



**REBUILDING LOS  
ANGELES: A GUIDE TO  
DESIGNING YOUR  
FUTURE READY HOME.**

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**BITTONI**

**At Bittoni Architects, we understand that rebuilding your home goes beyond bricks and mortar—it's about restoring a sense of security, comfort, and belonging. To those in the Palisades, Malibu, and Altadena who have experienced recent losses, we extend our deepest sympathies. We recognize the emotional toll of losing a home, and we are here to support you in turning this challenging time into an opportunity to create something meaningful.**

**This guide is crafted to provide a clear, personalized roadmap for navigating the design and construction process, with insights tailored to your unique needs. Rebuilding isn't just about restoring what's lost; it's a chance to innovate and enhance the way you live. You'll encounter critical decisions that shape your home, timeline, and budget, and we're here to help you every step of the way. Our guide outlines the possibilities and challenges that come with bringing your vision to life, with empathy and care at the heart of everything we do.**

# **GUIDANCE ON REBUILDING: UPDATES FROM CITY AND COUNTY AUTHORITIES**

Both the Mayor's Office and the Governor's Office have released Executive Orders related to rebuilding efforts. The specific impact on your property will depend on whether it falls under the jurisdiction of the City of Los Angeles or Los Angeles County. At this time, we are aware of the following directives. While LA County has not yet issued detailed guidance, it is expected to align with the city's approach. Generally, areas like Altadena are managed by LA County, while neighborhoods such as the Palisades are under the City of LA's authority.

## **Summary of Current Directives:**

### **Demolition Permit Waivers**

Permits for demolishing damaged or destroyed structures will be waived, though you'll still need to provide proper documentation of the site.

### **Debris Removal**

Multiple task forces will handle debris cleanup, which may include clearing foundations and retaining walls. Before any cleanup starts, it's advisable to consult a professional to

determine whether any structural elements can be salvaged, potentially lowering your rebuilding costs.

### **Eligibility Criteria for Expedited Review**

To qualify for the expedited plan review process, your rebuild must stay in roughly the same location as the original structure and not exceed 110% of the original height, size, or area. It's still unclear how this applies to additions like basements or ADUs. This policy will remain in effect for seven years.

### **Non-Conforming Structures**

If your property previously had features that don't meet current zoning codes—like smaller setbacks, larger floor areas, or greater height—you can rebuild them as they were, provided your new plans meet the eligibility requirements (i.e., within 110% of the original structure).

### **Accelerated Initial Plan Review**

Building department officials are directed to complete the first review of plans within 30 days. However, this fast-tracking applies only to the initial review and doesn't guarantee quicker timelines for subsequent reviews or approvals from other agencies. With current staffing challenges, many believe this timeline may be difficult to achieve. The full permitting process is still estimated to take at least 16 weeks.

### **Architect Self-Certification**

The city is considering allowing licensed architects to self-certify plans for eligible single-family homes, potentially speeding up the permitting process and even inspections.

### **Exemption from Discretionary Reviews**

Eligible projects will be exempt from discretionary reviews typically required in areas governed by specific plans or special regulations. However, neighborhood-specific reviews

outside of standard planning and building requirements may still apply.

### **Coastal Commission Exemption**

If your property falls within the coastal zone, eligible projects will be exempt from Coastal Commission review, which usually adds significant time to the permitting process.

### **Haul Route Requirements**

Projects that involve moving significant amounts of earth typically require approved haul routes, which can involve complex plans for truck traffic and road closures. The Department of Transportation and Department of Public Works are working on directives to exempt eligible projects from this requirement.

### **Electrical Code Requirements**

While current building codes require new structures to be fully electric and include solar panels, these requirements will be waived for eligible projects.

### **ADU Requirements Temporarily Relaxed**

For the next three years, you won't need an existing primary residence on-site to build an ADU. In coastal areas, only detached ADUs will still require Coastal Commission review.

### **Temporary Housing During Reconstruction**

During the rebuilding process, homeowners will be allowed to place tiny homes, RVs, modular structures, or mobile homes on-site for up to three years or as long as the building permit is active.

### **Incentives for Fire-Resistant Homes**

The state is exploring incentives, such as tax breaks or financial support, to encourage "home hardening" — the use of

fire-resistant materials and design features to improve a home's resilience to wildfires.

### **Senate Bill 9 (SB9) Implications**

Senate Bill 9, passed in 2022, allows homeowners to add up to two single-family homes on lots zoned for single-family use. When combined with ADU allowances, a single lot could potentially have up to four units. No current directives modify SB9 provisions.

