

How To Obtain Planning Permission from the Town & Country Planning Division

Any development, building, engineering works, mining, or subdividing land, requires planning permission from the Town & Country Planning Division (TCPD) under the Town and Country Planning Act, Chap. 35:01. Applications flow through the DevelopTT online portal. There is no TCPD application fee, but a Municipal or THA-issued building permit and completion certificate follow the TCPD decision, those may carry fees.

Key Points

- Planning permission is required under the Town and Country Planning Act, Chap. 35:01.
- Applications flow through the DevelopTT portal (<https://www.developtt.gov.tt>).
- TCPD administers nine Planning Regions from four regional offices, Tobago is a dedicated region.
- Two application types: Outline Planning Permission (early feasibility) and Final Planning Permission (formal approval to proceed).
- There is NO TCPD application fee. Building permits from the Municipal Corporation / THA may carry fees.
- Wednesday public days at regional offices for pre-application consultations.
- A separate Municipal or THA building permit is required BEFORE construction starts, on top of TCPD approval.
- Refusals can be appealed to the Advisory Town Planning Panel (ATPP).

1. When you need planning permission

Under the Town and Country Planning Act, Chap. 35:01, planning permission is required for any 'development', a broad concept that includes:

- Building works, new construction, extensions, material alterations, changes of use.
- Engineering works, earthworks, road-building, dredging, coastal protection.
- Mining operations.
- Subdivision of land.

A very short list of works are 'permitted development' and do not require an application, most investor-scale projects will require permission. When in doubt, assume permission is required and confirm at a pre-application consultation.

2. Outline Planning Permission

For any material project, a resort, marina, factory, subdivision, the sensible starting point is Outline Planning Permission. Outline permission establishes at an early stage whether a proposed land use is consistent with existing policy and site development standards, and identifies the conditions that must be met before substantial costs are incurred.

Documents typically required:

- Deed or Certificate of Title for the land.
- Survey plan or cadastral sheet.
- Location sketch showing the site in its wider context.
- A description of the proposal, nature and scale of intended development.
- A conceptual plan, layouts, massing, key setbacks.

3. Final Planning Permission

Once outline permission is in hand (or where the project is small enough to skip the outline stage), the project moves to Final Planning Permission. Requirements vary by project type:

- Subdivisions, contour maps, final survey plan, drainage and bridge plans, road details, grading plans.
- Building operations, structural details, materials, elevations, floor plans, cross-sections, drainage plans.
- Retention applications (for works already built without permission), as-built drawings and an explanation of why retention is sought.

The TCPD may impose conditions and may require conditions to be discharged before construction can start.

4. The Tobago region

TCPD administers Tobago as a dedicated Planning Region with its own regional office. Applications for sites in Tobago are lodged through DevelopTT but land in the regional office. This has practical consequences:

- Pre-application consultations should be scheduled with the Tobago regional office.
- Where a project touches THA-vested state lands, the THA Division of Infrastructure and the THA Building Permit team will also be involved (see below).

- Coastal projects may require input from the Institute of Marine Affairs.
- Any proposal that impinges on the Main Ridge Forest Reserve or the North East Tobago UNESCO Biosphere Reserve will attract closer scrutiny.

5. Filing on DevelopTT

DevelopTT (<https://www.developTT.gov.tt>) is the online portal for planning permission applications and application tracking. The workflow:

1. Create an applicant account.
2. Select the appropriate application type (Outline / Final / Retention / Change of Use).
3. Upload the documents in the required formats and sizes.
4. Submit the application. There is NO fee at the TCPD stage.
5. Track the application status through the portal.
6. Respond to any requests for additional information within the deadline stated.

Public days are held every Wednesday at regional offices for pre-application consultations and technical advice, use them.

6. After TCPD approval, building permit

TCPD approval is a necessary but not sufficient condition to start construction. Before commencing works, the developer must also obtain a provisional building permit from the relevant Municipal Corporation (in Trinidad) or the Tobago House of Assembly's building permit function (in Tobago).

The Municipal / THA building permit process reviews the structural and safety aspects of the development. Fees are charged. Building permits usually specify compliance with the building code and any mitigations required.

Upon substantial completion, a final inspection is conducted and a Completion Certificate issued, that is the document that enables the property to be occupied or operated.

7. Refusals and appeals

If TCPD refuses an application, the applicant can appeal to the Advisory Town Planning Panel (ATPP). The appeal is a paper-based review that considers whether the TCPD decision was reasonable. Appeals must be lodged within the statutory time limit stated on the refusal notice.

An unsuccessful appeal can, in some circumstances, be followed by judicial review, but this is an expensive route and generally a last resort. Most refusals are more efficiently addressed by revising the application to meet the objections and resubmitting.

Sources

- Town & Country Planning Division, FAQs (tcpd.gov.tt)
- DevelopTT, Application Document Checklists
- Town & Country Planning Act, Chap. 35:01

This guide is an informational summary prepared by the Tobago Foreign Direct Investment Commission for the benefit of prospective investors. It does not constitute legal, tax, or financial advice. Legislation and administrative practice change from time to time, always consult a qualified attorney-at-law admitted in Trinidad & Tobago before acting on any of this material. Where a discrepancy exists between this guide and the underlying statute, the statute prevails.