



Procedures for Over the Counter Architectural Review

The Planning Division can grant Over the Counter (OTC) planning approvals for minor changes to existing building(s) or site improvements 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. The decision to grant an OTC approval is an administrative determination and requires no notice.

Over the Counter (OTC) Approval Process

All of the following information should be uploaded to the City's OPS portal and intake appointments are encouraged. Planning application form with owner's signature: <https://bit.ly/PAPanningAppForm>. Sufficient information for staff to be able to make an informed decision. Please use the minor Architectural Review submittal checklist as a guide for materials that may be needed for the OTC process: <https://bit.ly/minorARchecklist>. Applicants shall be prepared and include items such as photos, sections, sightlines, parking tables, floor plans, site plans, elevation drawings, color renderings, color and material samples, and other supporting documents may be required, as determined by staff, in order to process and approve these changes.

The following lists provides some illustrative examples of OTC projects. For questions, please contact the Planner on Duty at (650) 617-3117 or email at planner@cityofpaloalto.org.

The following projects DO NOT require a Planning application:

Assuming the following items are included in a Building permit, Planning staff will review the requested changes through the Building permit process without the need for an OTC application.

1. Replacement of rooftop mechanical equipment and new screening:

When a parapet or similar screening feature is being added, or already exists, and would fully screen any proposed equipment from off-site views. Submittals shall include the following, as determined by staff:

- Equipment cut sheets are required with the decibel level listed
- Multiple new pieces of noise producing equipment will require a noise report
- Roof screen shall be in scale with the building (maximum 10 feet)

2. Parking Lot Upgrades:

Parking lot changes, including the installation of electric vehicle charging stations and ADA improvements, that don't remove existing trees or modify the existing parking lot count.

- Applicants must demonstrate compliance with parking regulations for any new and existing parking spaces on a site based on the existing or proposed land use (See PAMC 18.52 and 18.54).
- Any associated trenching for electrical conduit shall not impact existing trees and/or tree roots in a way that would cause the trees to be removed or need to be replaced.
- Changes to parking lot circulation may require a Planning application.

3. Window/door changes:

Installation or replacement of windows and doors on non-historic buildings. Windows or door changes that substantially alter a building's appearance or create privacy impacts require a Planning application as determined by staff.

4. Like of Like changes:

Any like for like replacement such as, but not limited to: roof material, paint colors, siding, windows, doors, etc. Historic properties may require a Planning application.

The following projects REQUIRE a Planning application, but will be processed OTC:

Small changes, such as the items listed below, typically qualify for over-the-counter review. Prior to submittal, applicants should discuss proposed changes with staff.

1. Signs:

All sign types and sizes may be considered through the OTC process, except for freestanding signs located near a driveway (i.e. within the visibility triangle). The proposed sign(s) must conform with the size limitations identified in PAMC 16.20 and shall be compatible/compliment the building design and other signs on the same building/parcel. All wall and monument signs must have lettering that is at least 1-inch in depth; e.g. 0.5-inch sign letter depth and 0.5-inch pin mount or equivalent gap. All raceways shall be located behind a building wall. Proposed signs must meet the City's high quality material findings in conformance with PAMC 18.76.020.

2. Minor modification of architectural elements:

Minor changes to existing (non-historic) buildings and previously approved projects, including but are not limited to: roof materials, awnings, exterior siding (if similar to existing), finish materials, architectural details, changes to building color, trim, lighting, FAR increase equal or less than 50 sf, etc.

3. Minor site improvements:

These changes may include but are not limited to: changes to parking lots, pathways, hardscape, benches, art work, site lighting, accessibility ramps and improvements that result in minor landscape changes (no tree removal), etc.

- Conversion of existing vehicle parking to bike parking in conformance with PAMC 18.52.045(a)(2)

4. 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. Submittals shall identify the species and quantities of native, drought tolerant, and habitat forming species proposed. There must be a majority native species proposed with the remaining species either the drought tolerant or habitat forming categories. Tree removal and replacement is not an OTC application.

Changes that require 1) review by other departments, 2) an increase of over 50 square feet to floor area and/or lot coverage to the site, 3) require specific conditions of approval to be applied, or 4) substantially change the look and feel of a building or property, are not eligible for the OTC process.