COMMERCIAL RENOVATION

Do you need a permit for an office or shop renovation?

By DirectHome Editorial Updated 24 November 2026 12 min read Explore our commercial renovation service ↗

Ask your landlord or building management first, because their fitting-out rules say what needs their approval. A government permit comes in only when the work or the use calls for one, such as moving sprinklers or exit signs, changing the unit's use, structural work, a JTC unit (JTC is the government agency that leases industrial land and space), or opening a food shop.

Need advice for your home? WhatsApp our team ↗



Here's each approval in the order you'd meet it, and who applies. It's the paperwork side of a commercial renovation; the commercial renovation buying guide covers the rest of the job.

Which approval your work needs, and who applies

Who approves what, under the official sources linked below. A Qualified Person is a registered architect or professional engineer. Each exemption keeps the limits set out in its section.

What you're planning	Who approves it	Who applies
Any fit-out in a rented unit	Your landlord or building management, under its fitting-out rules	You
Changing what the unit is used for	The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) may need to give planning permission	You, your landlord, a consultant or a Qualified Person
Moving sprinklers, exit signs or alarm parts, or changing escape routes	The Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF): plan approval, or a lodgement for listed minor works, unless the works are exempt	A Qualified Person
Lightweight partitions, false ceilings and aircon, or replacing existing floor and wall finishes	Not the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) or URA, within their exemption limits (URA's list doesn't apply in central, conservation and some other planning areas); SCDF may still apply	A Qualified Person, where SCDF applies
Cutting into a beam, column or load-bearing wall	BCA: structural plans and a permit	A civil or structural Professional Engineer, for the plans; the permit jointly by you, that engineer and the builder
Any fit-out in a JTC unit	JTC, unless its handbook exempts the work from submission to JTC, and the relevant authorities	A consultant you engage
Opening a food shop	The Singapore Food Agency (SFA), through its licence	You, or a filer you appoint

Your landlord's approval comes first

Your landlord's or building management's fitting-out guide sets what needs their approval, what the application must include and the rules while work goes on. Ask for it, and read what your lease says about fit-out works, before you plan anything. Ask too about the working hours, how common areas must be protected, any deposit, and whether a trade must use the building's appointed contractor.

Government approvals lean on that consent too. SCDF says you need the building owner's or management corporation's consent before minor fire safety works under a lodgement, and URA's change of use application asks for the owner's letter of consent. In a Housing & Development Board

(HDB) shop or office, HDB has its own renovation guidelines, and in a commercial complex it tells you to approach the managing agent for instructions.

Need advice for your home?

Tell us what you need on WhatsApp and send a few photos. We'll arrange a free site assessment, then give you a fixed-price quote within 3 to 5 working days.

WhatsApp us Try the free cost estimator

When URA's planning permission comes in



Whether URA has to decide depends on your plan. URA advises you not to commit to a tenancy or renovation works before you have its decision.

Changing what the unit is used for may need planning permission, URA says, with a shop becoming a commercial school as its example. URA can approve or refuse, and it advises you not to commit to a tenancy or renovation works before you have its decision.

Two routes can spare you the application. In shopping centres and some other commercial blocks, switching between shop, showroom and restaurant needs no planning permission if the unit was approved for commercial use and counted as commercial floor area, the development has no special conditions on its use, the change is for one unit, and you meet the other agencies' licensing rules before the new use starts; party-walled shophouses and shopflats are left out. URA's lodgment scheme also gives instant approval to pre-identified uses within selected commercial buildings and the first storey of some shophouses, where they meet all its conditions.

If the use stays the same, URA's list of works exempt from planning permission covers internal partitioning in a non-residential unit that changes neither the main use, its quantum (how much space it takes), the floor area nor the common areas, plus partitions of lightweight material, replacing or changing a false ceiling with lightweight material, any aircon works and replacing existing floor and wall finishes. **The list doesn't apply to national monuments or conservation buildings, or in conservation areas, central areas, urban design areas and other planning areas with their own guidelines.**

Fire safety works go to SCDF through a Qualified Person



Fire safety works take one of three routes. If you can't tell which one applies, SCDF advises asking it for a free consultation.

Under the Fire Safety Act 1993, anyone carrying out fire safety works must first get SCDF's approval of plans, unless the works are exempt or on the minor works list below. Fire safety works include adding, moving or removing sprinklers, hose reels, fire alarm panels, exit signs or fire doors; layout changes affecting escape routes or fire compartments; aircon or ventilation works for non-residential use; and a change of use that affects fire safety, such as a shop becoming an eating place.

