

2025 - 2026 EDITION

# THE NATIONAL PERMITTING PLAYBOOK

HOW TO REDUCE RISK, AVOID DELAYS, AND  
DELIVER PROJECTS ACROSS THE U.S.





# INTRODUCTION

## **Why National Permitting Feels More Complicated Than Ever**

Developing or renovating buildings across multiple states was once straightforward. Today, every municipality operates on its own timeline, enforces different code versions, and requires distinct approvals—making national rollouts slower, costlier, and far less predictable.

Evolving energy standards, environmental regulations, aging infrastructure, and widespread agency staffing shortages have introduced new layers of risk. Even a simple tenant improvement can trigger unexpected multi-agency reviews, depending entirely on the jurisdiction.

Milrose created this guide to give national owners, developers, architects, and construction teams a clear, current view of the permitting landscape—and practical insight into where risks exist, what has changed, and how to keep projects moving forward.

# THE NEW REALITY OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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**Every market is following a different playbook, and the rules are changing at different speeds.**

That complexity creates three major challenges for national teams:

- **Code Versions Are No Longer Aligned:** New York City continues to enforce standards based largely on the 2015 International Construction Codes (ICC), while markets like California have already implemented newer code cycles at the state level—often with extensive local amendments layered on top of national and state requirements. As a result, the same design may comply in one jurisdiction but fail, or be significantly over- or underspecified, in another.
- **Sustainability Requirements Are Expanding:** Regulations shaped by Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors have evolved from optional goals into mandatory compliance triggers. New energy codes, EV charging mandates, and stricter efficiency standards—along with affordable housing requirements and incentive programs such as California’s AB 79—are increasingly influencing project scope, entitlement strategy, and design decisions, often driving unexpected redesigns
- **Agencies Are Understaffed and Overwhelmed:** Across many major cities, government agencies are experiencing significant staffing crises, leading to the loss of thousands of employees.<sup>5</sup> This critical shortage slows approvals and extends timelines, even when plans are technically complete and compliant.



# THE NEW REALITY OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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## What this means for national teams:

A one-size-fits-all design is no longer possible. Success now requires a partner who understands each region in detail and can forecast issues early. Milrose fills this role by coordinating permitting, code consulting, zoning, inspections, and compliance services across the entire building lifecycle.



# THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK

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## How Code Cycles Create Real Project Risk

In the United States, building codes are based on model standards developed by the ICC Council, which updates them every three years.<sup>6</sup> Cities, counties, and local authorities having jurisdiction (AHJs) must then choose when to adopt these new codes, and how much to modify them for local needs.

Many jurisdictions do not have the staff or resources to update quickly, which creates long adoption delays and a widening compliance gap across the country.

## Examples of Code Divergence

Region	Code Basis (2025–2026)	Adoption Pace	Risk
New York City	2022 Code (Based on 2018 ICC Model)	Stagnant / Lagged	Administrative bottlenecks, outdated code conflicts
California	2025 California Building Codes (CBC)	Scheduled / Extended	Complex environmental clearances, high seismic requirements
Texas (Austin / College Station)	2024 ICC Family of Codes	Accelerated / Localized	High code volatility, frequent local amendments

# ESG AND ENERGY CODES

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## The Growing Focus on Sustainability

Energy efficiency is no longer optional. Nearly every major market is strengthening energy code requirements, such as those governed by the International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) and ASHRAE Standard 90.1. While these changes increase initial construction costs, they ensure compliance with modern standards and yield significant long-term building performance benefits.

