DECK BUILDERS OTTAWA

Permits & Inspections

When an Ottawa deck needs a building permit, what the application and drawings need, the homeowner design exemption, and the footing, framing and final inspections

4 Expert Answers from Deck IQ

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Q1

What does the Ottawa framing inspection check on a deck?

Ottawa's framing inspection comes "at completion of structural framing and guards." That is what the City says about it. We found no separate framing checklist on ottawa.ca for homeowners.

What the framing stage covers

The permit drawings the City requires give a clear picture of what needs to be in place before this inspection is booked. Those drawings must show:

- Footing or foundation type, size and location, including helical pile layout and specifications where applicable
- Joists, beams, posts and decking with size, spacing, direction and span
- The deck-to-house connection, such as a ledger board
- Stair construction and location
- Guard and handrail information, including height and infill

Guards are specifically named at this stage, which matters because the 2024 Ontario Building Code sets guard height requirements, the no-climb rule for infill between 140 mm and 900 mm above the walking surface, and the opening size limit of 100 mm for the passage of a sphere.
The City asks that inspections be booked 48 hours in advance. There are three inspections in total for a permitted deck: Excavation/Foundations (for in-situ piers and pads, before backfill), Framing (at completion of structural framing and guards), and Final (at completion of framing, stairs and guards). The framing inspection sits in the middle of that sequence.

One practical point: if the deck will be built differently from the permit drawings, discuss the change with the City's Building Code Services before the inspection.

If you have questions about what your specific permit drawings require at the framing stage, ask the City's Building Code Services.

Q2

Does a small freestanding deck in Riverside South need a permit?

A freestanding deck in Riverside South needs a permit only when two conditions are both met: its walking surface is greater than 10 square metres (approximately 108 square feet) in area, and its walking surface is more than 600

mm (24 in.) above the adjacent grade. If either condition is not met, no permit is required under the City of Ottawa's rules for a freestanding deck. The word "small" matters here, so the exact area and height of your deck determine the answer.

There is one important exception to keep in mind. If the deck serves as the principal access to your home and it is elevated, a permit is required regardless of size or height. Heritage properties are also not subject to the permit exemptions, so if your property falls within a Heritage District Overlay, check with the City's Building Code Services before assuming no permit is needed.

Even without a permit, the 2024 Ontario Building Code and the City's Zoning By-laws still apply. That means the deck must still meet Code requirements for guards, footings and loads, and it must comply with setback rules. Under both Zoning By-law 2008-250 and Zoning By-law 2026-50, the most restrictive provisions of each apply to permit applications deemed complete on or after March 11, 2026. For an uncovered, unenclosed deck with a walking surface no higher than 600 mm above grade, there is generally no minimum setback in the rear or interior side yard, but in the front yard it must sit at least 1 metre from the lot line and may project no more than the greater of 2 metres or 50 per cent of the required yard. In all other cases, a minimum setback of 1 metre from any lot line and a maximum projection of 2 metres applies. Because both by-laws are in play and some provisions are still under appeal, confirm the rules for your specific lot with the City.

A few things to sort out before building:

- Measure the walking surface area carefully: if it is close to 10 square metres, have a builder or designer confirm the calculation.
- If the deck is within 600 mm of the ground and meets the other conditions in the 2024 Ontario Building Code, the footing frost-depth rules may not apply, but the deck still needs to be anchored against uplift and lateral movement unless it meets all five conditions of the floating-deck exemption.
- Before any digging, submit a locate request through Ontario One Call at least 5 business days in advance. It is free and required by law.

If your deck does need a permit, the City's fee is $12.75 per $1,000 of assessed project value, with a minimum of $117.00, and you will need scaled, dimensioned drawings with a site plan, framing plan and elevations.
The request form on this site sends your project details to local Ottawa deck builders listed in the Ottawa Construction Network directory, so you can compare written quotes.

Q3

Deck permit when the house has three units in Ottawa?

