

Electrical permits and inspections in Vancouver

Why the rules change the moment you cross the city line, what you are allowed to do on your own home, the form that catches apartment buildings out, and the inspection mistakes that cost money.

The Wire Guys Electrical Ltd. · Serving British Columbia since 2019 · Every source listed on the last page · Checked 8 September 2026

Vancouver runs its own electrical permitting, and that one fact makes most general British Columbia advice wrong inside the city. The office is different, the rules on doing your own work are different, and the paperwork an apartment building needs does not exist anywhere else in the province. This guide is the plain version, taken from the City of Vancouver's own pages and from Technical Safety BC. Every source is listed at the back so you can check it yourself.

1. Vancouver is one of seven exceptions in the province

Technical Safety BC issues electrical installation permits for most of British Columbia. It says so on its own site, and then it names the places where it does not. Vancouver is on that list.

Technical Safety BC issues the permit	The municipality issues it instead
Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Mission, Langley, Coquitlam, and most of British Columbia	Burnaby · Maple Ridge · North Vancouver · Surrey · Vancouver · Victoria · West Vancouver

That list is Technical Safety BC's, reproduced as they publish it. We have not gone behind it to describe how each of those municipalities runs its own office, because we have not read their pages. What matters at a Vancouver address is the first half of the sentence: it is the City, not the province, that issues your permit and sends the inspector.

Licensing and permitting are two different things

This is where people tie themselves in knots. Technical Safety BC licenses electrical contractors *across the whole province*, Vancouver included, while the City of Vancouver

issues the permit for the job. So the contractor working on your Vancouver house is licensed provincially and permitted municipally, at the same time, and neither replaces the other.

A licence says who is allowed to do the work. A permit says this particular job has been declared and will be inspected.

You need both, from two different bodies, and holding one does not get you the other.

2. What actually needs a permit inside Vancouver

The City's starting position is broad: you need an electrical permit for all electrical work, with two exceptions it states itself.

- Replacing **defective** fuses, receptacles, switches or bulbs with units of similar type and rating.
- Minor alterations, repairs or additions to an installation already covered by an existing annual electrical permit.

Read the first one carefully, because it is narrower than people hope. It is a like-for-like swap of a fitting that has failed. Adding a circuit, moving a receptacle, feeding a new appliance or touching the panel is none of those things.

Two Vancouver rules that surprise people

- **Buildings with a service rated more than 500 KVA need an annual, or operating, permit.** It lets the building owner maintain the existing operating equipment and carry out minor electrical work under one standing permit rather than pulling a new one every time. If you sit on a strata council in a larger building, this is worth knowing whether your building holds one.
- **All filming work in Vancouver requires an electrical permit** — in a studio or on location, no exceptions. Film crews are ordinary on Vancouver streets and the electrical side of them is permitted like any other installation.

3. Can you do the work on your own house?

Sometimes — and Vancouver's conditions are its own, not the province's. The default is strict: to apply for an electrical permit in Vancouver you must be a licensed electrical contractor holding a valid City of Vancouver or inter-municipal business licence.

The exception is for a detached single-family home, and the City requires **every one** of these to be true at once:

- You own the home, and you currently live in it
- The home does not contain a secondary suite
- No part of the home is rented to another person
- Your electrical service is not above 200 amp, 120/240
- You will be doing all of the electrical work yourself

- You are knowledgeable about this type of work, and are prepared to meet with and get approval from an electrical inspector

All of them, not most of them. A basement suite disqualifies you. A single rented room disqualifies you. Hiring someone to do half the work disqualifies you. And because the exception is written for a detached single-family home, an apartment, a duplex or a strata unit does not reach the list at all.

What changes the moment you leave the city

Outside Vancouver, where Technical Safety BC issues the permit, the exclusions are drawn differently: owners of a strata, owners of a non-strata duplex, and anyone operating a business from their home cannot obtain a homeowner permit and must hire a licensed contractor. Two different authorities, two different lists. If you own property in more than one municipality, that is the trap.