## Key Compliance Elements for 2025–2026 Include:

- **New Energy Efficiency Standards:** Adherence to ASHRAE 90.1-2022 and updated IECC requirements.
- **EV Charging Requirements:** State and local mandates, such as CalGreen, increasingly require minimum EV parking ratios or electric-ready infrastructure—directly affecting site planning and parking layouts for new construction and major renovations. These requirements often trigger multi-agency reviews (planning, building, fire, and utilities) that can introduce conflicting interpretations, design revisions, and approval delays. In many cases, teams must also “futureproof” parking and electrical capacity to meet anticipated demand, adding meaningful upfront cost and complexity well before EV utilization materializes.
- **Stricter Documentation:** Compliance often requires rigorous technical documentation, such as the 2021 IECC COMcheck compliance reports required for commercial permits in Texas municipalities.

Milrose helps teams understand these technical requirements early, ensuring they are incorporated into design and budgeting without last-minute surprises or costly redesigns.

# ADMINISTRATIVE REALITIES

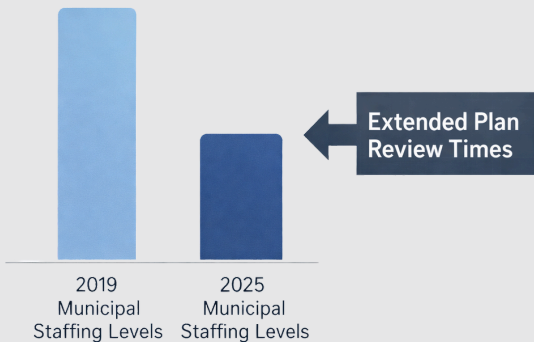
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## Why Permitting Takes Longer Today

Even perfectly designed, code-compliant projects can experience delays due to bureaucratic friction at the municipal level. This isn't a design flaw—it's an operational reality

Many jurisdictions, including New York City, face staffing shortages that extend plan review and resubmittal timelines. To manage workload, agencies increasingly rely on third-party reviewers, which can add oversight layers, conflicting interpretations, extra review cycles, higher fees, longer approvals, and increased soft costs.

**The Milrose Difference:** Milrose reduces these delays by maintaining deep, established relationships with agency staff and providing proactive process management. We navigate scheduling conflicts, strategically manage communication with reviewers, and utilize alternative submission pathways to mitigate chronic municipal staffing issues and keep your project on schedule.



**KEY CHALLENGE:** Staffing shortages cause chronic project delays nationwide

# WEST COAST OVERVIEW

## *California: The Most Complex Permitting Environment in the Country*

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California demands some of the most detailed technical and environmental reviews in the nation. This complexity is driven by high natural risks and aggressive environmental mandates. Understanding these checks early is essential for preventing significant timeline extensions.

### **The Regulatory Triple Threat:**

- **High Seismic Requirements:** In seismic risk zones across the country, projects increasingly trigger stringent structural and nonstructural requirements. While especially pronounced in California, many jurisdictions now require specialized structural calculations and anchorage details for commercial projects—even for nonstructural elements like storage racks, shelving, and equipment—adding engineering scope and review complexity early in the permitting process.
- **Fire, Storage, and Hazardous Materials:** Fire marshals nationwide are applying heightened scrutiny to high-pile storage, Group A plastics, lithium-ion batteries, and other potentially hazardous commodities. While historically concentrated in select markets, these reviews are now common across many jurisdictions and frequently trigger a cascading “snowball effect”—requiring sprinkler upgrades, increased water supply, fire pump capacity, or revised storage configurations. These requirements often must be engineered, documented, and submitted early to avoid redesigns and permitting delays.
- **Environmental Gateways (CEQA and AQMD):** Environmental compliance is multi-layered.
  - **AQMD:** Any demolition disturbing over 100 square feet triggers filing an asbestos report and receiving clearance from the local Air Quality Management District (AQMD).

# WEST COAST OVERVIEW

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- o **CEQA:** Projects in environmentally sensitive or constrained areas—particularly in coastal and urban infill markets such as Los Angeles—are subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). If a formal review, such as an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), is required, project timelines can extend significantly due to additional analysis, public review, and agency coordination.



