OTTAWA KITCHEN RENOS

Permits & Inspections

Which kitchen jobs the City of Ottawa exempts from a building permit, which are on its permit list, fees and heritage buildings

8 Expert Answers from Kitchen Reno IQ

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Q1

Like-for-like kitchen faucet swap: does Ottawa want a permit?

A like-for-like faucet swap does not land on the City of Ottawa's permit list. The City's plumbing line covers "alterations, additions or extensions to a plumbing system", and it carves out an explicit exception: "except replacing existing fixtures." A faucet replacement in the same location, with no change to the supply lines or drain, falls within that exception.

The City's exempt list also covers "replacing kitchen or bathroom cabinets (provided plumbing fixtures remain in same location)", which confirms the City's general approach: fixtures staying put do not trigger the plumbing permit line. The City does add that even exempt projects "must still comply with the Ontario Building Code and any applicable law."

One thing worth checking before the work starts: if your home is a designated Heritage Building or sits in a Heritage District Overlay, the City says those properties "are not subject to exemptions" and the owner contacts the City first. For a standard residential kitchen outside those designations, a like-for-like faucet swap is outside the permit requirement as the City writes it.

If you are hiring someone to do the work, ask the contractor in writing what the scope covers: shutting off the supply, removing the old faucet, installing and testing the new one, and confirming no supply lines or drain connections are being moved or extended. That last point matters, because any extension or alteration to the plumbing system does bring the permit line back into play.

When you have two written quotes in front of you, set them side by side and check that each one names the same scope by component, confirms the faucet location is unchanged, and states clearly who is responsible for pulling any permit if the scope turns out to be broader than a straight swap.

Q2

Does a heritage house in Sandy Hill get the cabinet exemption?

Sandy Hill has streets that fall within a Heritage District Overlay, and the City of Ottawa says that buildings in a Heritage District Overlay "are not subject to exemptions." That means the cabinet exemption the City lists for "replacing kitchen or bathroom cabinets (provided plumbing fixtures remain in same location)" does not automatically apply to your house.

The first step is to contact the City's Building Code Services to find out whether your property is in a Heritage District Overlay or is individually designated. Those are two different situations, and the answer changes what you need to do before any cabinet work starts. If your property is subject to heritage protections, the City's guidance is that the owner contacts the City first, before the work begins.

Even where the exemption does apply to an ordinary house, the City says exempt projects "must still comply with the Ontario Building Code and any applicable law." So the exemption removes the permit requirement, not the obligation to meet the Code.

One other thing worth noting: countertops are not named on either the City's exempt list or its permit list. The cabinet line is the closest entry, but the City has not said it covers countertops. If your job includes a new countertop, that is another item to raise when you call Building Code Services.

Before work starts, make sure you have a written contract that sets out the full scope, the price broken down by component, and the start and completion dates, so there is no dispute later about what was agreed.

Q3

Does the Ottawa permit fee use the whole kitchen's value?

The City's 2026 fee schedule sets the rate at $12.75 per $1,000 or part thereof of the "assessed valuation of the work", with a minimum of $117.00. The schedule defines construction value as "the total value of all materials, labour, overhead and professional fees for the project". What the City means by "the project" when a kitchen job mixes permit-required work with exempt work is something we did not find answered in the fee schedule itself.

The practical question is whether the City values the whole kitchen renovation or only the portion that triggered the permit. For example, a job that moves a sink (which needs a permit under the plumbing line) and also replaces cabinets (which the City lists as exempt) could be valued either way. The fee schedule does not say, and the answer may depend on how the application is submitted and what the City's Building Code Services asks for.

The submission requirements say floor plans must show plumbing fixture locations, but the schedule is silent on how the City separates exempt from permit-required costs when both are part of the same project.

The most direct way to get a clear answer is to call the City's Building Code Services before the permit application goes in, describe the full scope of the work, and ask how the construction value is calculated for a job that includes both permit-required and exempt components. That conversation also confirms whether a single application covers all the permit-required parts of the job.

Q4

Is a plumbing-only permit cheaper for an Ottawa kitchen sink move?

