

Construction Industry Communication #37

From: Amit Ghosh, Chief Building Official
Re: Primary and Secondary Service Distribution; Site Lighting Installation
Date: August 3, 2010

Background: Historically, primary and secondary electrical service has been provided and installed by the local utility companies and regulated by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO). In the late 1990's and early 2000's, the City of Columbus became aware that private contractors were beginning to supply and install distribution services in lieu of the utility companies. A preliminary procedure was established to allow this process to be performed within the intent of the code. The former Chief Building Official (CBO), Joseph F. Busch, permitted private contractors to perform this work per National Electric Safety Code (NESC) requirements in accordance with The National Electrical Code, Article 90-2 (c), "Special Permission". There were guidelines established on how this work was to be performed. Unfortunately, those guidelines were not adhered to and work was installed without any regulatory oversight.

Memorandum: At this time, the City of Columbus has established a written procedure for the installation of this work being performed by private contractors. The process is as follows:

- If not a utility or registered and overseen by the PUCO, the contractor must be licensed to perform work (licensed by State and registered with City of Columbus).
- Must ask for relief in writing of National Electrical Code (NEC) standards in accordance to exception provision in NEC 90-2 (F) to the Chief Building Official (CBO) for each site-specific project.
- Exceptions to NEC requirements will only apply to primary distribution if approved by CBO.
- Primary distribution shall be inspected by a Special Inspector in accordance with OBC 1705.21
- All site lighting being supplied from building services will be required to meet NEC standards with plan approval, permits and inspections by the electrical inspection department. Site lighting not fed from building services equipment is exempt per OBC 101.2 (19).

- Separate electrical permits will be required for site primary service, each building secondary service and site lighting supplied by building services.
- Design documents and the Statement of Special Inspections report shall be emailed to electricinfo@columbus.gov upon completion and prior to any electric building finals being obtained. No work shall be started until proper permits are obtained as outlined below.

Permits shall be obtained as follows:

1, 2 and 3 Family Dwellings

Primary Distribution/ Issued as a residential electrical “2 Inspection Permit” per current fee schedule.

Secondary Distribution (each building) / Issued as a residential electrical “Minor Work Permit” per current fee schedule.

Multi-Family Dwellings (4 or more Family)

Primary Distribution/ Issued as a multi-family electrical “2 Inspection Permit” per current fee schedule.

Secondary Distribution (each building) / Issued as a multi-family electrical “1 Inspection Permit” per current fee schedule.

Commercial/Mixed Use

Primary Distribution / Issued as a commercial electrical “2 Inspection Permit” per current fee schedule.

Secondary Distribution (each building) Issued as a commercial electrical “1 Inspection” permit per current fee schedule.

- Inspections for Primary Distribution will be performed by a Special Inspector in accordance with OBC 1704 and registered with the City of Columbus. The Special Inspector shall complete the Statement of Special Inspections from the City of Columbus website and email to electricinfo@columbus.gov, prior to issuance of a Certificate of Completion for the permit or a Certificate of Occupancy for any building served by the primary distribution. If changes are made in the field as compared to the design documents submitted, the report will note the design changes and the design engineer will note their approval. Any secondary inspections will be scheduled under the electric permit and performed by the City of Columbus Electrical Inspection department.

- Site lighting permit work supplied by building services will be designed, installed and inspected per NEC standards. Inspections will be performed by the electrical inspection staff of the Columbus Department of Building and Zoning Services.

If you have any questions regarding the intent or content of this communication, please contact the Electrical Inspection Supervisor, at 614-645-6076 or Chief Building Official, at 614-645-6416.

Revised 2/25/2026