

Zoning and Permitting Frequently Asked Questions

The information provided on this page is limited to the zoning regulations found in the Boulder Revised Code, 1981 (BRC). Some properties have requirements beyond the by-right regulations set forth by the zoning district. If you believe that this may apply to the property that you are researching, please see *“How can I find out if a property has a previous review?”* below.

Contents

Do I need a building permit?.....	2
Do I need a permit for a fence?	2
Do I need a rental license?.....	2
What is the maximum number of people that can live in a home? What is the maximum occupancy for a property?2	
Do I need to hire a contractor?.....	3
Do I need to hire an architect or engineer?.....	3
Does the city accept electronic stamps and signatures from architects and engineers?.....	3
How much does a building permit cost?.....	3
Does the city accept credit cards for payment?	4
How do I prepare an application for building permit (single family, residential)?	4
How do I prepare an application for building permit (commercial/multi-family)?	4
How do I submit a permit application?.....	4
How can I see the development history for a property?	5
How can I see the enforcement history for a property?	5
How can I get copies of the permit history from a property, planned unit development documents or a copy of a survey?	5
How can I find out if a permit has been issued for construction that is currently taking place?	5
What are the design requirements in the City of Boulder?	5
How can I determine the zoning for a property?.....	6
How can I find out if a property has a previous review?	6
How can I determine the lot size of a property?	6
What are the setback requirements for the property?	7
How can I determine the maximum allowable building coverage for a property?	7
How can I determine the maximum allowable floor area for a property?.....	8
How can I determine the minimum required open space for the property?	8
How do I know if a specific use is allowed in a zone district?.....	8
What are the requirements to establish an accessory dwelling unit (ADU)?	9
What are the city’s outdoor lighting requirements?	9
Is the property in the floodplain?	9
Is the property in a wetland?	9
Is the property in a historic district?	9

Does this structure require a historic demolition review?	9
Is the property in the wildland urban interface?	10
Does the project required a grading and drainage plan?	10
Does the project require a soils report?	10
When is a test for asbestos required?	10
What if asbestos containing materials (ACM) are identified through asbestos testing?	11
Will the project trigger the water meter to be upsized?	11
How do I report a violation for building without a permit?.....	11
What are the City’s roofing requirements?	11
How do I prepare a solar analysis?	11
How can I schedule a construction waste documentation Inspection?	11
How can I schedule a final site drainage inspection?	12
Is my view protected?.....	12

Do I need a building permit?

[Section 10-5-2\(j\), BRC 1981](#), provides a list of all work exempt from building permit. Please note that while a project may be exempt from building permitting it must still meet all relevant building, zoning, and engineering code requirements. Additional approvals may be required if the property is located within a floodplain, wetland, [historic district or has been designated as an individual landmark](#).

Do I need a permit for a fence?

Fences not over 6 feet tall are exempt from building permit requirements. However, if the fence will be located in a floodplain, wetland, will be constructed in an [historic district or on a property designated as an individual landmark](#), other processes are required before the fence can be built.

- A [floodplain development permit](#) is required for new and replacement fences in the floodplain.
- A [wetland permit](#) is required for new and replacement fences in a wetland
- A [landmark alteration certificate](#) is required to build or alter fences constructed in an [Historic District or on a property designated as an individual landmark](#).

Regardless of whether a permit is required, fences must be a minimum of 18” from public sidewalks and cannot obstruct [site triangles](#). Please refer to [section 9-9-15, BRC 1981](#) for fencing regulations.

Do I need a rental license?

Please refer to the city’s [Rental Housing Licensing webpage](#) for rental licensing information.

What is the maximum number of people that can live in a home? What is the maximum occupancy for a property? Occupancy is dependent on the zoning district. First, determine the zoning district of the property, see “*How do I determine the zoning for a property?*” above. Then review [9-8-5, B.R.C. 1981 Occupancy of Dwelling Units](#).

Do I need to hire a contractor?

Please refer to the city's [Contractor Licensing website](#) for additional information about when a licensed contractor is required.

A homeowner contractor permit will only be issued to the property owner if the work will be done on a single-family detached dwelling (single-family house) or on a single-family house's accessory structures that is owned and occupied as the primary residence by the individual listed as the homeowner contractor. This exception does not apply to detached accessory dwelling units. If you do not intend to perform all the work yourself, licensed subcontractors are required. A list of licensed contractors in the City of Boulder can be found online [here](#).