One thing we see go wrong on DIY work. The commonest is an EV charger installed without a Red Seal electrician, run on thin wire instead of the proper heavy gauge. It works, until the wiring burns. A charger is a continuous load on a circuit that has to be sized for it, which is why the load calculation in section 5 exists.

4. Before you can apply at all

Three sequencing rules catch out projects that were otherwise ready.

- **The building permit comes first.** If your project needs one, the City will not issue the electrical permit until the building permit has been issued. Applying in the other order does not speed anything up.
- **Drawings are required where the application involves new construction** — with an exception for a new house or a laneway house.
- **Fees are payable when the application is submitted**, not when the permit is issued.

Applications are processed in the order they are received, and the City publishes its own current processing times on the electrical permit page, split between simple permits and permits that need a plan review. Read the live table for the current figures.

5. The form that catches apartment buildings out

This one is genuinely specific to Vancouver, and almost nobody outside the trade has heard of it. For **existing multi-unit buildings of five or more units**, the City requires a New Electric Load Installation form — the NELI — before it will review the electrical permit application, whenever the work involves:

- Electrification of existing fuel combustion space heating and domestic hot water systems
- New electric heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems
- New electric vehicle charging systems
- Installation of new, or modification of other, electrical loads over 3,000 watts within a unit

The exemption is as useful as the rule: the NELI is not required when the work *reduces* net load — the City's own example is taking out baseboard heaters and putting in a heat pump, provided the net load goes down.

If you are a strata council electrifying a building or adding parkade chargers, this is the difference between an application that gets reviewed and one that sits. On our jobs we complete it. You are not filling in a load form.

The load calculation is paperwork as well as physics

The City publishes a different electrical load calculation form for an apartment or multiplex, for a duplex, and for a one-family dwelling with a laneway house or a secondary suite, plus a separate checklist for electrical service to a laneway house. That is a fair map of Vancouver's housing. It also explains why "will my panel take it?" is not a question anyone can answer by looking at the panel door.

6. What the permit fee actually covers

The City sets the rates and publishes a schedule of fees and permits, and that live document is the only version worth quoting. What is worth knowing is the structure, because the structure does not change:

- **Inspection fees are included in the overall permit fee.** You are not billed separately for the inspector attending.
- **Fees are paid at submission**, so an application you later abandon has already cost something.
- **A withdrawn application may be partly refunded**, where the fee is refundable, less an administration fee to process the refund.
- **Re-inspection fees are extra**, and they are the ones that actually hurt. Section 8.

7. What an inspection is really checking

An inspection is not a general opinion on the wiring. The City sets out what it is for: that the work matches what was described under the permit, that it complies with the relevant bylaws, and that it meets safety, accessibility and green building goals.

Two consequences follow, and both matter more than they sound.

- **It is checked against the permit, not against the job.** If the scope grew after the permit was issued and nobody amended it, the work no longer matches the paperwork. The City lets you request an amendment to an issued permit through the online account for exactly this reason.
- **There is usually more than one.** The City says plainly that several inspections at different stages of construction are often required. A rewire is not one visit at the end.

Nothing closes until it is done: all work must be inspected before the permit is finalised. An uninspected permit is an open permit, and it stays attached to the property.

Who books it, and when

Inspections are booked, not automatic, and only a trades contractor or the permit applicant with a City online account can book one online. There is a published cut-off point in the working day, and a request that arrives after it goes into a later slot. There is also a published deadline for cancelling without a charge. Both are on the City's inspections page and both are current there rather than here.

A City electrical inspector also attends after a complaint from the public. Permitted work is not the only work that gets looked at.