Seismic Anchorage Details



Fire Marshal Clearance (High-Pile)



Asbestos/AQMD Filing



CEQA/Coastal Review



**KEY CHALLENGE:** Failing to anticipate these triggers causes significant delays

# WEST COAST OVERVIEW

## *California: The Most Complex Permitting Environment in the Country*

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### **Navigating the LA Jurisdiction Maze and the ADA 20% Rule**

The LA Jurisdictional Maze

The Los Angeles region is notorious for fragmented oversight.

- **LADBS vs. LA County:** The City of Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety (LADBS) handles projects within the city proper, but surrounding unincorporated areas fall under LA County, which has its own independent building department.
- **Overlapping Review:** Even projects submitted to LADBS often have fire and health clearances routed to LA County Fire and Health divisions. This intricate web of interdependent agencies demands specialized coordination to avoid conflicting requests and duplicated reviews.

### **The ADA 20% Rule**

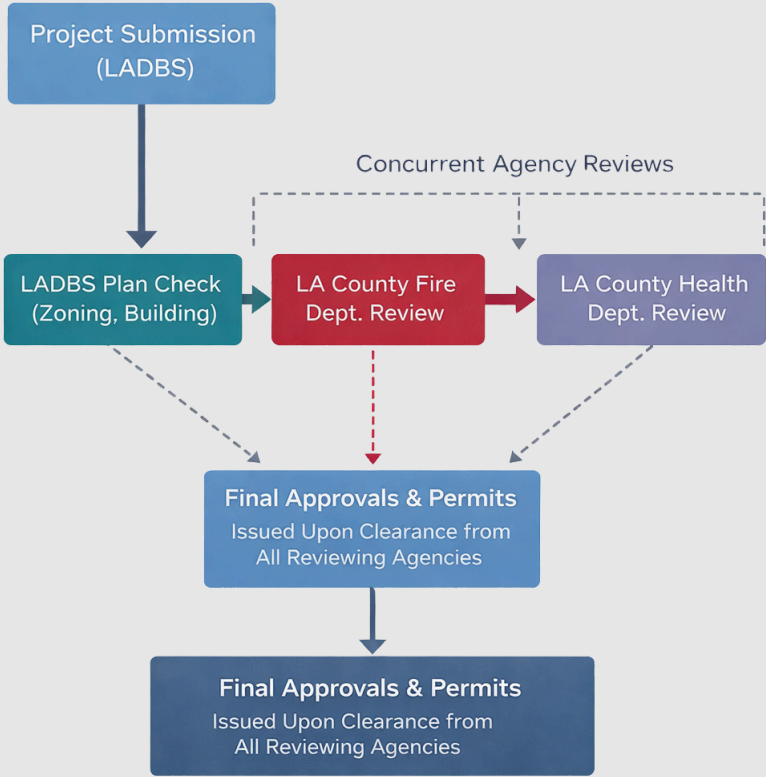
California is highly stringent regarding accessibility. If a project exceeds a certain valuation threshold (approximately \$220,000 to \$30,000 in scope valuation), the developer is required to allocate up to 20% of the project's valuation toward upgrading existing, non-compliant ADA features (e.g., doors, fountains) within the building. This acts as a hidden fee that must be budgeted early in financial due diligence.




# WEST COAST OVERVIEW

*California: The Most Complex Permitting Environment in the Country*

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 **KEY CHALLENGE:** Overlapping agencies require specialized coordination to avoid delays

# EAST COAST OVERVIEW

## *The NYC Metro Region: Complexity in Existing Buildings*

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New York City presents dense regulatory complexity, centered on its large inventory of older buildings. The single most impactful regulatory shift in 2025–2026 is the implementation of the city's first dedicated Existing Building Code (EBC).

