

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a black pen, drawing on a set of architectural blueprints. The blueprints are spread out on a surface, showing various lines, rectangles, and text. The hand is positioned in the upper right corner, with the pen tip touching the paper. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the hand and the drawing process.

Do You Need an Architect?

The 12 Times Architectural Designs Are Required by State Law

1. Churches or other places of worship - Because it's considered a public building, anywhere that members of the community congregate must be designed by an architect.
2. Buildings Over 2,500 Square Feet. Any building (offices, restaurants, or medical centers) 2,500 square feet or larger that is erected, enlarged, or altered requires the services of a registered architect.
3. Schools or other education buildings - buildings intended for education (as classified by the building code adopted in the jurisdiction where the building will be located).
4. Multi-family residences - duplexes, triplexes, quadruplexes, apartments, townhomes (sharing common walls).
5. Interior Alterations - involving a change in occupancy type to a more stringent occupancy type; e.g., business to education or assembly.
6. Buildings Intended for Assembly Occupancy. Any building erected, enlarged, or altered that is intended for the assembly occupancy of people (as classified by the building code adopted in the jurisdiction where the building is located) regardless of size requires the services of a registered architect.
7. Buildings Intended for Education Occupancy. Any building erected, enlarged, or altered that is intended for use as an education facility (as classified by the building code adopted in the jurisdiction where the building is located) regardless of size requires the services of a registered architect.
8. Buildings Intended for Use as an Auditorium. Any building erected, enlarged, or altered that is intended for use as an auditorium regardless of size requires the services of a registered architect.

9. Buildings Intended for Use as a Church. Any building erected, enlarged, or altered that is intended for use as a church regardless of size requires the services of a registered architect.
10. Metal Buildings. In the case of metal buildings, it is permissible for the plans for the “shell” to be stamped by a licensed professional engineer; however, once occupancy type is established, the services of a registered architect are required for design of that building, if not otherwise exempted.
11. Change of Occupancy. If a building renovation project results in a change to a more restrictive occupancy type (such as business occupancy to assembly or education occupancy), an architect is required (regardless of building size).
12. Roofing Projects. An architect is not required on a roofing project consisting of an exact replacement necessary for maintenance of the building. If the pitch of the roof is to be altered or if a new roofing material will be used, the services of a registered architect and/or licensed professional engineer will be required to evaluate whether the building’s structural system will support the intended changes. The new roofing materials shall satisfy the industry-recognized assembly fire rating requirements corresponding to the rating of the existing roof assembly.

What Credentials does someone need to be a Registered Architect?

To become a Register Architect, you have to have a degree or combination of degrees from an institution accredited by the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB), plus additional practical training.

Next, the candidate must pass a professional examination to register with the State and receive a license.

Following state licensure, a firm must have a [Certificate of Authorization](#) (COA) and display the architect’s seal including the registration number. At this point, the firm is legally responsible for its projects and must follow all city and state laws, regulations, and build codes.

What is a Certificate of Authorization (COA)?

A Certificate issued to a firm entity (corporation, professional corporation, professional association, partnership, or limited liability company) which acknowledges it is practicing architecture as an entity in Alabama as opposed to being a sole practitioner.

Are all firms required to have a COA?

Yes, unless the architect is practicing as a sole proprietor.

What type of Insurance is required for architects?

General Liability: This coverage protects architects against a property damage or personal injury. If they accidentally ruin a piece of a client's furniture or if you accidentally trip in their office, they're insured.

Professional Liability: This policy covers the architect in the event of a professional error like failing to adhere to build codes or going back on a professional promise.

How do I ensure an architect's license is current?

You can perform a License Verification on the State of Alabama's Board of Architectures [website](#). Also remember it is illegal for anyone to call themselves and architect if they are not licensed. A drafter or architectural designer is not an architect.

Questions about the Architects Seal

What does an architect's seal look like?

Two inches in diameter, containing the registrant's name and registration number in the inner circle substantially resembling this image.



Can an architect prepare and seal engineering plans?

Generally, no; however, "incidental" engineering is allowed. Architects generally should not seal electrical, mechanical, plumbing, civil, or structural engineering drawings, unless the engineering is of a minor nature or an addition to the primary engineering system. An architect can hire under his scope of work the engineers needed for your project and coordinate all of their efforts.

Is there an electronic seal and can an architect use it on architectural plans?

Yes, but they do not have to sign their seal like engineers do.

Can a Registered Architect seal another registrant's standard design (prototypical) plans?

Yes, this is allowed under conditions outlined in Board for Registration of Architects Regulation 100-X-5-.08.

Is the registered architect required to place his/her signature on the seal or any part of the drawings?

Not under the registration law, but individual jurisdictions may require it.

Who can provide architectural services in Alabama?

Can a person registered in another state practice architecture in Alabama prior to receiving his/her Alabama registration?

No.

Can a person interview for a project, participate in a design competition, or submit a response to an RFP for architectural services prior to receiving his/her Alabama registration?

No.

How do I verify an architect's registration status in Alabama?

Visit the Board's web site at <http://www.boa.alabama.gov>. In the "Important Links" box, click on License Search and enter the person's last name or registration number. If access to the Internet is not available, call the Board office at (334) 242-4179.

Who do I contact if there is no architect on a project that requires one?

Alabama Board of Architects
770 Washington Avenue, #150
Montgomery, AL 36130-4450
www.boa.alabama.gov
(334) 242-4179 (office)

Who has jurisdiction over a building project if there is no local building official?

The Alabama Fire Marshal assumes jurisdiction in this case.

Contact the Fire Marshal's Office at (334) 241-4166 or FireMarshal@insurance.alabama.gov.

CHECK LIST

Consider the following areas when preparing to discuss your project with an architect. Use this checklist to gather and organize the information an architect will want to know.

Project

- Prepare a brief project description
- What is the location of project?
- Is there a preferred style?
- Material preferences
- Collect pictures of what you like in hardcopy or on social media such as Pinterest

Occupants

- Who will use the building?
- How many occupants?
- What are the special requirements of the occupants?

Spaces

- Identify any specific areas of the building (rooms, floors, etc.)
- How will spaces be connected?
- Does project require outdoor design (landscape, parking)?

Time and Money

- Is the project time sensitive?
- Are their constraints based on location?
- What is the estimated budget?

Other considerations

- Are there any special elements or considerations of the project?
- What other resources will participate in the project?

Thank you...

to Bill Whittaker Architecture for giving the City of Anniston permission to use this resource document. All content is property of Bill Whittaker Architecture and is not the property of the City of Anniston.



About the Author

Bill Whittaker is a licensed architect with over 20 years of experience. He actively participates in his community and serves on several boards. He also the current president for American Institute of Architects for the State of Alabama.



About Bill Whittaker Architecture

Architects are professionals trained in the art, engineering, and history of the built environment. We are trained problem solvers for complex design problems. Whether it is a complex roof design or if a building needs to maintain its historical look, a project can benefit from an architect's ability to visualize ideas three dimensionally.

We pride ourselves on delivering projects faster, more cost-effective, and with a process that considers a reduced environmental impact. With a small firm like us, your project has the personal attention of the principal of the company and not a less experienced employee. We care about your project and its success. With our size and attitude we can keep our fees low and very competitive.