Moving a sink is on the City of Ottawa's permit list under "Plumbing - alterations, additions or extensions to a plumbing system (except replacing existing fixtures)." The City's 2026 fee schedule sets a flat rate for that category: "Plumbing work only - where work includes plumbing only $117 per application."

That flat $117 fee applies when the permit covers plumbing alone. If the sink move is part of a broader renovation that also includes structural work, the permit for that other work is calculated separately at $12.75 per $1,000 or part thereof of the assessed valuation of the work, with a minimum of $117. The City's fee schedule says construction value "is based on the total value of all materials, labour, overhead and professional fees for the project." Whether the City treats a combined job as one application or two, and how it values the work, is something to ask the City's Building Code Services before the work starts.

On cost, published 2025-2026 Ottawa guides put moving a sink at about $1,500 to $5,000, with more for long runs, slabs or venting changes. The permit fee is a small, fixed part of that total; the plumber's labour and materials make up the rest.

A few things worth confirming in writing before the work starts:

- Which permit applications are needed and who pulls them (the City's FAQ says both the owner and the contractor are equally liable under the Ontario Building Code Act)
- Whether the scope is plumbing only, or whether opening a wall or other structural work is also involved
- The written payment schedule

Ask the City's Building Code Services whether your specific scope qualifies for the $117 plumbing-only application or whether additional permit categories apply.

Q5

Ottawa building permit fee for a kitchen renovation: how much?

On the 2026 schedule, the City of Ottawa sets the rate for alterations and renovations at $12.75 per $1,000 or part thereof of the assessed valuation of the work, with a minimum fee of $117.00. If the permit covers plumbing work only, the fee is $117.00 per application.

The City defines the construction value as the total value of all materials, labour, overhead and professional fees for the project. That means the fee base is not just materials or just the cabinet budget; it covers everything the permit

touches. Ask the City's Building Code Services how the value is set for your scope before the work starts.

Which parts of a kitchen renovation need a permit also shapes the fee. The City's permit list includes adding or removing walls where that creates different room sizes or uses, and plumbing alterations, additions or extensions to a plumbing system, except replacing existing fixtures. Replacing cabinets where the sink stays in place is on the City's exempt list. A job that is entirely exempt work carries no permit fee at all. Whether the City values the whole kitchen or only the part that needs the permit is something we did not find stated; ask the City how it calculates the fee for your combination.

A few things the fee schedule does not answer on its own: whether a new duct through an exterior wall, a new gas line or a range hood installation needs a permit is not named on either the City's exempt or permit list. For any of those, ask the City's Building Code Services before the work starts.

The Building Code Act says no person shall construct unless a permit has been issued where one is required, and the City says both the owner and the contractor are equally liable under the Ontario Building Code Act. So confirming what is and is not permit-required for your job is worth doing before any work begins, not after.

Electrical work in a kitchen is an ESA notification, not a City permit, and gas work is regulated by TSSA; those carry separate requirements.

Before any contractor starts, ask them to put the full payment schedule in writing so you know exactly what is due at each stage of the job.

Q6

New kitchen flooring in a Nepean house: building permit or not?

"New flooring" is on the City of Ottawa's exempt list, its projects not requiring a building permit, so new kitchen flooring on its own sits on that list. The City adds that exempt work "must still comply with the Ontario Building Code and any applicable law, such as the Zoning By-law".

Two situations change the answer:

- If the house is a designated heritage building or sits in a Heritage District Overlay, the City says it is "not subject to exemptions", so contact the City first.
- If the flooring is part of a bigger kitchen job, the other parts are checked on their own. Moving the sink is "Plumbing - alterations, additions or extensions to a plumbing system (except replacing existing fixtures)", and "adding or removing walls, i.e., creating different room sizes and/or uses" is on the permit list too. Replacing

cabinets with the plumbing fixtures in the same location is exempt.

In an older house, Health Canada advises hiring a professional to test for asbestos before renovating or remodelling, and lists "floor and ceiling tiles" among older materials that may contain it. If a professional finds asbestos, Health Canada says to hire a qualified asbestos removal specialist to remove it safely. Testing and removal are covered on ottawaabatement.com.