### **The New Existing Building Code (EBC)**

Historically, managing renovations meant referencing disparate and archaic standards, sometimes dating back to 1938. The new NYC EBC, taking effect shortly after passage in 2025, provides a clear regulatory framework for alterations, repairs, and additions to existing structures

- **Clarity and Risk Mitigation:** The EBC defines clear thresholds for when an alteration is considered "substantial," triggering mandated upgrades to accessibility, energy efficiency, and fire protection.
- **Adaptive Reuse:** This de-risks the renovation process, making it a more predictable path for developers who want to maximize leasable square footage in pre-1961 "overbuilt" structures.

### **Modern Office Designs and Egress**

Today's amenity-driven workplaces—blending traditional offices with high-density assembly functions like cafeterias and event spaces—create design conflicts.

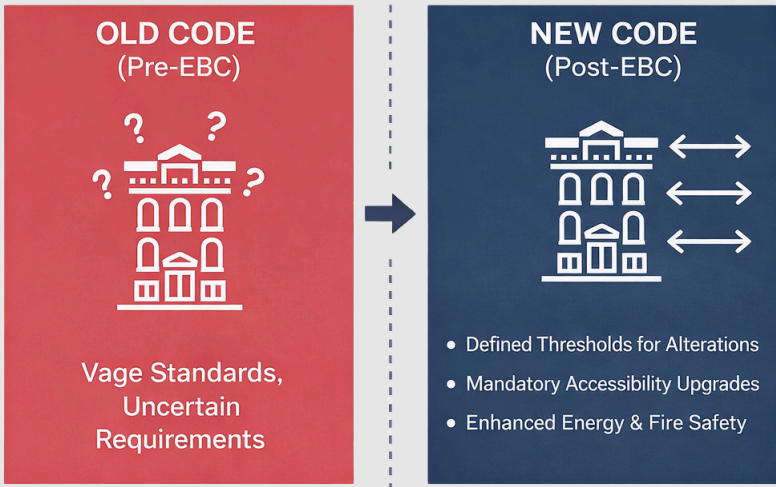
Assembly spaces require significantly shorter egress distances than standard offices. Milrose's code consulting services are crucial for defining occupancy accurately and securing variances that allow the integration of modern amenities while maintaining fire safety.

# EAST COAST OVERVIEW

*The NYC Metro Region: Complexity in Existing Buildings*

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## NYC Existing Building Code: Clarity for Renovations



**KEY BENEFIT:** Predictable compliance path preserves asset value

# EAST COAST OVERVIEW

## *The NYC Metro Region: Complexity in Existing Buildings*

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### **Safety, Security, and Aesthetics: The NYC Balance**

- **Vertical Connectivity and Variances:** Developers often desire open, vertical convenience stairs to connect up to five contiguous floors, but this violates standard fire separation mandates. Milrose consults on alternative mitigation strategies, such as using specialized fire shutters, and negotiates fire protection equivalencies with the Fire Department (FDNY) to secure necessary variances.
- **Security vs. Egress:** Clients require the ability to lock doors leading into tenant spaces for security, but this conflicts with fire codes requiring free egress. Milrose obtains necessary variances by implementing approved door-release systems that automatically unlock doors upon fire alarm activation, balancing security with critical life safety compliance.

### **Navigating Historic and Aesthetic Compliance**

- **Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC):** The LPC regulates all work on designated landmarks and historic districts, requiring a parallel, mandatory filing process alongside Department of Buildings (DOB) approvals. LPC approval is required for exterior work, including changes to facades, windows, and even the visibility of mechanical units on a roof.
- **Outdated Signage:** NYC signage regulations date back to the 1961 zoning resolution, when "animated signs" meant flashing neon bulbs. This makes approvals for modern digital screens and animated displays difficult, forcing businesses to struggle against archaic codes.