# **KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

Starting a new construction project brings up several important questions that will guide the process from concept to completion. The first questions are often **“What will this cost?”** and **“How long will it take?”** While these are fundamental concerns, the answers depend heavily on the decisions you make at each phase of design and construction.

Early alignment of your goals, assembling a trustworthy and experienced team, and realistic planning of scope, budget, and timelines are crucial steps to setting your project on the right path. Below are essential questions to help you navigate the process effectively.

## **Defining Your Goals**

- What do you hope to achieve with this project?
- Which factors are most important to you: fire resistance, functionality, aesthetics, quality, budget, or timeline?
- How do you envision your daily life in this home?
- Are you planning to build just a primary residence, or will you include additional structures like an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)?
- Beyond square footage and bedroom count, what other aspects of the home matter to you (e.g., natural light, outdoor space, flexible living areas)?
- Are you interested in incorporating sustainable features or other lifestyle elements like smart home technology?

## **Assembling the Right Team**

- Are you already working with any professionals, and if so, have they started their work?
- What type of agreements or contracts do you have in place with your current team members?
- Are you consulting with other architects, contractors, or consultants to compare approaches?
- Do you understand the roles of the additional team members you may need, such as structural engineers, civil engineers, or landscape architects?

## **Strategic Planning**

- Where will you live while your home is under construction?
- How involved do you want to be throughout the project, and do you have the time to manage a process that can be quite time-consuming?



- Who will be responsible for making key decisions, and how will those decisions be made (individually, as a family, or with professional guidance)?
- What is your budget, and how flexible is it? Are you factoring in contingencies for unexpected costs or schedule changes? Have you considered potential delays due to permitting, contractor availability, or material shortages, and built buffer time into your schedule?

# REBUILDING OPTIONS

The rebuilding process is continuously changing as new regulations and procedures emerge. As of this guide's creation, there are at least four main approaches to consider when planning your rebuild. Each option comes with its own set of variables that can affect the timeline, costs, and how well the final outcome aligns with your personal goals. Below is an overview of these paths, along with their potential benefits and challenges.

## **Rebuilding Within 110% of the Original Structure's Size**

- Qualifies for faster initial plan reviews.
- May benefit from relaxed building and zoning code requirements.
- Exempt from Coastal Commission oversight.
- Allows for reconstruction of previously non-conforming features, such as reduced setbacks or oversized floor areas.

- However, timelines and requirements from other agencies are still uncertain.

### **Expanding Beyond 110% of the Original Structure's Size**

- Provides the opportunity to design a fully customized home tailored to your lifestyle.
- Will undergo standard plan reviews, which could take longer due to current backlogs.
- Must meet all current building and zoning code requirements.
- Subject to reviews under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and Coastal Commission regulations.
- Likely to involve a more complex design process, additional consultants, higher design fees, extended permitting timelines, and increased construction expenses.

### **Using Pre-Designed or Standardized Plans**

- While not yet confirmed, standardized plans are expected to qualify for expedited permit reviews.
- Can lead to savings in both design and permitting phases.
- Offers the advantage of predictable construction costs from the outset.
- However, this option limits customization in design and layout.

### **Building an ADU as a Temporary Primary Residence**

- Current directives allow for the construction of ADUs without an existing primary residence, meaning an ADU can serve as a livable structure until the main home is built.

- This approach may reduce permitting time and costs.
- Modular or prefabricated ADU options could further shorten construction timelines.
- Keep in mind that the ADU can only serve as the primary residence for up to three years.

# ASSEMBLING YOUR PROJECT TEAM

Choosing the right team is essential to the success of your rebuild. Knowing the specific roles and responsibilities of each professional involved will help you select the right people, ensuring they align with your goals and meet your project's needs. Below is an overview of the key team members, including which roles are typically required.

## **Key Team Members:**

### **Architect**

An architect, licensed in the State of California, will be your primary collaborator and project leader during the design phase. They will work closely with you to understand your goals, translating them into a cohesive design that reflects your vision. The architect will also manage the permitting process with various agencies, including the building department, and produce detailed construction drawings. Additionally, they coordinate with other consultants, such as structural engineers, and help monitor the project's timeline and budget. While their role continues into the construction phase, the general contractor becomes the lead at that point. Hiring an architect is strongly recommended, although

California law does not require a licensed architect to stamp plans for single-family homes under two stories.