A deck on a house with three or more units falls outside the homeowner design exemption, so you will need a BCIN designer, an architect or an engineer to take design responsibility for the permit drawings. That is the first practical difference from a single-family home.

The City of Ottawa's permit triggers apply the same way regardless of how many units the building has. A permit is required if the deck is attached to the house and its walking surface is more than 600 mm (24 in.) above adjacent grade, or if it is an elevated deck providing principal access to the building, whatever its size. A freestanding deck in the yard needs a permit only if it is both more than 10 square metres (approximately 108 square feet) in area and more than 600 mm above grade.

The homeowner design exemption is where the unit count changes things. The City explains that a homeowner may take design responsibility for drawings related to their own house, but that exemption does not apply where more than two dwelling units exist in the building. With three units, Schedule 1 of the permit application must name a BCIN designer, an architect or an engineer. That person takes design responsibility for the drawings.

A few other things follow from this:

- The permit application still goes through the My ServiceOttawa portal, with a complete set of scaled, dimensioned drawings: a site plan, a foundation and framing plan, and elevations.
- The City's fee is $12.75 per $1,000 of assessed valuation (materials, labour, overhead and professional fees combined), with a minimum of $117.
- The three inspections still apply: Excavation/Foundations before backfill, Framing at completion of structural framing and guards, and Final at completion. Book each one 48 hours in advance.
- Both Zoning By-laws 2008-250 and 2026-50 apply to applications deemed complete on or after March 11, 2026, with the most restrictive provisions from each winning. Setbacks and yard projections depend on the zone, so confirm the rules for the specific lot with the City.
- If the deck uses composite or PVC decking rather than conventional lumber, the permit application needs a CCMC or BMEC material testing report.

If any footing work is involved, a locate request through Ontario One Call must go in at least five business days before anyone digs. That step applies whether a contractor or the owner does the digging.
The most useful question to put to your designer or engineer before they start the drawings is whether the deck's connection to the building, given that it has three units, triggers any Part 4 structural design requirements beyond the standard Part 9 prescriptive rules.

Q4

How long is the first permit review for an Ottawa deck?

The City of Ottawa lists "First review - 5 business days" for a deck building permit application. That is the timeline for the first review, not a guarantee of when the permit will be issued.

A few things are worth understanding about what that timeline means in practice. The five business days covers the City's first look at your application, not the full approval process.

The City's list for a deck application includes a completed and signed digital permit application, a full set of scaled and dimensioned drawings (site plan, foundation and framing plan, and elevations), and a Schedule 1 naming either a BCIN designer, an architect, an engineer, or the homeowner taking design responsibility for their own house. If your decking material is anything other than conventional lumber, you also need a CCMC or BMEC material testing report. If your guards are a manufactured or pre-engineered system outside the Code's prescriptive rules, you need the manufacturer's information and attachment details.

Applications go through the My ServiceOttawa portal, and payment must accompany the application. The City's fee is $12.75 per $1,000 or part thereof of the assessed value of the work, which covers all materials, labour, overhead and professional fees, with a minimum of $117.00.

Once a permit is issued, the City requires three inspections booked 48 hours in advance: an excavation and foundations inspection before backfill (for in-situ piers and pads), a framing inspection at completion of structural framing and guards, and a final inspection at completion of the deck framing, stairs and guards.

If you are unsure whether your drawings are complete enough to pass the first review without comments, a designer or BCIN holder who has submitted Ottawa deck permits before is the right person to ask first, because they can check the package against the City's list before you apply.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Deck Builders Ottawa. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified contractors and your local building authority (the City of Ottawa's Building Code Services) before starting any deck project. Decks in Ottawa are built under the 2024 Ontario Building Code (O. Reg. 163/24) and the City's permit and zoning rules. Information is current as of November 15, 2026 and may change. Visit **deckbuildersottawa.ca** for the latest answers.