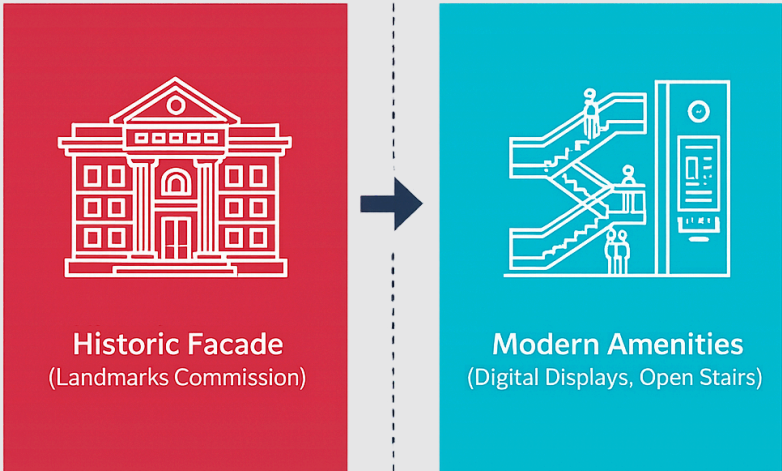


# EAST COAST OVERVIEW

*The NYC Metro Region: Complexity in Existing Buildings*

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## When Modern Design Meets Historic Code



**KEY CHALLENGE:** Balancing preservation with innovation requires expert negotiation.

# CENTRAL OVERVIEW

## *Chicago: Blending History, Density, and Modern Zoning*

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The Chicago market requires a balanced approach, combining flexible zoning policies that support urban density—such as mixed-use allowances and Transit-Oriented Development incentives—with a rigorous review and construction process shaped by an aging building stock. While Self-Certification pathways can accelerate permitting for qualifying projects, they transfer greater responsibility to the design team and demand precise code interpretation and documentation to mitigate audit risk, delays, or permit revocation.

### **Unique Chicago Permitting Hurdles:**

- **Site-Specific Restrictions:** Commercial projects frequently face unique challenges due to odd-shaped lots, unusual setbacks, or corner properties.
- **Separate Approvals:** Unlike many other cities, Chicago mandates separate approvals for landscaping and driveway work, adding unique compliance steps.
- **Variance Complexity:** When a design doesn't conform to zoning, obtaining necessary variances or special permits adds significant time to the project timeline.



**Odd-shaped Lots  
/ Setback  
Variations**



**Separate  
Landscaping  
Review / Driveway  
Approvals**



**Multi-Step  
Variance Process  
/ Special  
Use Permits**

# CENTRAL OVERVIEW

## *Texas Metro Regions: The Accelerated Code Adoption Front*

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The exponential growth of Texas metroplexes has necessitated aggressive code modernization. Jurisdictions are actively leapfrogging ICC cycles to ensure standards keep pace with development volume.

**Rapid Adoption and Volatility:** The key challenge for national clients is not slow approval, but constant, rapid change. While Texas adopts model codes, municipalities layer on local amendments, and code interpretations vary significantly between major cities like Houston, Dallas, and Austin.

- **Austin:** Adopted the 2024 International Building Code (IBC), Energy Conservation Code (IECC), and Fire Code (IFC), effective mid-July 2025.<sup>2</sup>
- **College Station:** Moving toward the 2024 ICC family by January 2026.<sup>9</sup>
- **Dallas:** Requires a detailed, multi-step process for obtaining the final Certificate of Occupancy (CO), demanding verified compliance across zoning, fire safety, and accessibility.

