

What to check before you bid

For contractors and trades · about 3 minutes · reviewed August 24, 2026

The public record on a building before you send a proposal: what is already open, what an inspector already flagged, and what a soft-story obligation is worth knowing before you price the job.

From Scan the Block

Every public record on one San Francisco address, in a single report: the Assessor's file, permits and violations, zoning, hazards and the published earthquake maps, rent-control indication, and ten years of the surrounding blocks - each count compared with an average San Francisco area of the same size, and none of it scored. scantheblock.com

■ BEFORE YOU SEND A BID, READ THE PARCEL

A building's public record is not a substitute for walking the site - nothing here replaces that. But before a bid goes out is the cheapest moment to know what the city already has on file: what is permitted, what is still open, and what an inspector already flagged. Finding it after you have started work costs more than finding it before you priced the job.

■ WHAT IS ALREADY OPEN ON THIS PARCEL

Every filed permit - building, electrical, plumbing - is keyed to the same block and lot, and the report separates what is still open from what closed out. An open permit from a previous contractor is not your obligation until you take the job, and then it often becomes exactly that: a re-inspection or a corrective step folded into a project that was supposed to be simpler.

Note

Nearly half of all plumbing permits citywide carry no recorded outcome at all. That is the city never logging a result, not proof the work happened - the report counts these separately rather than guessing which way to round them.

■ WHAT AN INSPECTOR ALREADY FOUND

Fire and building inspectors file their findings as public notices of violation, and they sort by trade more cleanly than most people expect: a violation coded for a sprinkler or standpipe system is a different job from one coded for an alarm or an exit sign, and the report keeps them separate rather than lumping every fire-code citation into one count. The same is true on the building side - a notice for a rodent or cockroach infestation is a pest job, not a general sanitation citation about trash.

- Fire-suppression violations - sprinkler and standpipe systems specifically, split out from alarms and exits.
- Pest and infestation notices - rodent, cockroach and bedbug citations, split out from general sanitation.
- Every other notice of violation on the parcel, whatever trade it touches, with its date and status.

■ THE OBLIGATION THAT OUTLASTS A SALE: SOFT-STORY RETROFIT

San Francisco's mandatory seismic retrofit program covers a specific building type - typically ground-floor parking or open commercial space under several stories of housing - and a building on the list that has not completed its retrofit carries a standing obligation, not a suggestion. The report says whether a parcel is on the program and whether it has finished.

■ READING IT AGAINST THE JOB, NOT INSTEAD OF THE SITE VISIT

1. Run the address before you quote. Three minutes now, against however long an unpleasant surprise costs later.
2. Check for open permits in your own trade first - an open electrical or plumbing permit from a prior contractor is the closest thing to a direct warning the record gives.
3. Read the violation list for your trade specifically. A citation coded to your system is a customer who already has an inspector's attention on the exact thing you are bidding to fix.
4. Still walk the site. A filed record describes paperwork, not the condition behind a wall.

■ WHAT THIS CANNOT TELL YOU

- It is not an inspection. A clean record means nothing was filed - not that nothing is wrong.
- It does not name who to call. No owner or manager is identified anywhere in this product, by design; the report describes the building and its filings, never a person.
- A quiet record on a busy block is still a fact about the block, not the building. The comparison against nearby buildings the same size is on the report for exactly this reason - use it.

■ READ THE RECORD ON AN ACTUAL ADDRESS

Everything described in this guide comes out of one report on one San Francisco address. Type an address at scantheblock.com and it takes a few seconds; re-opening a report you have already run is free, always. Reports are a web page and a PDF you can share, and every figure carries the caveat that qualifies it.

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■ ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Last reviewed August 24, 2026. Every rule described here is San Francisco's, not ours, and the city changes them - where a date or a threshold matters to a deal, confirm it against the city. This is general information about public records and not legal, tax or investment advice.

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