Do I need to hire an architect or engineer?

A professional engineer or architect registered in the State of Colorado shall prepare the plans and specifications for and observe the construction of all buildings except for the following:

- (a) Detached dwellings intended solely for private use, occupancy, or resale, including accessory buildings commonly associated with the same;
- (b) Farm buildings and buildings for the marketing, storage, or processing of farm products;
- (c) Minor additions, alterations, or repairs to the foregoing buildings that do not cause the completed buildings to exceed the applicable limitations herein set forth; or
- (d) Nonstructural alterations of any nature to any building if such alterations do not affect the safety of the building.

Drawings and specifications for footings and foundations shall bear the seal and signature of a professional engineer or architect registered in Colorado and be designed as specified in Chapter 18 of the building code for all occupancies.

Exceptions:

- (a) Detached structures not intended for human occupancy;
- (b) Additions to existing detached dwellings not exceeding 150 square feet.

Any structural modification to any building in the City of Boulder will require plans to be prepared by a structural engineer licensed in the state of Colorado.

Does the city accept electronic stamps and signatures from architects and engineers?

Acceptable forms of stamps and signatures from a licensed professional are determined by the state licensing boards for architects and engineers. The City will accept any form of stamp and signature that is deemed valid by the [Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies](#).

How much does a building permit cost?

We cannot provide a fee estimate, but fees can be estimated using the [Schedule of Fees](#). A typical residential interior remodel will include the following fees:

- Building Plan Check Fee
- Building Permit Fee
- Electrical Permit fee
- Mechanical Permit Fee

- Plumbing Permit Fee
- City and County Sales and Use Taxes

Please note that this is not an all-inclusive list, and if the scope includes additional work then additional fees will be assessed.

Does the city accept credit cards for payment?

Yes, the city accepts VISA, Discover and MasterCard. There is a 2.85% service charge.

How do I prepare an application for building permit (single family, residential)?

Use the checklists found on the city's [Applications and Forms Database](#); select the form that most closely addresses the proposed scope of work.

- [Residential - New Construction and Additions Requirements Checklist](#) Permit application requirements for new construction or additions to one and two-Family dwellings, detached garages or accessory buildings
- [Residential - Interior Remodel Requirements Checklist](#) Permit application requirements for an interior remodel of a one and two-Family dwelling or townhome
- [Residential - Decks Requirements Checklist](#) Permit application requirements for an attached or free-standing deck on one and two-Family dwellings or townhomes
- [Residential - Sheds and Pergolas Requirements Checklist and Guide](#) Permit application requirements for a shed or pergola with no utilities or electrical service
- [Residential - Detailed Building Permit Requirements Attachment](#) General residential building permit requirements for one and two-Family dwellings and townhouses, including attached and detached accessory buildings, garages, sheds, pergolas and decks. This document is intended to provide a more detailed description of materials required for permit applications and is for reference purposes only. This is not intended to be submitted with the permit application.

Within these checklists are links to the required forms and guidelines on how to prepare an application submittal package.

How do I prepare an application for building permit (commercial/multi-family)?

Use the checklist found in the city's [Applications and Forms Database](#) titled "[Multi-family and Non-residential Building Permit Checklist](#)" to prepare your application package.

How do I submit a permit application?

It depends on the type of permit required. The following permit types may be submitted online through the [Customer Self-Service Portal](#):

- Electrical/Photovoltaic Solar
- Electrical Temporary Construction Power
- Fence and Wall
- Fire
- Floodplain Information Request

- Groundwater Discharge
- Mechanical HVAC (Residential Only)/Solar Water Heater/Wood Burning
- Mobile Home Installation
- Plumbing
- Roofing Replacement
- Sign

For all other application types refer to the [Online Permit Application Guide](#) for information about the permit application process.

How can I see the development history for a property?

Visit [emaplink](#). In the upper right-hand side of the screen find the search bar that defaults to “Enter Address” and type in the property address, then hit *Enter* on your keyboard.

Once the property has been identified on the map, click on the property and a pop-up window will appear with more information. Click on the “Property Report” link, then click on *Download PDF Report*.

How can I see the enforcement history for a property?

Please refer to the city’s [Enforcement Activity Summary webpage](#) for information about the enforcement history of a property.

How can I get copies of the permit history from a property, planned unit development documents or a copy of a survey?