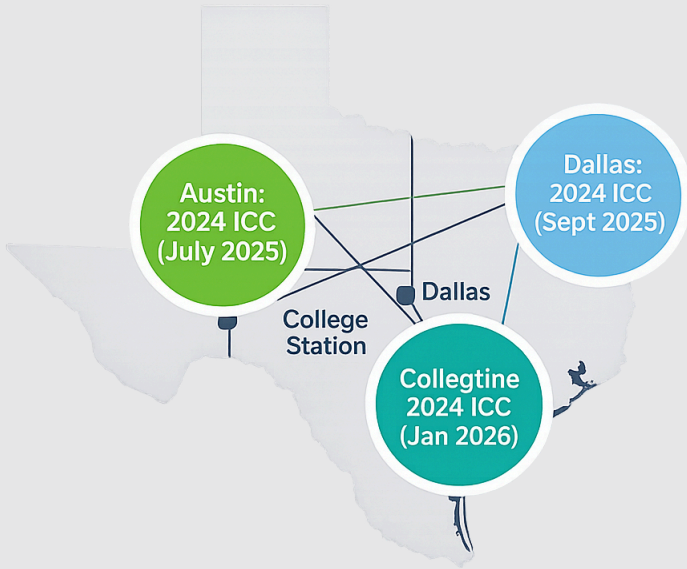
Milrose provides the critical local mastery necessary to track and immediately integrate these rapid, diverging interpretations and local amendments. This ensures high first-time approval rates are maintained through specialized pre-inspection checklists modeled after individual building department guidelines.

# CENTRAL OVERVIEW

*Texas Metro Regions: The Accelerated Code Adoption Front*

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## Texas Metro Regions: Accelerated Code Adoption



**KEY CHALLENGE:** Rapidly changing local amendments require constant vigilance.

# THE HUMAN FACTOR IN PERMITTING

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## Where Expertise Trumps Automation

The modern technology ecosystem has produced automation solutions for permitting. While these tools offer undeniable efficiency in administrative tasks, permitting remains a human-driven process, especially for complex national projects.

Technology's Role: Tools for Efficiency

AI and automation are highly effective at routine tasks, reducing friction at the intake level:

- **Document Organization:** AI can pre-screen applications and help staff quickly access relevant codes and application histories.
- **Completeness Checks:** Tools can check basic submission completeness, flag common errors, and reduce initial permit wait times.
- **Comment Summary:** AI can efficiently summarize and organize reviewer comments to prioritize next steps.

The Human Factor: The Unstoppable Differentiator

The true value in national permitting lies beyond basic data processing—it is in navigating the interpretive, discretionary, and relationship-driven components of the process.

# THE HUMAN FACTOR IN PERMITTING

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<b>AI Limitation</b>	<b>The Human Advantage (Milrose Expertise)</b>
<b>Cannot Negotiate</b>	Experts leverage established relationships with Authorities Having Jurisdiction (AHJs) to negotiate variances, mitigate arbitrary objections, and establish mutual understanding that designs are safe and compliant.
<b>Cannot Navigate Nuance</b>	Human code consultants resolve conflicts between complex, overlapping, and contradictory zoning requirements—such as height limits versus setback rules—that challenge algorithmic interpretation.
<b>Cannot Manage Discretionary Approvals</b>	Discretionary approvals (e.g., open stairs in NYC or CEQA exemptions in California) require strategic legal and engineering judgment, not formulaic compliance. These safety-critical decisions cannot be automated.
<b>Cannot Understand Local Politics</b>	Embedded human intelligence tracks municipal staffing shortages, leadership transitions, and shifting agency priorities that drive chronic delays—enabling proactive, future-proof planning.
<b>Cannot Resolve Interpretation</b>	Plan checkers exercise discretion; human consultants use technical expertise and relationships to advocate for projects and reduce inconsistent interpretations.

# HOW MILROSE SUPPORTS NATIONAL BRANDS

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## **Milrose: The Nation's Premier Building Lifecycle Expert**

Perfect for corporate real estate leaders, national rollouts, and real estate investment groups.

The fragmented and volatile national regulatory environment demands a strategic response. Milrose Consultants provides the dedicated regulatory expertise and scale that traditional architectural and engineering firms cannot sustainably manage.

