided by the candidates to inquire about their experience working with the design professional. Ask about the quality of their work, adherence to timelines and budgets, and their overall satisfaction with the project outcome.
- **Hire the design professional:** Once you've evaluated the candidates, select the design professional that best fits your needs and sign a contract outlining the scope of services, fees, and project timeline. Make sure to address any concerns or special requests before signing the agreement.
- **Collaborate on the project:** Work closely with your chosen design professional to develop plans and specifications that meet your vision and comply with local building codes and regulations. Maintain open communication throughout the process to ensure a successful project outcome.

By following these steps, you can find the right design professional to help you create plans for your construction project and navigate the permit application process. I have also written a guide called "G. Batista's One-Hour Guide to Hiring an Engineer in South Florida" with more details including a checklist that you can use to interview your designers. 

STEP 2 – FILL OUT THE PERMIT APPLICATION

Permit applications vary slightly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. However, they ask for basically the same information. The items below are typical for the vast majority of permit applications for cities and counties in Florida.

These are as follows:

1. Owner information – The application will ask for the name of the owner of the property where the construction is to take place. This will include basic information such as address and phone number. Many times, the Owner (or a duly-recognized representative) will have to sign the application and have it notarized.
2. Contractor information- The application will typically ask for all of the contractor's information including, but not limited to, name, address, contact information, license and insurance details.
3. Designers information (Architect or Engineer) including, but not limited to, name, address, and licensing information.
4. Most times, the Building Department will ask for a current property survey.
5. Other information that may also be required:
 - a. In the case if an HOA (Home Owners Association), the Building Department may ask for an approval by the Home Owners Association that it has passed their review and obtained their approval. If you have an HOA, you should first determine if their approval is required. Each jurisdiction has its own set of forms and documents that will allow you to clear this hurdle.
 - b. In case you decide that you do not want to use a contractor, you will need to apply for the permit as an Owner-Builder. Every jurisdiction has its requirements whereby they will allow you to do the construction without a licensed contractor. You should talk to the Building Department and get some feedback as to the requirements that will allow you to do so.
 - c. At times, the Building Department will ask for an actual copy of the executed construction contract between the owner and the contractor. This is because the permit fees are tied to the cost of construction and the Building Department wants to ensure that the fees are based off of an actual contract.
 - d. Asbestos affidavit – Particularly in Dade County, most demolition and renovation projects for commercial and certain residential facilities require review for asbestos and approval from the Division of Environmental Resources Management (DERM), Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources. If this is required for your project, you should consult with your building department for more information. Many of the forms to complete these tasks are often obtained online at the jurisdictions website. 



STEP 3 – REVIEW PROCESS

After submitting a construction permit application and the associated plans, the building department conducts a review process to ensure the project complies with all applicable building codes, zoning regulations, and other requirements.

The building department will perform an initial review of your application and project documentation to ensure all required information is provided and application fees are paid. If any information is missing or incomplete, they may request additional details or documentation. The building department will closely examine your project plans to ensure they comply with local building codes, zoning ordinances, and other regulations. This review typically involves multiple departments or divisions, such as planning and zoning, structural, electrical, plumbing, mechanical, and fire protection. Depending on the project's scope and complexity, other departments or agencies may need to review and approve specific aspects of the project. These may include the fire department, public works, utilities, health department, or environmental agencies.

Each department will have a specific staff professional to review your plans to ensure that the permit(s) you're applying for comply with the Florida Building Code, your particular city and/or county code, and any other applicable municipality requirements.

YOU SHOULD KNOW

When departmental staff evaluate the plans, they are required to write down their review comments. Most building departments today have an electronic system that gives each proposed permit a "process number" whereby you can access the status of your permit online, including the specific plan review comments, at any time.

Depending on the permit type and project complexity, initial plan reviews may take between 24 hours and 15 business days, excluding any necessary corrections that will have to be made after the review is performed. It may take even more time depending on the building department's staffing problems, if we are in the middle of the holidays, and if the project is very large and complex. If corrections, or "reworks," are required, the review will obviously take more time because the particular department will require that your designer rework their plans and then resubmit for another review.

After the initial review process and/or reworks are completed, you'll be notified via the contact method(s) provided on your application, whether your application and documents have been approved or require further corrections. You can re-submit the corrected documents electronically, in person, or however your jurisdiction so requires.

Depending on the complexity of your project, your documents will be reviewed by several departments. Here's a general explanation of just some of the more typical reviewing departments:

Planning and Zoning Review

If your project goes beyond a simple interior renovation or alteration such as a new structure or an addition to an existing structure, the Building Department may require that your documents first go through the planning and zoning department. This is the department that will determine if your project is in tune with your local rules generally regulating the use and scope of your project. For example, if you want to build another house on your property when the regulations state that only one house can be built per parcel, then they will definitely flag your project. There are many more regulations such as height restrictions and rules governing how much more space you can add to an existing structure. Each jurisdiction can have thousands of rules and is thus beyond the scope of this guide to review.

