Building Services Policy

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EFFECTIVE DATE
1/1/2004
Revised: 6/1/19

SUBJECT
Structural Observation
(Residential)

BUILDING OFFICIAL APPROVAL:

PURPOSE/SCOPE:
To improve customer service and to clarify when structural observation is required and what the responsibilities are of the design professional, contractor, and or property owner.

ANALYSIS:
The California Building Code provides the Building Official the discretion to require structural observation on engineered projects, in addition to those required in the Code. This policy outlines when structural observations are required per the Building Official.

Placer County experiences diverse construction activity and engineering designs due to the County’s topography, climate, geology, and the size, nature, and complexity of the design. As a result and to further ensure public safety, Placer County Building Officials have historically required structural observation on all residential structures with 5,000 square feet or more of area. This policy has been in effect for over 20 years and is well known in the industry as a construction requirement County-wide.

In an effort to improve consistency, staff has worked with stakeholders to clarify the requirements and create a transparent process. The previous policy required structural observation reports, much like that of special inspections, prior to commencing with the next phase of construction. In an effort to further streamline the implementation of this long standing policy, provide flexibility, and aid in facilitation of development the following policy will serve that purpose, while maintaining the verification of critical load paths and ensuring engineering requirements are met.

POLICY:
Placer County requires structural observation of the structural lateral system on all residential buildings when the structural area of a building is equal to or greater than 5,000 square feet. Smaller structures may also require structural observation, as may be determined by the County during plan review, due to complexity of design or as otherwise required in the Building Code for seismic and or wind. The following outlines structural observations and the observation requirements of the structural system by a California licensed design professional, who is employed by the owner or owner’s authorized agent--here forward referred to as the engineer.

**Structural observation definition:** The visual observation of the structural system by a registered design professional for general conformance to the approved construction documents.

Structural observation does not include or waive the responsibility for inspections by the County or special inspections, as outlined in California Code of Regulations, Title 24 and the Placer County Building Ordinance.

**Structural lateral system observation:**
- **Foundation observation** – Prior to approval of the foundation by the Building Services Division, the engineer or a duly authorized representative, shall perform an **observation** of the structural lateral components of the foundation and leave at the job site, some form of written acknowledgment of their observation and findings.
The engineer’s documentation shall be on company letterhead and state that the foundation is in general conformance to the approved construction documents.

- **Exception options for project facilitation:**
  - **Engineer’s report notes deficiencies** - The engineer’s observation and findings must clearly state their desire to re-observe the deficiencies noted in their report. If the engineer’s report does not indicate their desire to re-observe the deficiencies, the County will verify correction. If the deficiencies noted in the engineer’s report have been corrected and the County building inspection results in no additional deficiencies, the foundation will be approved to pour. *If the engineer is not clear about the deficiency(s) and the County is unable to verify correction, the engineer will be required to perform another observation to verify correction.

- **Engineer’s report not onsite** - If the County building inspector arrives prior to the engineer, the building inspector will perform the foundation inspection and note any deficiencies. If the only correction is the missing written documentation from the engineer, the building inspector will partially approve the foundation, fail the structural observation, and write a correction notice. The correction notice will indicate the missing structural observation report, noting the foundation pour may not occur until the engineer performs their structural observation and notes zero deficiencies (If the structural observation results in deficiencies, the County must re-inspect prior to the foundation being poured.). At the next scheduled inspection, the inspector must be provided a copy of the foundation observation report from the engineer, stating the foundation is in general conformance with the approved construction documents noting zero deficiencies. The building inspector will then approve the foundation and structural observation requirement in order to update the permit record.

  Note: Two or more failed inspections of the same type, or phased inspections, will result in re-inspection fees.

- **Lateral observation** - Prior to approval of the lateral elements of the structural system by the Building Services Division, the engineer, or a duly authorized representative, shall perform an observation of the lateral elements and leave at the job site, some form of written acknowledgment of their observation and findings. The engineer’s documentation shall be on company letterhead and state that the lateral elements are in general conformance to the approved construction documents.

- **Exception options for project facilitation:**
  - **Engineer’s report notes deficiencies** - The engineer’s observation and findings must clearly state their desire to re-observe the deficiencies noted in their report. If the engineer’s report does not indicate their desire to re-observe the deficiencies, the County will verify correction. If the deficiencies noted in the engineer’s report have been corrected and the County building inspection results in no additional deficiencies, the lateral inspection will be approved. *If the engineer is not clear about the deficiency(s) and the County is unable to verify correction, the engineer will be required to perform another observation to verify correction.

- **Engineer’s report not onsite** - If the County building inspector arrives prior to the engineer, the building inspector will perform the lateral inspection and note any deficiencies. If the only correction is the missing written documentation from the engineer, the building inspector will partially approve the lateral elements, fail the structural observation, and write a correction notice. The correction notice will indicate the missing item, noting that construction may proceed, once the engineer performs their structural observation and notes zero deficiencies (If the structural observation results in deficiencies, the County must re-inspect prior to covering).
At the next scheduled inspection, the inspector must be provided with a copy of the lateral observation report from the engineer, stating the lateral is in general conformance to the approved construction documents noting zero deficiencies. The building inspector will then approve the lateral and structural observation requirement in order to update the permit record.

Note: Two or more failed inspections of the same type, or phased inspections, will result in re-inspection fees.

- **Framing and structural system observation** - Prior to approval of the rough framing by the Building Services Division, the engineer, or a duly authorized representative, shall perform an observation of the entire structural system. The engineer’s report and authorization to proceed shall be left on the job site. The report shall be on company letterhead, state all three items in the lateral structural system (foundation, lateral, and structural framing) are in general conformance to the approved construction documents, and must be signed, stamped, and dated by the engineer.

  o **Exception options for project facilitation:**

  - **Engineer’s report notes deficiencies** - The engineer’s observation and findings must clearly state their desire to re-observe the deficiencies noted in their report. If the engineer’s report does not indicate their desire to re-observe the deficiencies, the County will verify correction. If the deficiencies noted in the engineer’s report have been corrected and the County building inspection results in no additional deficiencies, the framing inspection will be approved. *If the engineer is not clear about the deficiency(s) and the County is unable to verify correction, the engineer will be required to perform another observation to verify correction.*

  - **Engineer’s report not onsite** - If the County building inspector arrives prior to the engineer, the building inspector will perform the rough framing inspection and note any deficiencies. If the only correction is the missing written documentation from the engineer, the building inspector will partially approve the rough framing, fail the structural observation requirement, and write a correction notice. The correction notice will indicate the missing item, noting that construction may proceed, once the engineer performs their structural observation and notes zero deficiencies (if the structural observation results in deficiencies, the County must re-inspect prior to insulating). At the next scheduled inspection, the inspector must be provided a copy of the structural system observation report from the engineer stating the structural system is in general conformance to the approved construction documents and must be signed, stamped, and dated, noting zero deficiencies. The building inspector will then approve the framing and structural observation requirement in order to update the permit record.

Note: Two or more failed inspections of the same type, or phased inspections, will result in re-inspection fees.

* This policy supersedes all previous policies on structural observation requirements. *