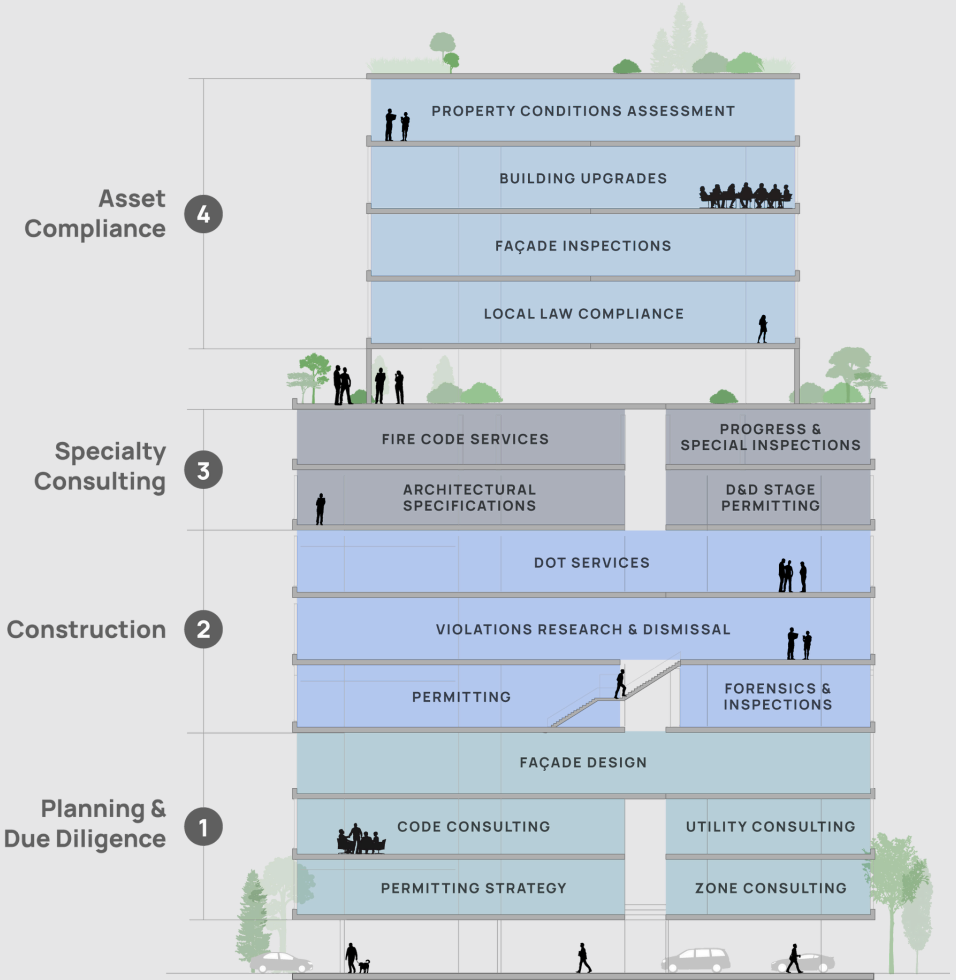
## **End-to-End Lifecycle Partnership**

Milrose is defined as the Nation's Premier Building Lifecycle Firm, providing comprehensive support that begins long before the first submission and extends well beyond final inspection. We embed across the full arc of the project, ensuring no handoffs, no silos, and no guesswork.

## **Our Support Spans Four Critical Stages:**

- **Planning & Due Diligence:** Zoning consulting and permitting strategy.
- **Design & Development:** Code consulting and utility consulting.
- **Construction & Approvals:** Permitting, violations research and dismissal, and inspections.
- **Operations, Maintenance & Compliance:** Property conditions assessment, façade inspections, and ongoing regulatory management (e.g., Local Law compliance).
- **Program Management & National Rollouts:** Single-source coordination across jurisdictions, agencies, and project teams to ensure consistency, speed, and accountability at scale.

# HOW MILROSE SUPPORTS NATIONAL BRANDS



# NATIONAL CHECKLIST

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## Before You Begin Any Project, Ask These Questions

Milrose helps answer and resolve all of these questions early so project teams can plan with clarity and confidence.

