



Development Services

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Accessory Structure Guide

For the Permit and Inspection Process

What are the most common accessory structures we permit and inspect?

We permit and inspect a variety of accessory structures, but the most common include sheds, carports, and garages.

What is a shed?

A *shed* has all of the following characteristics:

1. It is a detached, one story structure.

2. It is used for tool storage, a playhouse, or similar use.
3. It does not exceed 10 feet tall at the eave height.
4. The maximum distance that it can be off the ground is 18 inches. The structure is made of light-frame construction, with vertical and horizontal structural elements primarily formed by a system of repetitive wood or light-gauge metal framing members. New product technology has also introduced plastic panel products as an acceptable tool storage solution.

A structure that does not comply with these criteria will be treated as any other detached accessory structure.

What is a carport?

A carport is a structure open on **all sides** used generally for covering vehicles. The floor surface can be concrete, gravel, or asphalt. If the structure is not open on all sides, it shall be considered a garage and will have to comply with all code requirements for garages. Carports constructed of light gauge steel are the only structures over 256 square feet that we allow to be installed without being continuously supported on footings.

What if my accessory structure cannot be defined as a shed or carport?

If your accessory structure cannot be defined as a shed or carport, the building code requirements are more restrictive. These structures are typically required to be supported on continuous footings. Examples are garages, workshops, barns, etc.

When is a permit required?

All accessory structures require a permit unless the structure complies with the definition of a shed **AND** does not exceed 256 square feet. However, some constraints still apply:

1. The shed must be properly anchored to the ground.
2. If it will have electricity, an electrical permit is required.
3. **The shed must comply with Zoning Ordinance setbacks from all property lines. Prior to placing the structure on the lot, contact the Planning Department at (540)928-2080 for setback and easement requirements. No buildings shall be placed in the flood plain.**

What Permits do I need?

Regardless of the type of building or how it is constructed, a building permit is required if the building floor area is greater than 256 square feet. In addition to a building permit, an electrical, mechanical, and/or plumbing permit may be required. Please provide the full scope of the work during the permit process so it can be determined what permits are necessary.

What is the permit process?

The following is the general process for obtaining a permit for an accessory structure.

1. Contact the Development Services Department / Zoning for setback and easement requirements prior to purchasing a building. Zoning restrictions can often dictate the number and location of accessory structures on a property.
2. Gather all of the necessary documents listed below and determine your estimated construction cost.
3. Visit Development Service's permit office located at 5 W. Main Street Fincastle, Virginia 24090. Here, you will be assisted with filling out the application. Please be prepared to pay for all required permits at this time.

The documents will be review by multiple county departments and once they are satisfied, the permit will be issued by the Building Official.

4. After you receive the permit, you may begin construction.
5. It is your responsibility to call for the required inspections as you proceed.
6. You must obtain a final inspection prior to use.

What documents are required?

The following construction documents must accompany the permit application.

1. Site Plan- A site plan is required showing the proposed setback distances between the structure and all property lines and the distance to other structures on the property.
2. Construction Drawings- If the structure you propose to install is a pre-engineered or pre-fabricated building, you are required to submit plans that are specific to your building's design, not generalized plans. Pre-engineered buildings are required to be stamped by a Registered Design Professional e.g. architect, engineer. **All structures shall be designed to withstand a 90 MPH wind speed and a 30 lb/sq. ft. snow load.**

What inspections are typically required?

1. Footing Inspection
 - **Structures <256 square feet:** If your accessory structure meets the definition of a shed, it may be exempt from footings. If your structure is not a shed, footings shall extend a minimum of 12 inches below final grade.
 - **257-600 square feet:** Accessory structures shall have footings that extend a minimum of 12 inches below final grade. (Note) Structures of other than light frame construction >400 square feet do not meet this exception.
 - **>600 square feet** Accessory structures shall have footings that extend 24 inches below final grade so to be protected by frost.
2. Electrical Inspection (if applicable)
3. Mechanical Inspection (if applicable)
4. Plumbing Inspection (if applicable)
5. Framing Inspection
6. Final Inspection