Structural Review

If your project involves some sort of structure (walls, floors, roofs, beams, columns, etc.) then your project

will have to undergo a structural review. South Florida structural reviews tend to be more rigorous than most other parts of the state (and of the country as a whole) mostly due to our constant exposure to high velocity winds (hurricanes). Most reviews require that your designers submit structural calculations to substantiate their designs and as such, these reviews can take quite a bit of time.

Building Review

Building review encompasses items such as occupancy loads, paths of egress, and dimensions of certain key items such as stair widths, door and window sizes, safety railing dimensions, and a host of many other items.

Mechanical Review

If you have any type of air conditioning or ventilation system (such as bathroom fans or kitchen exhaust fans) that is part of the design, then your documents will need to go through a mechanical review. Florida requires that A/C designs contain sizing calculations (which lets the users know what is the best size of A/C unit to install) and “energy calculations” that prove to the reviewers that the HVAC that was designed complies with the Florida Building Code’s energy efficiency code. The Mechanical review can also include plumbing and gas designs.

Electrical Review

The reviewers check to ensure that the plans comply with the Florida Building Code which, in the electrical


YOU SHOULD KNOW

If your plans require too many reviews, most jurisdictions impose penalties. Make sure that your design professionals have sufficient experience to not make basic mistakes on their plans.

department, mostly requires compliance with the NEC (National Electrical Code).

Fire Department Review

If applicable, your plans will be reviewed by the Fire Department also. This mainly has to do with ensuring compliance with fire protection and life safety provisions of the building code. These provisions include, but are not limited to checking the design’s for fire-safe materials, smoke detectors and fire alarms, fire extinguisher placement, fire sprinklers, and even restaurant hoods among many other items.


During the initial permit application review, the building department will assess exactly which departments (such as the ones expressed above) your documents will need to pass through for approval. Once all these departments approve your documents, you will be ready for the next step : Obtain your permit. 

STEP 4 – BUILDING PERMIT ISSUED

Congratulations! You have your permit. However, your work and your responsibilities have not ended. This is where most people get into trouble; they think that with the issuance of the permit, they have nothing left to do. This section mentions items that you should know after your permit is attained.


Finishing the work

With your permit issued, you have a limited number of days to finish the work and schedule inspections. If no city inspections are called for to be performed, then the

permit can also expire. If the permit is allowed to expire due to inaction, the jurisdiction will penalize you for re-issuing the permit or, in worst-case scenario, require that you start the entire process from scratch and re-pay the associated fees. If your contractor pulled the permit, then it is the contractor’s responsibility to make sure that it does not expire. On the other hand, if you pulled an owner-builder permit, then you are the one responsible for that. Again, staying in contact with your building department, or obtaining your information through your online portal (if available in your jurisdiction) is invaluable for staying out of trouble. 

STEP 5 –INSPECTIONS

Once you are issued your permit, you will receive your official set of approved permit plans and a permit card. The permit card is a cardboard card that is given to you (or your contractor) and is to be posted conspicuously on the jobsite for easy access by the building department inspectors that show up on your jobsite. Your approved set of plans must also be on the site. This card contains a list of all the required inspections that are to be performed on the project such as demolition, plumbing rough, plumbing final, drywall screws, roof-

ing underlayment, roofing final, among a host of many other inspections that may be required for your particular project. Once the inspector goes to the jobsite to perform his inspection, they will either approve or disapprove the inspection and sign the permit card with the date of the inspection. Note that this process is also done electronically. Either way, it is not until all the required inspections have been approved and passed, that you will not be able to get your certificate of completion (or occupancy) that will allow you to enjoy your renovation/construction and will also allow you to close out your permit. 


STEP 6 –CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY / PERMIT CLOSEOUT