### **General Contractor**

Once construction begins, the general contractor takes over as the project lead. It's advisable to hire a general contractor midway through the design process—after the design is finalized and initial coordination with engineers is complete, but before submitting plans for permit approval. This approach helps the contractor begin budgeting and construction planning early, which can improve efficiency and cost management.

### **Land Surveyor**

A land surveyor, licensed to practice in California, conducts a property survey that defines the lot boundaries, existing structures, easements, and topographical features. Although the city may waive this requirement for flat, rectangular lots, most projects will need a survey to move forward.

### **Structural Engineer**

The structural engineer designs the framework and structural systems of your home. They create a separate set of structural drawings required for both permitting and construction. A structural engineer's stamp is mandatory before a building permit can be issued.

### **Civil Engineer**

A civil engineer is generally required if your project involves significant earth-moving activities, hillside construction, or the installation of retaining walls. For flat lots with standard conditions, a civil engineer may not be necessary.

### **Soils Engineer**

If your property is on a slope, in a special grading area, or involves substantial excavation, a soils engineer will be

necessary. They conduct site tests to assess the soil's bearing capacity and produce a report with recommendations for the structural and civil engineers. This soils report must go through a separate approval process with the grading department.

### **Landscape Architect**

Depending on the scope of your project, a licensed landscape architect may be required. If you're interested in designing landscaping that helps mitigate fire risk, it's beneficial to hire someone experienced in fire-resistant design as well as aesthetic landscape planning.

# **DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION JOURNEY**

The process of designing and constructing your home unfolds in several distinct phases. Each stage includes specific goals and tasks that gradually shape your project from concept to completion. While the process typically includes seven phases, the sequence and focus may vary depending on your project's complexity and personal goals.

### **Pre-Schematic Design Phase**

This initial stage is ideal for those still exploring different possibilities for their property. Whether you're considering maximizing the potential of the site, adding features like an ADU or a pool, or just testing different layouts, the architect will develop multiple options. These are usually presented as

site plans or 3D models, showcasing various scenarios with differing costs, timelines, and scopes.

### **Schematic Design Phase**

If you already have a vision for how your home will fit on your lot—or you've chosen a layout from the pre-schematic phase—you can proceed to schematic design. Here, the architect creates basic sketches, 3D models, site plans, and floor plans that show the building's layout and massing (its overall height, bulk, and shape). Inspiration images and visual references are also compiled to help define the aesthetic direction. Typically, three options are created, with one selected to refine further.

### **Design Development Phase**

At this stage, the architect will refine the chosen design, working closely with structural engineers and other consultants to coordinate every aspect of the project. This is one of the most detailed phases, where floor plans are finalized, finishes and materials are selected, and building systems are integrated. The phase concludes with the preparation of a permit set, which will be submitted for building department review.

### **Construction Documents Phase**

This final design phase focuses on producing comprehensive construction documents. The architect and consultants finalize all project details, incorporating any revisions required by the permitting authorities. These documents serve as both a construction guide and part of the contractual agreement with the general contractor. This phase can often overlap with the permitting process to streamline the timeline.

## **Permitting Phase**

This phase begins with submitting the finalized plans to the building department. A plan checker will review the drawings and provide comments. The architect and consultants will address these comments, often requiring multiple rounds of revisions and back-and-forth communication. While the city has expedited certain aspects of this process, approvals from other agencies—such as the LA Fire Department, Bureau of Engineering, and Department of Water and Power—may still take time. Once all feedback is addressed, the building permit will be issued.

## **Bidding Phase**

During this stage, you'll solicit bids from general contractors based on the design development drawings. Some homeowners prefer to wait until permits are approved to ensure any necessary changes are reflected in the final drawings. However, for more straightforward projects, it's common to proceed with bidding while awaiting building department feedback, minimizing delays.

## **Construction Phase**

Once construction begins, the general contractor takes the lead role. The architect remains involved in a supportive capacity, answering questions from the contractor and making site visits to ensure the construction aligns with the design intent. The architect also helps coordinate with other consultants as needed throughout the construction process.

# PROJECT TIMELINE OVERVIEW

Several factors influence the timeline of your project, including the complexity of the design, the selected rebuilding path, and agency approval processes. Below is an estimated timeline for each phase:

- **Pre-Schematic and Schematic Design:** Typically takes 1–3 months to explore options and finalize basic layouts.
- **Design Development:** Due to extensive coordination and preparation for permitting, this phase usually spans 2–4 months.
- **Construction Documents:** Often overlapping with permitting, this phase takes about 1.5–3 months.
- **Bidding:** Depending on contractor availability and the level of detail required, this can take 1–3 months. It may run concurrently with other phases or be completed beforehand if budget constraints are tight.
- **Permitting:** While some permits are expedited, others can be unpredictable. Standard rebuilds may take 3–6 months, while projects requiring Coastal Commission review could extend 12–24 months.
- **Construction:** Custom homes ranging from 1,500 to 4,000 square feet typically take 10–24 months to complete, depending on factors like site access, material availability, and project complexity.