A **Qualified Person** is a registered architect or professional engineer, and SCDF says the plans must be prepared and submitted by one, on behalf of the building's owner or occupier. A contractor who isn't a Qualified Person can't file them.

The shorter route for minor works

Some smaller jobs skip full plan approval. In a building that already has its Fire Safety Certificate or Temporary Fire Permit, minor works listed in the fire safety regulations may go ahead after a lodgement instead. In a unit shown as a shop or office on the building's approved plans, the list includes internal partitions, false ceilings and raised floors up to 150 mm deep (200 square metres in all). Inside the building it also covers moving or adding exit signs, detectors and up to 9 sprinkler heads outside the higher hazard classes, except in excluded buildings such as childcare and healthcare premises.

None of it may affect fire compartments, the structure's fire resistance or the wet or dry riser, add a fire hazard or floor area, be part of a conservation project, or change the use, except to an ancillary pantry, toilet, office or store room (a store room of up to 20 square metres) that doesn't raise the occupant load. A Qualified Person lodges it before work starts. Anything that isn't exempt and isn't on the list needs plan approval first, and if you can't tell which route applies, SCDF advises asking it for a free consultation.

Building works, structure and BCA's permit

BCA needs a permit for all building works except the insignificant building works listed in the Building Control Regulations. For a fit-out, that list includes:

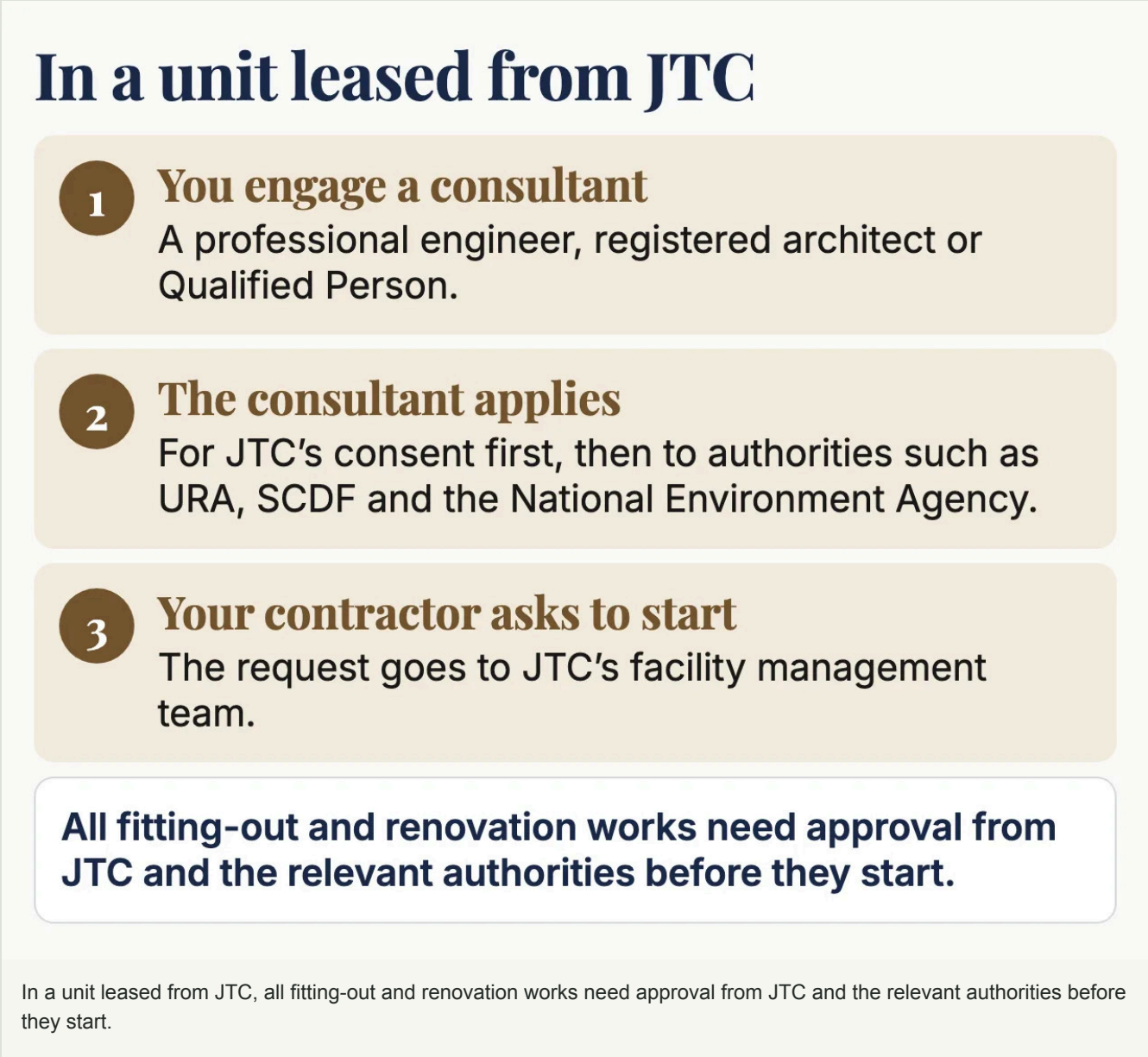
- partitions up to 10 metres high in lightweight material, such as plasterboard, calcium silicate board or hollow concrete blocks
- a lightweight false ceiling hung from the structural ceiling, only for looks or to hide services, not accessible, with no supporting span over 6 metres
- replacing existing floor and wall finishes, replacing or changing windows and doors, and all air-conditioning works
- opening up or removing a wall that carries no load but its own weight