Through the Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) anyone can request information on a property. Our records department is able to share any files that can be legally distributed to the public. If you are looking for general information on a property, surveys, previous reviews, planned unit development documents, permit history, certificates of occupancy, etc. please submit a request to P&DSRecordRequest@bouldercolorado.gov.

How can I find out if a permit has been issued for construction that is currently taking place?

The permit history for a specific property may be viewed through the [Customer Self Service portal](#).

Go to “Records Search”. Select “Permit” from the dropdown menu. Enter the address and click search. All permits associated with the property will be listed. Click on the case number to review further information associated with the permit.

What are the design requirements in the City of Boulder?

Please visit the [Codes and Regulations webpage](#) for a list of all currently adopted codes in the City of Boulder.

Local amendments to the adopted building codes can be found in [Title 10](#) of the Boulder Revised Code. Specifically, the climatic and geographic design criteria applicable to Table R301.2.1 of the 2012 IRC are as follows:

- *Ground Snow Load = thirty pounds per square foot with a minimum Roof Snow Load of 30 pounds per square foot.*
- *Three-second wind gust velocity = 120 mph east of Broadway, 130 mph west of Broadway*
- *Seismic Design Category = B*
- *Weathering = severe*

- Frost line depth = 32 inches
- Termite = slight
- Decay = none to slight
- Winter Design Temp = 2 degrees Fahrenheit
- Ice barrier underlayment required = NO
- Flood Hazards = See Sections 9-3-3 through 9-3-9, B.R.C. 1981
- Air freezing index = 459
- Mean annual temp = 52.1

How can I determine the zoning for a property?

Visit [emaplink](#). Once on this page, click the gray box next to the “Zoning Districts” layer in the legend on the left-hand side of the page. Next, in the upper right-hand side of the screen find the search bar that defaults to “Enter Address” and type in the property address, then hit Enter on your keyboard. This will zoom into the property displaying the zoning district.

Some properties have requirements beyond the by-right regulations set forth by the zoning districts. This may be indicated by a Parcel Tag labeled “Previous Review”. See *How can I find out if a property has a previous review?* Below.

How can I find out if a property has a previous review?

Visit [emaplink](#). In the upper right-hand side of the screen find the search bar that defaults to “Enter Address” and type in the property address, then hit *Enter* on your keyboard.

Once the property has been identified on the map, click on the property and a pop-up window will appear with more information. Click on the “Property Report” link, then click on “Download PDF Report”. If the Property Summary Information includes a parcel tag referencing a *Previous Review* please contact

PDSRecordRequest@bouldercolorado.gov to obtain information about previous approvals associated with the property.

Once you have reviewed the materials you may contact a Project Specialist at plandevlop@bouldercolorado.gov with specific questions related to the development restrictions associated with the approvals. The development limitations on this FAQ page may not apply to the property if a previous review exists.

Please be advised that even if the Previous Review parcel tag is not associated with the property there is a chance that additional development constraints apply to the property. If you know that a variance, planned unit development, site review or use review has been approved for the property, or it seems clear that the property does not meet the development requirements found on this page, please follow the steps in *How can I get the permit history from a property, planned unit development documents or a copy of a survey?* above.

How can I determine the lot size of a property?

Visit the Boulder County Assessor’s [Property Search](#) webpage. Once on the webpage, you will see a white text bar across the center/top of the screen that says “Enter search term...,” enter the property address into this text bar and hit enter on your keyboard. A nested menu will appear on the left-hand side of the screen. Click the section titled “Property”.

Look for the line item that says Est. Parcel Area: -> Square Feet. Please note that this number is for reference only and often does not reflect parcel size as accurately as a survey.

What are the setback requirements for the property?

First, determine the zoning district of the property, see *“How do I determine the zoning for a property?”* above. Navigate to TABLE 7-1 FORM AND BULK STANDARDS in [9-7-1, B.R.C. 1981](#). Locate the zoning district in the top row of the table. The setbacks will depend on the zoning district and whether the structure in question is principal or accessory. Principal buildings and uses can be found in the top section of the table; accessory buildings and uses are just below that. On the left-hand side of the table, the various types of setbacks are identified. Pay close attention to any footnotes listed in the setback descriptions in the left-hand column. To determine which side of the property is the front, side or rear yard, use the definition of *Yard, front, rear, and side* in [9-16, B.R.C. 1981](#) which states:

Yard, front, rear, and side means the open space between the buildings and the property lines at the front, rear, and sides of the property, respectively. On a corner lot, the open space adjacent to the shorter street right-of-way shall be considered the front yard. The rear yard is opposite the front yard, and the side yard is between the rear yard and the front yard. (See Figures 16-4 and 16-5 of this section.)

