



Administrative Procedures for Over the Counter Architectural Review

What is an Over the Counter permit?

An Over the Counter or OTC permit is the review and approval of a minor change to the exterior of a property (non-residential single-family or two-family use) that is handled at the Development Services front counter. These items are typically very minor in nature and may or may not be associated with a building permit.

Authority

Minor modifications to commercial and multifamily residential properties are typically subject to a discretionary Architectural Review application under Palo Alto Municipal Code (PAMC) Section 18.76.020(b)(3). The authority to exempt minor Architectural Review projects as an OTC project is contained within PAMC Section 18.76.020(b)(1)(B). The decision to grant an over the counter approval is an administrative determination and requires no hearing or notice.

Authority Reserved

Approval of such projects may be granted by the Planning Director. The Director has authority and discretion to determine if a project is exempt in accordance with 18.76.020(b)(1)(B). Projects that do not qualify as exempt will be processed as a Minor or Major Architectural Review, as appropriate, upon the filing of a complete application. The Director may delegate this authority.

Over the Counter (OTC) Approval Process

OTC approvals occur at the Development Center front counter located at 285 Hamilton Avenue. No appointment is required for OTC applications. OTC approvals will require an application form to be filled out in advance or at the counter. The application form is available at the following link: <http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/6491>. There is currently no fee for this OTC review. Applicants must provide sufficient information for staff to be able to make an informed decision. Please see the following link for the minor Architectural Review application submittal checklist to use as a guide for the materials that would also be needed for the OTC review and approval process: <http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/26107>. Applicants shall be prepared and include items such as photos, sections, sightlines, floor plans, site plans, elevation drawings, color renderings, color and material samples, etc. as necessary to facilitate OTC review. Digital copies of the plans are also requested to be provided at the time of review.

The examples above are not a complete list of items that may be exempted as “Over the Counter” projects. Similar projects may be exempted at the discretion of the Planning and Community Environment Director or their designee. For questions regarding the OTC process please contact the Planner on Duty at (650) 617-3117 or email at planner@cityofpaloalto.org.

The following projects typically qualify as an Over the Counter application:

- 1. Rooftop mechanical equipment:**
When a parapet or similar screening feature is being added or already exists and would clearly screen the new equipment from off-site views (equipment cut sheet required with the dba level listed) (site plan, line of site drawings, and elevation drawings are required to clearly demonstrate the new equipment will be screened from view.)
- 2. Window/door changes (additions or deletions):**
Like for like or substantially similar replacement of windows and doors on non-historic buildings. Photos of existing doors and/or windows must be provided along with details/elevation drawings for any new or replacement doors and/or windows.
- 3. Electric vehicle charging stations:**
(Parking requirements must be met after implementation and installation of any equipment-protecting bollards. The associated trenching for the electrical conduit must not harm existing parking lot and landscape trees) (Applicant must demonstrate compliance with the parking regulations for any new and existing parking spaces)
- 4. Minor modification of architectural elements:**
Minor changes to existing (non-historic) buildings. Site plans, building elevations, color renderings, and material samples will be required as necessary to make a determination. Changes could include but are not limited to roof materials, awnings, exterior siding, finish materials, architectural details, trim, lighting, etc. Additions of square footage would not qualify as an OTC project and would be subject to a formal Architectural Review application.
- 5. Wall Signs:** Wall mounted signs that are comprised of individual pin mounted letters made of metal may be exempted. The proposed wall signs must compliment the building design and be appropriately sized and no more than 50% of the area permitted by the code. If illuminated, halo illumination only and no extreme colors. Site plan, elevations, color renderings or photo simulations, sign drawings, and material samples required.
- 6. Minor changes to previously approved projects:** Staff would apply discretion to first ensure the change is minor and second to ensure the proposed change is appropriate for the building or site. Changes could include but are not limited to roof materials, awnings, exterior siding, finish materials, architectural details, trim, lighting, etc.
- 7. Minor site improvements:** i.e.: changes to parking lot, pathways, hardscape, benches, art work, site lighting, accessibility ramps and improvements, refuse enclosures, changes to building color, etc. (site plan and details required)
- 8. Minor landscape changes:** These changes would typically include items such as the replacement of one plant material for another, replacement of small turf areas with other plant material or ground cover/mulch, and other changes to planting and or hardscape layout. (site plan/landscape plan required, if water calculations are required based on the project scope, over the counter review would not be an option)