Cutting into a beam, column or load-bearing wall isn't on BCA's list. Only a civil or structural Professional Engineer acting as Qualified Person can apply for structural plan approval, and a permit is needed before the work starts. So have an engineer confirm a wall carries no load before it's hacked out. Where the work needs one, we arrange the engineer. For the partitions and finishes, see our hacking service.

Wiring has its own rule: the Electricity Act makes it an offence to do electrical work unless you're a Licensed Electrical Worker or supervised by one. Its exceptions, subject to any other written law, include replacing a lamp connected in your own installation. Our electrical works service covers the

work itself. If the new ceiling will hide aircon pipes, plan the drain route before it closes.

Renovating a JTC factory or business unit



In a unit leased from JTC, all fitting-out and renovation works need approval from JTC and the relevant authorities before they start.

In a unit leased from JTC, all fitting-out and renovation works need approval from JTC and the relevant authorities before they start. You engage a consultant, who can be a professional engineer, registered architect or Qualified Person, to apply for JTC's consent, and the consultant then takes it to authorities such as URA, SCDF and the National Environment Agency.

JTC's handbook lists works you needn't submit to JTC if they meet its conditions, such as floor finishes no more than 50 mm thick in tiles and screed, or a partition wall that changes no planning parameter such as floor area; other authorities may still need a submission. JTC also says your contractor must request the start of works from its facility management team, and that repairs or cleaning of common areas the works cause are borne by you or your contractor.

Opening a food shop adds SFA's licence



SFA's order for a food shop: planning permission before the tenancy, the licence application with its layout plan, renovation to that layout, then the pre-licensing inspection.

SFA's food shop checklist says to make sure the relevant planning permission is obtained before signing any tenancy agreement and investing in renovation or equipment.

The licence application includes a scaled layout plan showing the kitchen equipment, exhausts, sinks and wash basins, and the refreshment area. Once SFA has approved your application, you may proceed with the renovation, to the layout you submitted, then ask for its pre-licensing inspection before you start operating. Our specialists build the kitchen to that layout.

Does a mezzanine or storage platform need approval?



Only two small items are on BCA's exemption list, and one larger platform can be lodged. BCA needs a permit for all building works except those on its insignificant works list.

It can. BCA's exemption list, in the Building Control Regulations, has only two such items: a timber-floored loft of up to 5 square metres, and a single-level platform used solely to store goods in an industrial building, closed to the public, no higher than 4 metres or larger than 50 square metres, with no beam or slab span over 6 metres and no cantilever over 3 metres. The regulations also list a single-level platform no more than 4 metres above the floor and no larger than 100 square metres, with no

frame span over 6 metres and no cantilever over 3 metres, as lodgment works. Instead of applying for plan approval, plans prepared by a Qualified Person are lodged, and they're deemed approved once they meet the regulations' requirements and the Commissioner of Building Control acknowledges the lodgment. Any other mezzanine or platform needs BCA's plan approval, and BCA needs a permit for all building works except those on the insignificant works list. In a JTC unit, JTC's submission handbook asks for drawings and calculations endorsed by a civil Professional Engineer, with a structural check of the existing structure, to build or change a mezzanine floor or storage platform.