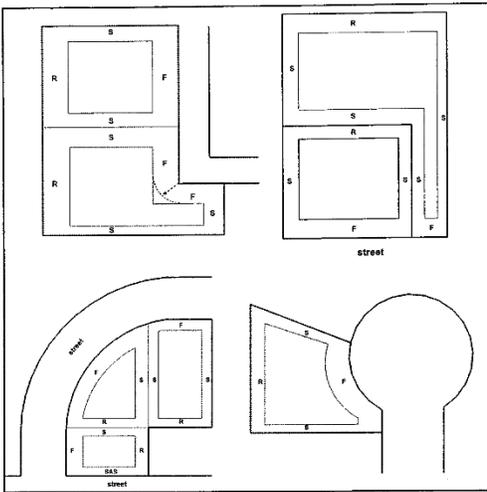


Figure 16-4: Yards for Irregularly Shaped Lots

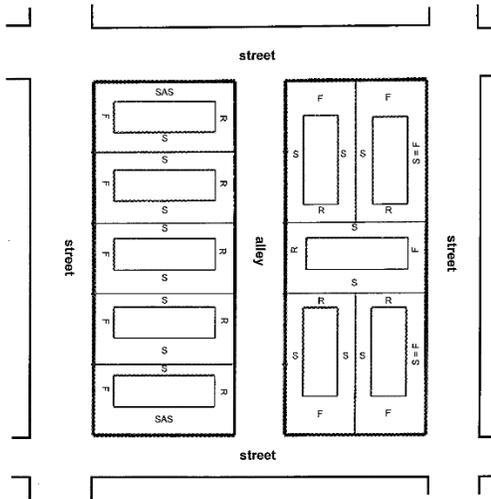


Figure 16-5: Front, Rear, and Side Yards

To the extent possible, setbacks of irregular lots will match the setbacks of adjacent lots.

- F: FRONT YARD
- R: REAR YARD
- S: INTERIOR SIDE YARD
- SAS: SIDE ADJACENT STREET

How can I determine the maximum allowable building coverage for a property?

First, determine the zoning district of the property, see *“How do I determine the zoning for a property?”* above. Navigate to [9-7-11, B.R.C. 1981 Maximum Building Coverage](#) and read through the *“Scope”* section to determine if building coverage limitations apply in the zone. Properties located within the RMX-1, RR-1, RR-2, RE, RL-1, RL-2 zoning districts can use the [Maximum Floor Area Ratio – Building Coverage Calculator](#) to perform the calculation.

Building coverage is defined in [9-16, B.R.C. 1981](#) as:

Building coverage means the maximum horizontal area within the outer perimeter of the building walls, dividers, or columns at ground level or above, whichever is the greater area, including, without limitation, courts and exterior stairways, but excluding:

- (1) Uncovered decks, stoops, patios, terraces, and stairways, all less than thirty inches high;

- (2) The outer four feet of completely open, uncovered, cantilevered balconies that have a minimum of eight feet vertical clearance below;
- (3) Up to three hundred square feet of a single-family detached residence front porch that is adjacent to a street;
- (4) Up to one hundred fifty square feet of additional porch area not located in the front yard for a single-family detached residence; and
- (5) One accessory building, no larger than eighty square feet in size and no taller than ten feet in height, associated with a single-family detached residence.

How can I determine the maximum allowable floor area for a property?

First, determine the zoning district of the property, see *"How do I determine the zoning for a property?"* above.

Navigate to [9-8-2, B.R.C. 1981 Floor Area Ratio Requirements](#) and read through the "Scope" section to determine if floor area limitations apply in the zone. Properties located within the RMX-1, RR-1, RR-2, RE, RL-1, RL-2 zoning districts can use the [Maximum Floor Area Ratio – Building Coverage Calculator](#) to perform the calculation.

Floor Area is defined in [9-16, B.R.C. 1981](#) as:

Floor area means the total square footage of all levels measured to the outside surface of the exterior framing, or to the outside surface of the exterior walls if there is no exterior framing, of a building or portion thereof, which includes stairways, elevators, the portions of all exterior elevated above grade corridors, balconies, and walkways that are required for primary or secondary egress by Chapter 10-5, "Building Code," B.R.C. 1981, storage and mechanical rooms, whether internal or external to the structure, but excluding an atrium on the interior of a building where no floor exists, a courtyard, the stairway opening at the uppermost floor of a building, and floor area that meets the definition of uninhabitable space.