# UNDERSTANDING PROJECT COSTS

When planning your rebuild, it's essential to consider two primary categories of expenses: **hard costs** and **soft costs**.

- **Hard costs** refer to the tangible expenses related to construction, such as labor and materials.
- **Soft costs** include professional fees (architects, engineers), permits, and taxes.

Cost estimates are often expressed as a percentage of the hard costs, providing a rough guideline early in the process. Your architect can offer a ***Rough Order of Magnitude (ROM)*** estimate based on initial design concepts, but precise costs will only become clear during the bidding phase when contractors submit proposals.

For budgeting purposes, assume hard costs start at approximately **\$550 per square foot** for a single-story home and **\$600 per square foot** for a two-story home, using basic materials like drywall interiors and stucco exteriors. Projects involving hillside lots or premium materials will generally incur higher costs.

## Architect

Architectural fees generally range from **8% to 15%** of the hard construction costs. The exact percentage depends on the project's size, complexity, and the architect's reputation and scope of services. Factors like hillside construction, coastal

regulations, additional zoning requirements, or high-end materials and finishes can also influence the fee.

Architects typically structure their fees in one of the following ways:

- **Percentage of Construction Costs:** This is a common method where the architect's fee is a percentage of the total hard construction costs. This percentage may adjust based on the project's complexity or scale.
- **Fixed Fee:** A lump sum agreed upon at the start of the project, based on an estimated scope of work. This approach works well when the project scope is clearly defined from the outset.
- **Hourly Rate:** Some architects charge by the hour, especially for smaller projects, consultations, or additional services beyond the original contract.
- **Hybrid Approach:** A combination of methods, such as charging a fixed fee for initial phases (like schematic design) and a percentage for later phases tied to construction costs.

The choice of fee structure often depends on the project's size, complexity, and the client's preference for predictability or flexibility in billing.

### **General Contractor**

The general contractor (GC) will charge fees for overhead and profit on top of the hard construction costs. These typically range from **10% to 20%** of the hard costs. The final percentage depends on factors like the project's complexity, size, and the contractor's experience and reputation. High-end

projects or challenging site conditions may lead to higher GC fees.

### **Structural Engineer**

Structural engineering fees typically fall between **5% and 10%** of the hard costs. These fees are influenced by the project's size, scope, and complexity. More intricate designs, such as those involving unusual structural systems or challenging site conditions, will lead to higher fees.

### **Permit Fees and Taxes**

Permit fees usually account for **5% to 10%** of hard costs in a standard plan review process. However, additional fees may apply if your project requires reviews from multiple agencies, such as environmental or coastal commissions. It remains uncertain whether the city will waive any permit fees for rebuild efforts.

### **Civil Engineer**

If your project involves grading, retaining walls, or drainage systems, civil engineering fees will generally range from **\$8,000 to \$15,000**. Larger, more complex projects or hillside construction will result in higher fees.

### **Land Surveyor**

A property survey typically costs around **\$4,000** for a standard-sized, flat lot. If your lot is larger, located on a hillside, or has complex boundaries, the cost will increase. In some cases, particularly for flat, rectangular lots, a survey may not be required.

## **Soils Engineer**

For projects on hillsides or those requiring substantial earthwork, a soils engineer will assess the site's soil conditions and bearing capacity. Budget **\$5,000 to \$8,000** for their services, though this can vary depending on the site's complexity and the size of your lot.

## **Landscape Architect**

The cost of hiring a landscape architect varies significantly depending on the project's scope, site size, and complexity. Factors like fire-resistant landscaping, hillside design, or intricate outdoor features will increase the overall fee.

**We are here to help.**

**We understand that rebuilding can feel overwhelming, but it's also an opportunity to create something even better—more sustainable, resilient, and reflective of your vision for the future. Our goal with this guide is to offer not just information, but also a sense of clarity and confidence as you navigate this journey. We hope it has been a helpful starting point. If you have questions, need more detailed guidance, or simply want to discuss your rebuild, we're here to support you every step of the way.**

**Please don't hesitate to reach out—we'd be honored to help.**

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