Why do I need a permit for my building project, it’s my property! I plan to live there forever, it will be safe enough for me! If I ever sell the place, I’ll bring it up to code then! I’ve been doing it this way for years, why change now? Inspectors just make up rules to make it rough on the builders! These comments are some of those heard when property owners and builders are told how the building code says their construction project is required to be done in order to pass inspection. What Homeowners, Builders, and Do-It-Yourselfer’s need to keep in mind is that the building code is not there to make their lives miserable. The building code is in place to provide safe structures in our communities. The building code provides the minimum requirements for safe construction of all the buildings that we use, from commercial buildings such as offices, stores, hospitals, factories, parking structures, etc. to construction projects in our own homes. All buildings are required to be constructed to meet the building code’s requirements. While the building codes in Michigan are controlled by the Bureau of Construction Codes and Fire Safety, and our lawmakers in Lansing, It is usually the local building inspection department’s job to make sure that those code requirements are met.

That’s where the Inspectors come in. It is their job to be familiar with the building codes, and keep up to date with any changes to the codes. With the always changing technology of today, the inspector also has to be familiar with all of the new products being produced, so that when inspection of a project takes place, he is familiar with any new products being used. While code changes don’t happen everyday, when the codes do change it can sometimes be challenging to keep all of the local builders informed. The same holds true for new and innovative building products. Having a good working relationship with your local inspection department can make being informed about code changes and new materials much easier. It can be a great way to keep up with any changes that may be on the way. Builders who communicate regularly with their inspection departments find that if any code violations are found during inspections, the corrections to those violations are usually simple ones. Informed builders know what the code requires, and make sure their work meets or exceeds those requirements. Those who believe the inspector is there to find anything he can to shut the job down, need to rethink that myth. The inspector is not making up rules and regulations just to make the builder’s life rough. The building code contains the minimum standard for safe construction, and the inspectors are simply enforcing what the building code requires.

How can a builder develop a good working relationship with the inspector? Here are a few suggestions.

If you’re not sure what the code requires, ask questions. Most inspectors are happy to answer any questions you may have, especially before the project begins, regarding the construction being done. They will be happy to share with you what the code requires for a construction project.

Get a copy of the current building code, and use it. Some builders actually have a copy of the code in their tool trailer. When a question comes up the builder can be aware of what the code may require, and can discuss any questions regarding the code when the inspector shows up onsite. Contact your local building dept. for information on how to purchase a copy of the current Building Code.

When calling to request an inspection, have the job name and permit number available. This makes it easier to find the required paperwork needed to do the inspection. Give the inspector plenty of notice that you need an inspection. Calling to request an inspection and telling him to be there in an hour probably won’t go over too well.

If the inspector tells you your work doesn’t meet code, and you don’t believe him, politely ask him why. He should be able to explain to you what the code requires, what is wrong and why it needs to be corrected.

Ask the inspector if you can meet him onsite for the inspection. They will usually be happy to have the builder walk the construction site with them, during an inspection. Any required corrections can be pointed out right away, allowing the builder to make those corrections quickly, sometimes while the inspector is there. It can be much easier to explain a correction on the jobsite than over the phone or in an inspection report. This will save time for the builder, as he doesn’t have to wait to receive an inspection report to know what needs to be done. The inspector has less to write in an inspection report when corrections are made right away.

By following these suggestions, and communicating regularly with your inspection department you can build a good working relationship with the inspectors. Your job and his can be much easier. A visit from the inspector can be a much better experience, because you are working together, with each other, toward a common goal, a building project that meets the requirements of the code, and providing a structure that is safe for all who use it.