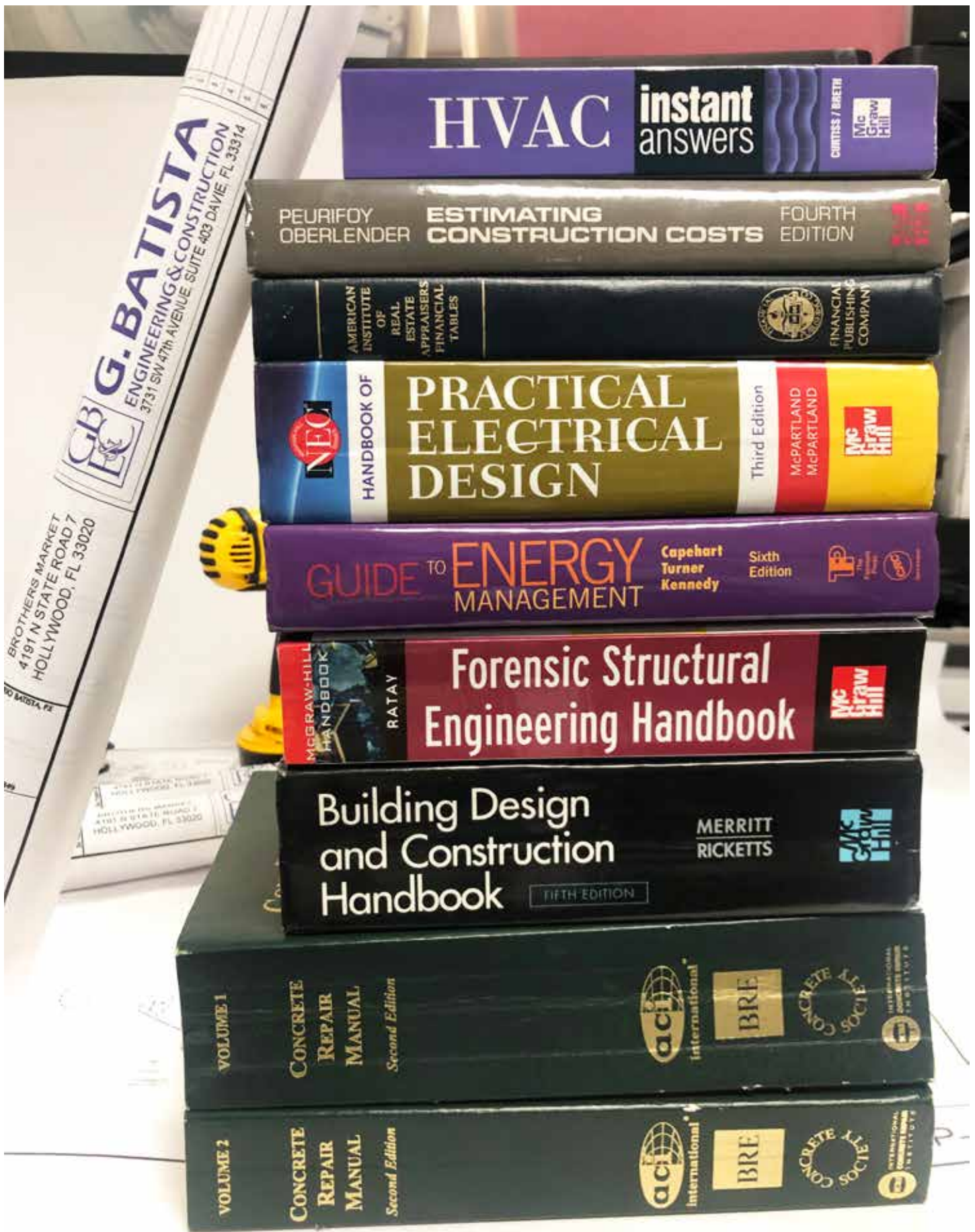
A Certificate of Occupancy (CO) is an essential document issued by a local government agency, such as a building department, upon the completion of a construction project. It certifies that the building or structure complies with all applicable building codes, regulations, and safety standards, and is suitable for occupancy.

The importance of obtaining a Certificate of Occupancy lies in the following aspects:

- **Legal occupancy:** A CO is required before a building or structure can be legally occupied or used for its intended purpose. Occupying a building without a valid CO could result in fines, penalties, or even legal actions by the local government.
- **Safety assurance:** The CO ensures that the building has undergone thorough inspections and has met all safety, structural, electrical, plumbing, and fire protection

requirements. This provides a level of assurance for occupants, owners, and potential buyers that the building is safe and fit for its intended use.

- **Property transactions:** A CO is crucial in property transactions, as it serves as proof that the building is in compliance with all local codes and regulations. Buyers, lenders, and insurance companies often require a valid CO before they proceed with a property transaction.
- **Permit closure:** Obtaining a CO is the final step in the construction permit process. It signifies that the project has been completed according to approved plans and specifications, and that all inspections have been successfully passed. Closing out the permit ensures that there are no outstanding issues or violations related to the construction project. Failure to properly close out your permit can cause you problems down the road such as preventing you from applying for other permits. 



DID YOU KNOW?

Many building departments are now allowing the electronic submission of your permit documents and allow the electronic approval of plans, payments, and even allow professionals to seal and certify their plans without having to physically seal and sign the plans. This significantly streamlines the process. You should access your jurisdictions website for the most up-to-date permit requirements.



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