Plan an electrical panel upgrade

Turn "we need more power" into a clear project brief. Separate the panel, the service and the circuits before comparing proposals.

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A panel replacement is not the whole project

An electrical service brings power into the home. The panel distributes it to individual circuits. Replacing a panel and increasing service capacity are different scopes. Portland describes the service or feeder as equipment between the utility connection and the main distribution panel; its permit guide lists service-panel replacement as permit work.

Ask the electrician to identify which parts of the system must change for your proposed equipment. A larger number on a new panel is not a complete project specification.

Source: Portland: residential electrical permits

Write a brief the electrician can use

List the change you want: an EV charger, heat pump, induction range, workshop or remodel. Include the equipment model when known, its proposed location and your preferred completion window. Ask the electrician to assess electrical capacity and explain the proposed approach.

Example brief: "We plan to add an EV charger in the garage and may add a heat pump next year. Please assess capacity, describe any service or panel changes, and separate required work from future provisions." This is an illustrative scope, not a recommendation for a particular home.

Resolve permits, utility work and the power interruption

Oregon directs project-specific code and permit questions to the responsible local building department. Confirm the jurisdiction for the property address. Ask who submits the permit, coordinates any utility work and arranges inspections.

Before accepting a proposal, ask how long power may be off, what access is required, who repairs opened surfaces and which documents you will receive at completion. Record the answers in the written scope.

Source: Oregon BCD: residential permits

Keep a completion file

Our suggested handover folder contains the agreed scope, approved changes, equipment information, permit reference, final inspection status and warranty contact. Ask the contractor which documents apply to your job.

Do not remove the panel cover or work inside energized equipment to fill in this worksheet. The planning conversation does not require you to expose wiring.

Project worksheet

Example question: Does your proposal replace the panel only, increase service capacity, add circuits, or include all three?

Write notes for the contractor. Do not expose wiring or open electrical equipment to complete this worksheet.

01. Property address and responsible permit office

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02. New equipment, model and proposed location

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03. Possible future equipment

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04. Contractor assessment: panel, service and circuit work

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05. Permit applicant and permit reference

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06. Utility coordination and planned power interruption

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07. Access, surface repairs and excluded work

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08. Completion documents and warranty contact

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Guide, source links and related resources: https://portlandoregonreviews.com/guides/plan-panel-upgrade