How can I determine the minimum required open space for the property?

First, determine the zoning district of the property, see *"How do I determine the zoning for a property?"* above.

Navigate to [9-8-1, B.R.C. 1981 Schedule of Intensity Standards](#) and refer to TABLE 8-1: INTENSITY STANDARDS. If the minimum open space requirements for your property is 0, then open space does not apply.

Refer to section [9-9-11, B.R.C. 1981 Useable Open Space](#) for information about acceptable forms of useable open space.

How do I know if a specific use is allowed in a zone district?

First, determine the zoning district of the property, see *"How do I determine the zoning for a property?"* above.

Navigate to TABLE 6-1 USE TABLE in section [9-6-1, B.R.C. 1981](#). Here there are multiple expandable tables. The tables are broken up by use category. The use tables are organized with the zoning district listed along the top row of the table and use descriptions listed in the left-most column. When you locate the use in question and the applicable zoning district, find the box where they meet, and you will see either a letter or an asterisk. A key defining the asterisk and letters is provided below the last table and states:

A: Allowed use.

L: Limited use. See [Section 9-6-2](#), B.R.C. 1981, for review procedures.

C: Conditional use. See [Section 9-2-2](#), B.R.C. 1981, for administrative review procedures.

U: Use review. See [Section 9-2-15](#), B.R.C. 1981, for use review procedures.

*****: Use prohibited.

n/a: Not applicable; more specific use applications apply.

What are the requirements to establish an accessory dwelling unit (ADU)?

Please visit the city's [Accessory Dwelling Unit webpage](#) for more information.

What are the city's outdoor lighting requirements?

For information on the city's outdoor lighting ordinance and permitting requirements, please visit the [Outdoor Lighting Ordinance webpage](#).

Is the property in the floodplain?

Visit the [Flood Hazard Zones Map](#). Enter the address in the upper right-hand corner of the screen and hit *enter* on your keyboard.

Refer to sections [9-3-3](#), [9-3-4](#), [9-3-5](#), and [9-3-6, B.R.C. 1981](#) for regulations governing the zones of the floodplain including floodplain development permitting requirements.

Is the property in a wetland?

Visit the [stream, wetland and water body map](#). Enter the address in the upper right-hand corner of the screen and hit *enter* on your keyboard.

Refer to section [9-3-9, B.R.C. 1981](#) for regulations governing streams, wetlands and water bodies within the city, on city owned or managed land or impacted by city activities.

Is the property in a historic district?

Visit [emaplink](#). Once on this page, click the gray box next to the "Local Historic Districts" layer in the legend on the left-hand side of the page. Next, in the upper right-hand side of the screen find the search bar that defaults to "Enter Address" and type in the property address and hit *enter* on your keyboard. This will zoom to the property displaying the historic information, if available. You may click on the property a pop-up window will appear with more information.

Visit the [Historic Preservation webpage](#) for information including [FAQ's](#) and [Design Guidelines](#). Any proposal for an exterior modification of a building in a Historic District or an Individual Landmark must first go through a [Landmarks Alteration Certificate](#) (LAC) review. The LAC must be approved **prior** to submitting for building permit. The reviews cannot be performed concurrently.

Does this structure require a historic demolition review?

Demolition of a structure that is not historically designated, but is over 50 years old requires [Historic Preservation Demolition Review](#). This review is separate from the [Demolition Permit Application](#) to streamline the application and reduce confusion around the two processes. Refer to the [Boulder County Assessor's Property Search](#) to determine the year of construction.

Demolition means an act or process which removes one or more of the following.

- (1) Fifty percent or more of the roof area as measured in plan view;

(2) Fifty percent or more of the exterior walls of a building as measured contiguously around the "building coverage" as defined in this section; or

(3) Any exterior wall facing a public street, but not an act or process which removes an exterior wall facing an alley.

Refer to the definition in [section 9-16\(c\) of the B.R.C. 1981](#) for example exhibits.

Is the property in the wildland urban interface?

Please review the [Structure Protection Plan](#) on the [Wildland Fire webpage](#) to determine if the property is located within the urban interface zone and is subject to the ignition-resistant construction and material requirements of the [International Wildland-Urban Interface Code](#).