The flooring itself, from materials to installation, is covered on ottawafloorinstall.ca, and backsplash tile on ottawatiling.com.

If the flooring is part of a kitchen contract signed at your home, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 says an agreement over $50 must be in writing and delivered to you, and you can cancel it without any reason within 10 days of receiving your written copy.

Before you sign, have the quote say whether the old flooring comes out and who tests it in an older house.

Q7

Painting kitchen cabinets: on Ottawa's exempt list?

"Painting and decorating" is on the City of Ottawa's exempt list (its projects not requiring a building permit), and painting kitchen cabinets, with nothing else changing, sits on that line. The cabinet line on the same list, "Replacing kitchen or bathroom cabinets (provided plumbing fixtures remain in same location)", is about replacing them.

The City adds one condition for every exempt project: it "must still comply with the Ontario Building Code and any applicable law, such as the Zoning By-law".

Two situations change the answer:

- If the house is a designated heritage building or sits in a Heritage District Overlay, the City says it is "not subject to exemptions", so contact the City before starting.
- If the painting is part of a bigger kitchen job, the other parts are checked against the City's lists on their own. Moving the sink is "Plumbing - alterations, additions or extensions to a plumbing system", and "adding or removing walls, i.e., creating different room sizes and/or uses" is on the permit list too.

In a house built before 1960, Health Canada says the home probably contains lead-based paint, and says not to use sanders, heat guns or blowlamps to remove lead-based paint. Lead and asbestos testing and removal are covered on ottawaabatement.com, and cabinet painting itself, from preparation to finishes, on ottawapaintcontractors.com.
We found no Ontario or City of Ottawa licence for cabinet painting as such. Electrician and plumber are compulsory trades in Ontario, which matters only if the job also includes wiring or plumbing.

If the agreement includes an estimate, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 says the supplier "shall not charge the consumer an amount that exceeds the estimate by more than 10 per cent". A quote for painting should say whether the doors, the boxes or both are included.

Before the work starts, get the scope and the price in writing, with the payment schedule.

Q8

Replacing kitchen cabinets, sink staying put: permit-exempt under Ottawa's list?

The City of Ottawa's list of projects that do not need a building permit includes "Replacing kitchen or bathroom cabinets (provided plumbing fixtures remain in same location)". New cabinets with the sink left where it is fit that wording.

The City adds that exempt projects "must still comply with the Ontario Building Code and any applicable law, such as the Zoning By-law". For cabinets over a cooktop, Ontario's Building Code sets framing, finishes and cabinetry directly above the cooktop at not less than 750 mm above the burners or elements, or 600 mm if they are noncombustible or protected by a metal hood that projects 125 mm beyond them (9.10.22.2). These are minimums for new work; ask the City how they apply to your renovation, and check the range's installation instructions, which may require more.

Three changes take a job off that exempt line or add a separate step:

- Moving the sink, or adding one, is "Plumbing - alterations, additions or extensions to a plumbing system", which is on the City's permit list.
- New under-cabinet lights or outlets are an Electrical Safety Authority notification, not a City permit.
- A new range hood duct through an outside wall is not named on either City list: ask the City's Building Code Services.

If the house is a designated heritage building or sits in a Heritage District Overlay, the City says those buildings "are not subject to exemptions", so contact the City first.
A quote for this job should name the cabinet run in linear feet, the material, whether the old cabinets are removed and disposed of, and whether any plumbing or electrical work is included. Published 2025–2026 Ottawa guides put stock or melamine cabinets at about $250 to $400 per linear foot installed.

Have the quote say, in writing, that the sink stays exactly where it is.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Kitchen Renos. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified contractors and your local building authority (the City of Ottawa) before starting any kitchen renovation. Some of this work needs a City building permit, electrical work is filed with the Electrical Safety Authority, and gas work is regulated by TSSA. Information is current as of November 15, 2026 and may change. Visit **ottawakitchenrenos.ca** for the latest answers.