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What's Changed in Residential Building Codes Across Sacramento, Placer, and the Bay Area (2025–2026)

If you're planning a home addition, ADU, or new construction project in Northern California, you need to understand this:

The rules have changed—and they are still changing.

Over the past year, cities and counties across Sacramento, Placer County, and the Bay Area have updated their municipal codes and permit processes. Most of these changes are not optional. They are being driven by new California state laws that local jurisdictions are required to adopt.

Here's what actually matters to you.

1. The Biggest Shift: New 2025 Building Codes Are Now in Effect

As of **January 1, 2026**, nearly all jurisdictions in your region have adopted the **2025 California Building Standards Code**.

This includes:

- California Residential Code (CRC)
- California Building Code (CBC)
- California Electrical Code (CEC)
- California Plumbing Code (CPC)
- California Mechanical Code (CMC)
- California Energy Code (Title 24)



Where this applies:

- City of Sacramento
- Sacramento County
- Placer County
- San José
- Santa Clara
- Palo Alto
- Most Bay Area jurisdictions

What this means for your project:

- Plans must now meet **updated structural, energy, and safety requirements**
- Older templates or previous plan sets may no longer comply
- Energy calculations and construction details must match the new code cycle

Bottom line:

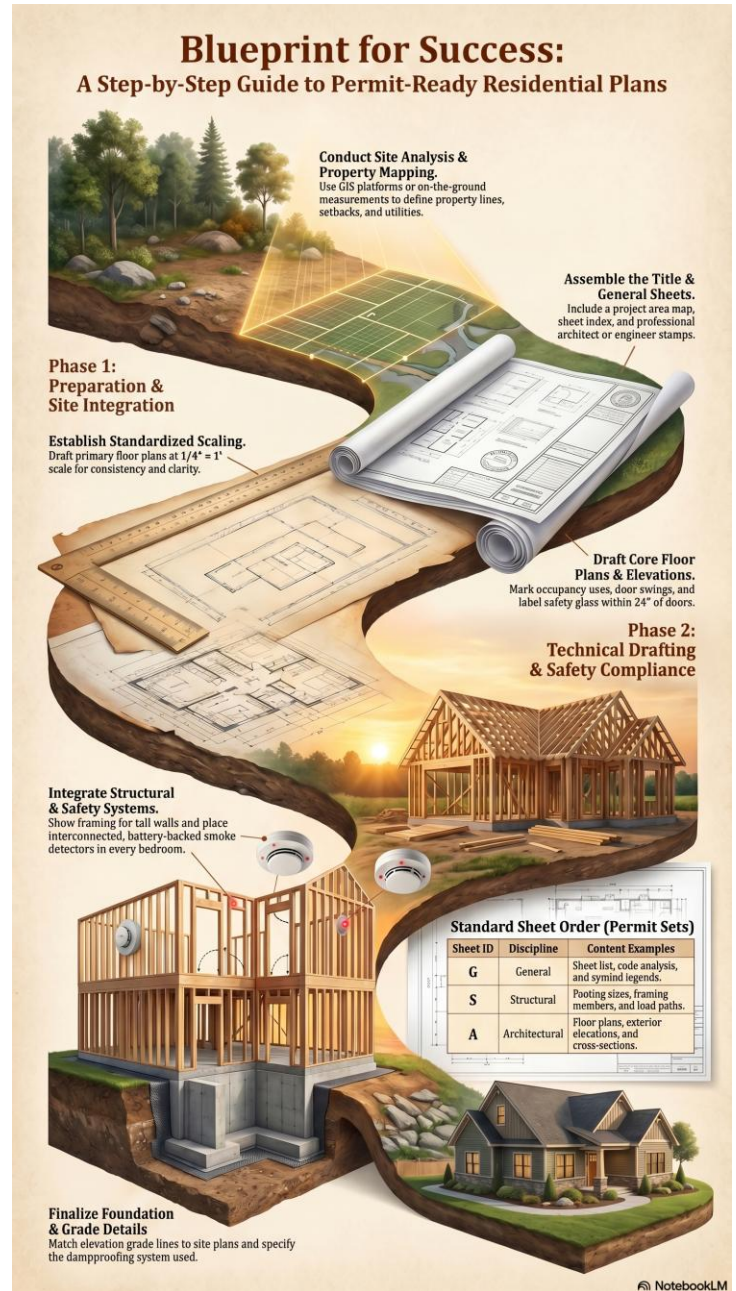
If your plans are not aligned with the 2025 code, they will be rejected.