Does the project required a grading and drainage plan?

For properties with significant slope concerns or soils with mass movement, a grading and drainage plan designed by a Colorado licensed Professional Engineer must be provided for all new structures, horizontal expansions of existing structures and proposals that modify the existing grade of the property. A grading plan may also be required to ensure that the proposed development will not pose a hazard to persons, surrounding property, the public right of way or other public improvements.

To determine if the property has soils with mass movement potential, as designated by the City of Boulder, visit [emaplink](#). Once on this page, click the gray box next to the "Geologic Development Constraints" layer in the legend on the left-hand side of the page. Next, in the upper right-hand side of the screen find the search bar that defaults to "Enter Address" and type in the property address and hit *enter* on your keyboard. This will zoom to the property.

If a grading and drainage plan is required, a soils report may also be necessary. Please refer to "Does the project require a soils report?" below.

Does the project require a soils report?

A soils report is required for all new structures and for work on buildings that include additions to, or significant alterations of, existing foundations for properties with steep slope concerns, soils with mass movement or shrink/swell potential.

To determine if the property has soils with mass movement or shrink/swell potential, as designated by the City of Boulder, visit [emaplink](#). Once on this page, click the gray box next to the "Geologic Development Constraints" layer in the legend on the left-hand side of the page. Next, in the upper right-hand side of the screen find the search bar that defaults to "Enter Address" and type in the property address and hit *enter* on your keyboard. This will zoom to the property.

If a soils report is required, a grading and drainage plan may also be necessary. Please refer to "Does the project require a grading and drainage plan?" above.

When is a test for asbestos required?

Asbestos testing triggers are as follows:

- Residential Projects –32 sf of disturbed surfaces (walls, ceilings, floor), 50 linear feet of disturbed pipes, or 55 gallon drum in volume of waste produced;

- Commercial Projects – 160 sf of disturbed surfaces (walls, ceilings, floors), 260 linear feet of disturbed pipes, or 55 gallon drum in volume of waste produced.

Previously the Boulder County Health Department regulated asbestos testing. The regulation of testing is now part of the building permitting process.

What if asbestos containing materials (ACM) are identified through asbestos testing?

If testing reflects that there are no asbestos containing materials present, please provide a copy of the test report with the building permit application.

If testing reflects that there are asbestos containing materials that need to be removed, we will need a copy of the state issued asbestos mitigation permit or a copy of the state issued demolition approval notice (which tells us that the asbestos has been removed).

Will the project trigger the water meter to be upsized?

If a project proposes the addition plumbing fixtures, it may be necessary to increase the size of the water meter in order to handle the additional demand on the infrastructure associated with this addition. The [Water and Wastewater PIF Worksheet](#) can help determine whether or not a project will trigger a water meter to be upsized. Follow the instructions in Step 2 on page 1 of the worksheet to complete page 4 of the worksheet. The sum from column G on page 4 corresponds with the Maximum Fixture Unit Count values in the middle column of the table on page 3. The required meter size is listed in the left-hand column titled Water Meter Size.

Most single-family homes have 3/4" taps and some older properties have 5/8" meters. To check meter size, refer to the property's water utility bill.

How do I report a violation for building without a permit?

If the work appears to exceed the scope listed for work exempt from permit "*Do I need a building permit?*" above and a building permit placard is not posted on site, you can report the violation to our Code Enforcement team using [Inquire Boulder](#).

What are the City's roofing requirements?

Refer to the [Roofing Inspection and Insulation Guidelines for New & Existing Residential and Commercial Structures](#) for information about to prepare a solar shading analysis.

How do I prepare a solar analysis?

Refer to the [Solar Access Guide FAQs](#) for information about to prepare a solar shading analysis.

How can I schedule a construction waste documentation Inspection?

In order to schedule your construction waste documentation inspection, please upload recycling tracking documentation to the permit through the [CSS website](#). Once we see that new files have been uploaded, we will direct

them to the Zero Waste Reviewer who can then sign off the inspection. If the permit does not include a construction waste documentation inspection or related condition of approval, it is not necessary to provide this documentation.

How can I schedule a final site drainage inspection?

To schedule your final site drainage inspection, please send a request for the inspection to ROWinspectionrequest@bouldercolorado.gov. Please be sure to include the permit number and address in your request.

Is my view protected?

Boulder is a beautiful community, with breath taking views. However, the city does not have development regulations that protect views.