What your contractor gives you

You apply for the landlord's approval, URA's change of use (your landlord, a consultant or a Qualified Person can also submit it) and SFA's licence (or a filer you appoint does). A Qualified Person files fire safety plans with SCDF, and a civil or structural Professional Engineer applies for BCA's structural plan approval, with the permit applied for jointly by you, the engineer and the builder. In a JTC unit, the consultant you engage applies for JTC's consent. Each of those forms asks what the work is. When we do the work, we give you the scope and details of the work the forms ask about, and where the work needs a Qualified Person or an engineer, we arrange one.

What happens if you renovate without approval

Under the Fire Safety Act, it's an offence to carry out, or permit or authorise, fire safety works before SCDF has approved their plans, or other than as approved, with a fine of up to $200,000, up to 2 years' jail or both, and SCDF's Commissioner can order the works stopped, altered or removed. The Building Control Act sets the same maximum for anyone who carries out, or permits or authorises, building works whose plans haven't been approved or deemed approved, or that have no permit in force, and the Commissioner of Building Control can order them stopped, changed or demolished. Both offences cover whoever permits or authorises the works, not only the firm doing them.

After an unauthorised change of use, SCDF said in 2022, it issues a Notice of Offence requiring the area to go back to its original use, or you can engage a Qualified Person to advise on what the new use needs, and it may require the premises to close temporarily.

What to settle before you sign the lease or the quote

Before you sign

- ☐ If you'll use the unit differently, get URA's decision first, where it needs one
- ☐ Get the landlord's fitting-out guide and read the lease's reinstatement clause

- [ ] List anything touching sprinklers, alarms, exit signs, escape routes, aircon ducts or the structure
- [ ] Check the quote includes the Qualified Person's or engineer's work and the authority fees

Use this blank checklist to record your project review.

Hidden conditions can still turn up once ceilings and walls open, so read how much contingency to keep for additions and alterations works before you fix the budget.

Then send us your landlord's fitting-out guide, the floor plan and what you want changed. We'll do a free site assessment, so the approvals your works need are known before pricing, and give you a fixed-price quote within 3 to 5 working days of the visit, never from a photo.

Common questions

How long do the approvals take, and what do they cost?

Each runs on its own clock, and your landlord sets its own. URA generally takes 10 working days to assess a change of use, and it may take longer if the submission is incomplete or other agencies have to be consulted. SFA reviews a completed food shop application within 7 working days. In JTC buildings, the permit to work review typically takes less than 20 days from submission to decision. As the agencies' pages listed them in November 2026, URA's fee for a change of use application is $500, SCDF's is $90 a minor works lodgement, and SCDF's plan fee is $90 a storey for a change of use or alterations to existing fire safety works that add no floor area.

Can you move in as soon as the work is finished?

Not always. Where fire safety works went through SCDF's plan approval, SCDF says the building's owner and the Qualified Person engaged for those works must obtain a Fire Safety Certificate before using or occupying the premises, and applying needs an Inspection Certificate from a Registered Inspector, whom the owner engages to inspect and certify the fire safety works. Your building's owner may get a Temporary Fire Permit to use the premises for a limited period first, if the fire safety works are complete with only very minor items outstanding. In a JTC unit, your consultant applies to the relevant authorities for a Temporary Occupation Permit, a Certificate of Statutory Completion or both, the permits you need before you can move in.

Do you have to undo the fit-out when the lease ends?

That's for your lease to say, so read its reinstatement terms before you plan the fit-out. If you hold a lease from JTC, you're required to reinstate the unit before returning it on the lease expiry date, after a joint inspection about 6 months before, and you're liable for double rent from that date if the reinstatement isn't finished. For a tenancy in a JTC-managed building, JTC's handbook says that even for works exempt from submission, you still reinstate the premises to the original handover condition when the tenancy ends or is terminated, unless the building owner agrees otherwise in writing. Other leases and tenancy agreements set their own terms.

Need help with your project?

Tell us what you need on WhatsApp and send a few photos. We'll arrange a free site assessment, then give you a fixed-price quote within 3 to 5 working days.

WhatsApp us Get a quote

Our service

Commercial Renovation for your home

Explore the service, then discuss what your home needs with our team.

View service details ↗

Still weighing your options?

Plan with the buying guide

Bring the choices, costs and questions together before deciding what to do next.

Read the commercial renovation buying guide →

More commercial renovation articles →