2. ADU Rules Are Being Rewritten (And Not Always Correctly)

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) continue to be one of the fastest-moving areas of residential construction law.

Many cities have updated their local ADU ordinances—but not all of them are fully compliant with state law.

Key issue:



The California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) has recently reviewed multiple cities and counties and found **conflicts between local ordinances and state law**.

Jurisdictions flagged by HCD:

- Sacramento (City)
- Roseville
- Rocklin
- Santa Clara County

Common problems:

- Incorrect limits on number of ADUs allowed
- Improper size or height restrictions
- Requirements that delay or obstruct ministerial approval
- Conflicts with state-mandated approval timelines

What this means for your project:

- Some local rules may **not be enforceable**
- You may have **more rights than the city initially indicates**
- Incorrect interpretations can delay your permit unnecessarily

Bottom line:

Not all city ADU handouts are reliable. State law often overrides them.

3. ADUs Are Now a Ministerial Process (No Hearings, No Discretion)

In jurisdictions like Los Altos and many others, ADU approvals are explicitly defined as:

- **Ministerial**
- No public hearing required
- No discretionary review
- No neighborhood input process

What this means:

If your project meets code, the city is required to approve it.

Additional example:

- Los Altos has even reduced **ADU building permit fees to \$0** (trade permits still apply)

Bottom line:

The approval process is faster—but only if your plans are complete and code-compliant.

4. Some Cities Are Streamlining the Process Further

Several jurisdictions are taking additional steps to reduce permit timelines.

Examples:**Rocklin**

- “Permit-Ready ADU” program
- Pre-designed plans to reduce review time

Roseville

- Preapproved ADU plans (AB 1332 program)
- Still must meet local zoning requirements

Hayward

- Streamlined permit pathways for housing types
- Two-step application process for certain projects

Palo Alto

- Updated building and energy codes with local amendments
- Adjusted ADU rules to align with state requirements

Bottom line:

Some cities are making it easier—but only if you understand how to use their systems correctly.

5. Placer County Has Made Broader Code Updates

Placer County adopted a wider set of municipal code changes beyond just state code updates.

These include:

- ADU-related zoning updates
- Regulations for movable tiny homes
- Agricultural lot split provisions
- General zoning and development adjustments

What this means:

- More flexibility in some cases
- More complexity in others
- Greater need for project-specific interpretation

Bottom line:

Placer County is evolving quickly, and assumptions based on older rules will get you into trouble.

6. Bay Area Jurisdictions Are Tightening Code Compliance

Cities like San José, Santa Clara, and Palo Alto are:

- Enforcing the 2025 code cycle strictly
- Applying local amendments on top of state codes
- Updating ADU rules under state pressure

What this means:

- Less flexibility during plan review
- More emphasis on complete, accurate submittals
- Fewer opportunities to “fix it later”

Bottom line:

Expect tighter reviews and faster rejections if plans are incomplete.

7. What This Means for Your Project

Here is the reality most people miss:

1. Approval is faster—but less forgiving

Incomplete or incorrect plans will not move forward.

2. State law overrides local confusion

If a city is applying outdated or incorrect rules, it can be challenged.

3. Every jurisdiction still has local constraints

Even with state control, cities still regulate:

- Fire setbacks
- Utilities
- Drainage and grading
- Site-specific conditions

4. Experience matters more than ever

The difference between approval and delay often comes down to:

- Knowing current code cycles
- Understanding state vs. local authority
- Preparing a complete, compliant plan set from the start

Final Takeaway

The permitting process in California is changing in a fundamental way.

- The **state is standardizing approvals**
- Cities are **losing discretionary control**
- Projects that meet code are getting approved faster
- Projects that don't are getting rejected immediately

There is less room for interpretation—and less tolerance for mistakes.