§ 160D-1110.1. Commercial and multifamily building permits for applications with sealed plans; third-party plan review alternatives; at-risk building foundation permits; at-risk building structure permits.

(a) Applicability. – This section applies to commercial and multifamily development project building permit applications that have plans and specifications that are complete and sealed for construction, as applicable, by a professional engineer licensed under Chapter 89C of the General Statutes or an architect licensed under Chapter 83A of the General Statutes.

(b) Pre-Submittal Meeting Option. – A local government must provide the option for an eligible building permit applicant to request and schedule within five business days of a request a pre-submittal meeting prior to applying for a building permit to discuss a building project and to determine whether the permit applicant possesses necessary plans and sufficient information the local government would require for building permit plan review. A building permit applicant is eligible to request a pre-submittal meeting under the following circumstances:

(1) The project plans and specifications for a building project are complete and sealed for construction, as applicable, by a professional engineer licensed under Chapter 89C of the General Statutes or an architect licensed under Chapter 83A of the General Statutes.

(2) The project plans and specifications for a building project are substantially identical to those that the permit applicant would submit with the building permit application.

(3) The building permit applicant has made best efforts to compile and prepare documents required by a local government, and other State or federal agencies, for the building project.

(4) The building permit applicant has determined whether an at-risk permit option will be utilized in accordance with subsection (h) of this section.

(c) Plan Review Time Line. – A local government shall complete its review of plans and specifications and issue a building permit decision to a permit applicant that has submitted necessary plans and sufficient information with a permit application within 45 days, unless a local government and a permit applicant otherwise agree. If a local government requests additional information or requires plan resubmission with changes during its review, after receiving requested information and changes from the permit applicant, a local government has up to 10 additional days to issue a building permit decision. Notwithstanding the 45-day limit in this subsection, a local government may issue a building permit decision within 60 days if a local government issues an at-risk building permit at the request of a permit applicant pursuant to subsection (h) of this section.

(d) Independent Third-Party Review to Assist Local Government. – A local government may utilize and contract with a licensed professional engineer or licensed architect certified under G.S. 143-151.13(f) to perform independent third-party plan review under this section, provided that the review time does not exceed the time frame prescribed by subsection (c) of this section.

(e) Independent Third-Party Review Election by Permit Applicant. – If a local government initially undertakes plan review of the submitted plans and does not issue a building permit decision or determines it is unable to complete plan review within the time frame prescribed by subsection (c) of this section, a permit applicant may subsequently elect to utilize and contract with a licensed professional engineer or licensed architect certified under G.S. 143-151.13(f) to perform an independent third-party plan review. Upon the local government's receipt of a completed plan review with certification required by subsection (f) of this section, the local government shall issue applicable building permits for the project within three business days and will refund or waive all applicable plan review and permit fees for the project upon issuance of the applicable building permits.

(f) Third-Party Review Certification Required. – A permit applicant that elects a third-party review under subsection (e) of this section shall provide the local government with a written certification signed by the plan reviewer that plans comply with applicable North Carolina State Building Codes and other applicable State and local laws. The certification shall be made on a form created by the local government.

(g) Conflicts of Interest. – A third-party plan reviewer shall avoid conflicts of interest in conducting independent third-party plan reviews under this section. Conflicts of interest include a plan reviewer having any financial interest in, or being employed, other than as a plan reviewer under this section, by a business that has a financial interest in the furnishing of labor, material, or appliances for the construction, alteration, or maintenance of, or any involvement in the making of plans or specifications for, the project subject to plan review.

(h) At-Risk Building Permit Options. – At-risk building permit options are available to an eligible building permit applicant that requested and attended a pre-submittal meeting in accordance with subsection (b) of this section to discuss a building project prior to permit application. An eligible permit applicant proceeding with an at-risk permit issued by a local government pursuant to this subsection assumes all risks of liability, and the local government is discharged and released from any liabilities, duties, and responsibilities attributable to the review, approval, or construction pursuant to that at-risk permit. In accordance with G.S. 160D-108(e), where multiple local development permits are required to complete a development project, a permit issued by a local government pursuant to this subsection is not an initial development permit for purposes of the vesting protections of G.S. 160D-108(e). The following at-risk building permit options are available:

(1) At-risk building foundation permit. – At the time of permit application, an eligible building permit applicant may request an at-risk building foundation permit authorizing a permit applicant to proceed with building foundation construction. A local government must issue an at-risk building foundation permit if a local government determines a permit applicant has submitted all necessary plans and sufficient information, as discussed at a pre-submittal meeting pursuant to subsection (b) of this section, and received all approvals necessary, for building foundation construction notwithstanding that other development approvals from the local government, or other State or federal agencies, for the project have not yet been obtained. For the purposes of this subdivision, a permit applicant must have received an approved erosion and sedimentation control plan in accordance with Article 4 of Chapter 113A of the General Statutes for land-disturbing activity at a building foundation construction site.

(2) At-risk building structure permit. – An eligible building permit applicant that has obtained an at-risk building foundation permit pursuant to subdivision (1) of this subsection may request the issuance of an at-risk building structure permit. A local government may issue an at-risk building structure permit authorizing a permit applicant to proceed with building structure construction if a local government determines a permit applicant has submitted all necessary plans and sufficient information, and received all approvals necessary, for building structure construction notwithstanding that other development approvals from the local government, or other State or federal agencies, for the project have not yet been obtained. Prior to issuance of an at-risk building structure permit, a local government may require a meeting with a permit applicant to discuss issues with submitted plans and information that a permit applicant would need to address prior to building structure permit issuance. For the purposes of this subdivision, "building structure

construction" includes the erection and installation of structural or framing members for exterior walls and roof assemblies.

(i) Manufacturer Information. – In the event the local government requires manufacturer specifications or manufacturer engineering information on an element, component, or fixture related to the submitted plans and specifications, a local government shall not delay or deny the issuance of applicable building permits based upon the receipt of specifications or manufacturer engineering information on an element, component, or fixture.

(j) Local Government Liability and Vested Rights. – A permit issued by a local government pursuant to this section shall not be construed to guarantee the issuance of further building permits, development approvals, or certificates of occupancy by a local government, or other State or federal agencies, that a project requires. A local government and inspection department are discharged and released from any liabilities, duties, and responsibilities imposed by this Article, or in common law, from any claim arising out of, or attributed to, plans subject to a third-party independent review pursuant to subsection (e) of this section. (2023-142, s. 2(a).)