8. The eight ways an inspection costs you extra

This is the part worth reading twice, because every item on it is avoidable and most of them are somebody's decision rather than bad luck. The City charges an additional fee when:

The site is not ready for an inspector	The work needs looking at again
The site is inaccessible to the inspector Required safety measures are not in place Plans or site representatives are not available when required The work is not ready at the scheduled time The inspection is cancelled after the scheduling deadline	Incomplete work was identified at a previous inspection Previous deficiencies have not been fully corrected Work has progressed beyond the inspection point, requiring uncovering

That last one is the expensive one. Close up a wall before the inspection point it needed, and the wall comes back open. Drywall, paint and a second trade, on top of the re-inspection fee — and the City requires any additional fees owing to be paid before you can request a further inspection on the project. The job stops until they are settled.

None of this is a reason to be nervous about inspections. It is a reason to care who is sequencing them.

9. If the inspection does not pass

An inspection that does not pass is not a disaster; it is a deficiency list and a return visit. The question worth asking any electrician before you hire them is who pays for that return visit, and section 8 is why the question has teeth.

Our answer, in writing: **if an inspection does not pass on our work, we put it right, call the inspector back, and we cover the cost.**

10. Four questions for whoever is quoting your Vancouver job

- **Who is pulling the permit, and from which office?** At a Vancouver address the answer is the City of Vancouver. On our jobs we pull it before the work starts, and you fill in no forms.

- **Do you hold a City of Vancouver or inter-municipal business licence?** They cannot apply for your permit without one. It is a fair question and it has a yes-or-no answer.
- **Will you be there for the inspection?** We are — so you are not left in your own hallway explaining someone else's wiring to an inspector.
- **Are you a licensed electrical contractor in British Columbia?** Ask for that in writing before anyone starts. We are, trading as The Wire Guys Electrical Ltd., and we are licensed and insured, WorkSafeBC registered, active and in good standing, with continuous coverage since 30 September 2019.

Sources

Every statement above traces to one of these, read at source on 8 September 2026.

Where a figure changes over time we have published the rule and the link rather than the number.

What it supports	Where it comes from
Technical Safety BC issues electrical installation permits for most of BC; the seven exception municipalities, Vancouver among them; either Technical Safety BC or your municipality issues the permit depending on location	technicalsaftybc.ca/electrical-permits and technicalsaftybc.ca (homeowner electrical permits)
What needs no permit in Vancouver; the annual permit above 500 KVA; filming; who may apply; the six homeowner conditions; the NELI form and its exemption; drawings for new construction; fees payable at submission; withdrawal and partial refund; building permit issued first; all work inspected before the permit is finalised; amending an issued permit	City of Vancouver, Get an electrical permit — vancouver.ca/home-property-development/electrical-permit.aspx
What an inspection checks; several inspections at different stages; what a City electrical inspector does, including attending after a public complaint; who can book online; inspection fees included in the permit fee; the additional-fee circumstances; additional fees payable before further inspections; the City's load calculation forms and laneway house service checklist	City of Vancouver, Inspections — vancouver.ca/home-property-development/inspections.aspx
Who cannot hold a homeowner permit outside Vancouver; like-for-like replacement by a licensed contractor; homeowner work under Section 17 of the Electrical Safety Regulation	technicalsaftybc.ca/apply-for/permits/homeowner-permits/homeowner-electrical-permits
Current permit fees, permit processing times, and inspection booking and cancellation deadlines	City of Vancouver — check the live pages

Check the live figures. Fee amounts, processing times and booking deadlines all change. The City of Vancouver publishes the current ones on its own pages. If you are reading this well after September 2026, treat the City's pages as the current version.

The Wire Guys Electrical Ltd. · Licensed and insured · Licensed electrical contractor in British Columbia · WorkSafeBC registered, active and in good standing, with continuous coverage since 30 September 2019 · BBB Accredited · Canadian family owned, serving British Columbia since 2019. Jasjot Kohli, the owner, is Red Seal certified and our designated Field Safety Representative.

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This guide is general information about the City of Vancouver's permitting and inspection process, not advice on a specific installation. Published 8 September 2026.