Risk Area	Critical Questions to Answer
<b>Codes and Requirements</b>	Which current code version applies? What local amendments could impact the design? What triggers fire or accessibility upgrades (e.g., the ADA 20% rule in California)?
<b>Environmental Considerations</b>	Does demolition require an asbestos evaluation and AQMD clearance? Are CEQA or Coastal Commission reviews applicable, and can statutory exemptions be secured?
<b>Agencies and Approvals</b>	Which city, county, health, and fire agencies will review the project? Are landmark or historic approvals required, and must reviews run concurrently?
<b>Timeline</b>	What are the current plan review timelines, and is the AHJ facing chronic staffing shortages? How can a dedicated permit partner reduce administrative friction?
<b>Building Conditions</b>	What is the building's structural age and what are the MEP limitations? How does the NYC Existing Building Code impact required accessibility or energy upgrades for this building?

# NATIONAL CHECKLIST

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## Early Strategy & Feasibility

Phase	Purpose	Key Activities	Risk / Insight
<b>Pre-Planning &amp; Feasibility</b>	Establish project viability and risk profile	Zoning and use analysis Code version and local amendments Environmental triggers (CEQA, AQMD, coastal, historic) Existing building conditions (structural, MEP, life safety)	<b>High-impact stage</b> – early decisions define downstream cost, scope, and schedule
<b>Permit Strategy &amp; Sequencing</b>	Define approval pathway and dependencies	Identify required permits and approvals Determine sequential vs. concurrent reviews Map overlapping jurisdictions Establish submission order and dependencies	<b>Key Question:</b> What unlocks what?

# NATIONAL CHECKLIST

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## Submissions, Reviews & Corrections

Phase	Purpose	Key Activities	Risk / Insight
<b>Project Submission</b>	Initiate formal review process	Initial filing with primary jurisdiction Completeness review Application routed to reviewing agencies	Errors here create cascading delays
<b>Concurrent Agency Reviews</b>	Obtain parallel agency approvals	Reviews by building, zoning, fire, health, planning, and related agencies	<b>Most delays occur here</b> due to overlapping authority
<b>Comments &amp; Corrections</b>	Address agency feedback efficiently	Consolidate agency comments Technical revisions (architectural, structural, MEP, fire) Coordinated resubmittals	Poor coordination extends review cycles

# NATIONAL CHECKLIST

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## Conditional Gateways, Approvals & Construction Support

Phase	Purpose	Key Activities	Risk / Insight
<b>Environmental &amp; Special Gateways</b> <i>(Conditional Path)</i>	Satisfy discretionary or external clearances	CEQA / EIR AQMD clearance Health Department / Air / Water Environmental / Planning Utilities / Public Works	<b>Late triggers can reset timelines</b>
<b>Conditional Approvals &amp; Clearances</b>	Align agency sign-offs	Sign-offs from individual agencies Conditional approvals pending other clearances Final coordination to align all approvals	Timing depends on weakest dependency
<b>Final Approvals &amp; Permit Issuance</b>	Secure permits	Permits issued only after all agencies clear No single agency controls final release	Delays compound if any agency lags
<b>Inspections &amp; Field Coordination</b>	Maintain compliance during construction	Required inspections scheduled Corrections addressed in real time Sign-offs coordinated to maintain progress	Field coordination protects schedule



# GET STARTED

## Ready to Unlock Unstoppable Project Momentum?

Milrose Consultants brings together permitting specialists, code experts, zoning advisors, and compliance professionals across the country. We support projects from planning through operations and help national clients build with clarity and confidence.

### **Milrose: One Relationship. Every Advantage:**

- End-to-end project lifecycle support
- Time and budget protection
- Regulatory clarity and confidence
- National reach, local insight

**Bring us in early, or bring us in now.** We integrate where you need us most. Visit [milrose.com](https://www.milrose.com) to learn more.



**THE BUILDING  
LIFECYCLE EXPERTS**

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