Permits Task Force Final Report

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Executive Summary

On April 15, 2021, the Board of Directors established the Permits Task Force under the direction of the Buildings Committee. The Board charged the Task Force to review the member comments received regarding fees for permits and to recommend the following by August 31, 2021:

- Actions that should be implemented to improve GHI's permit process for improvements, alterations, and additions.

- Whether GHI should charge fees for permit reviews and if so, what amounts should be charged.

- Actions that should be implemented to improve members' understanding of the permit process.

The Task Force consisted of Michael Campbell (Chair), Debbie McKinley (Alternate Chair), Tom Sporney (Staff Liaison), Stuart Caplan (replacement Staff Liaison), Erin Bileyu (Board and Buildings Committee Liaison), Ben Hille, Wendy Young, Alison Gary, Jennifer Tschabrunn, and Bill Jones. With a three month timeline, the Task Force, met every two weeks to review the current permitting process, taking input from members visiting Task Force meetings and staff involved in the permit process. In addition, the Task Force gave serious consideration to the 97 member comments on the proposed permit fees solicited by the Board. Of those members that submitted comments, 8 supported the fee schedule, 16 supported a fee but thought the suggested schedule was too high, and 67 were against fees entirely (6 were unclear in their support). Of the members who submitted comments, almost every member supported an improvement on the permit (process as it currently exists.

This document is the consolidated recommendations of the Task Force. This executive summary provides an overview of the recommendations. Detailed recommendations are provided in the sections that follow and in the appendices.

Improving the Permit Process

Across the board, members referred to how complicated the permit process is to understand and how long the process takes. With this in mind, the Task Force has focused its attention on reforming the permit process through transparency and member understanding. See Appendix 1 for the list of recommendations, which has been broken into the three sections: 1) Improve the Permit Process; 2) Improve Current Permit Definitions; and 3) Improve Member Understanding of Permits.

Charging Fees for Permits

The Task Force does not recommend charging a fee for permit applications. Based on the information provided to the Task Force from the Finance Committee and the minutes of the Board (dated January 7, 2021 and March 18, 2021), as well as comments from staff Tom Sporney and Stuart Caplan, the reasons for charging fees seemed to be

1) to defer the cost to GHI at large based on the belief that permits largely benefit one house and
2) to gain better compliance with the permit process by incentivising scheduling inspections and closing out permits.

The Task Force concluded that fees structured in this way were pre-emptively punitive toward members without clear expectations of how the fees would accomplish those goals.

The Task Force determined that charging fees for permits would work counter to the interests of GHI and is based on a false premise. While individual members can become educated about their homes through the permit process, and members do indeed perform improvements to their property, individual members are not and should not be the main beneficiary of the permit process. The permit process should be designed to:

- Protect GHI's interest in its property and ensure the quality of work when improvements/alterations are constructed. For example, some improvements/alterations have a greater chance of causing leaks, which may cause internal wall damage, while others provide GHI an opportunity to inspect framing and fix hidden problems.
- Protect adjacent and/or nearby members from unintended consequences of an improvement/alteration. For example, the permit process includes the evaluation of potential modifications to drainage patterns, requires adherence to agreed architectural/aesthetic standards, and ensures yard boundaries are not exceeded.

The member applying for an improvement/alteration is already paying a cost either in time or money. This work improves the individual members' GHI unit but is also an investment in the overall health of the community and increases the value of GHI as a whole. A permit fee will only serve to deter members' investments or cause members to make improvements/alterations without permits.

The Task Force was not provided an analysis by the Finance Committee of how much money the proposed permit fees would raise or how much the fees would lower the average member fee. That said, the cost of a permit fee would be sizable to members applying for a permit and represent a significant portion of their improvement/alteration cost.

To encourage compliance with the permit process, the Permits Task Force determined that a more significant reason members do not comply with the process is confusion around the permit process and the requirements to submit a permit, as well as difficulty navigating the process once begun. The fee schedule recommended by the Finance Committee provided only that a small portion of the fee would be refunded to the member to promote the closing of permits. The Task Force, combined with the vast majority of the member respondents, note that charging permit fees will only serve to discourage members from seeking permits and will ultimately cause further damage to GHI's units and the community as a whole.

The Task Force recommends instead that member responsibility for permit closure be better communicated (see third section of this report: Improving Membership Understanding of Permit Process). Initially, Technical Services and the member would agree to a date by which the permit should be closed out. If after that date the member does not comply with this responsibility, they would be met with escalating actions. These actions would begin with Technical Services staff contacting the member to determine the status of the permit and, if necessary, working out a new date by which the member would close the permit. If the member refuses to work with staff or remains non-compliant for 4 months after the permit closeout date, the complaint process will follow the procedures outlined in Section XVII of the GHI Member Handbook.

If there is a violation of the permit that needs to be rectified, and a member refuses to fix a violation after reasonable notification, then GHI should charge fee-for-service rates for remediation. This is specifically regarding permitted work, rather than unpermitted or non-approved additions or improvements that are already covered in the GHI Member Handbook.

Improving Membership Understanding of Permit Process

The permit process suffers from a troubling lack of understanding by members of the purpose of GHI permits and the permit process. Most members agree that properly inspected work done by professionals is a benefit to the entire membership, rather than a benefit to only the member having the work done.[1] To that end, the Task Force recommends the following mission statement be added to the GHI Member Handbook and to the website:

Permits for specified types of improvements, alterations, and additions are required to protect the history, structural integrity, and long-term health of GHI, while enabling members to upgrade their units in a way that provides for a happier and more sustainable community. The permit process ensures the quality of work performed on GHI property and protects GHI's long-term interests. The permit process has a fiduciary responsibility to GHI and its members to eliminate the risk of work that is not up to code and to protect GHI and members from the potential negative effects of poorly designed or managed work on utilities (internal plumbing and electrical and exterior water, wastewater, and stormwater piping), yard lines, and swales and other green runoff management.

The membership has also been inadequately served by a poorly maintained website. The Task Force believes the website must be fixed to address most of the misunderstandings between GHI staff and members. The current upgrade to Yardi provides GHI staff an opportunity to implement the following changes in a way that can improve membership compliance with the permit process. Appendix 3 of this report includes a comprehensive list of Task Force recommendations that are necessary to ensure communication of member responsibility.

At a minimum, the following recommendations should be implemented by staff, utilizing their knowledge of the process and with the autonomy of their positions:

1) Create and post a list of items requiring permits, a list of items not requiring permits, and a list of prohibited items. Include a list of member responsibilities regarding permits and the consequences of not upholding their responsibilities. This will serve as a common source of knowledge for both staff and membership to refer to permit requirements. This should be publicly accessible (not behind a member log-in portal) on both the current and future GHI website designs. The Task Force created an example of this document which can be found in Appendix 2.

2) Create and post a permitting decision tree, where processes and appropriate staff are identified for the Type I, II, III and IV permit types. regarding member and staff actions and when these actions are to be performed during the permit process. Differences between each of the permit types should be noted if a single decision tree is created. Staff may determine that more than one decision tree may be more appropriate given the differences between the permit types.

3) Ensure that website links work properly and that proper and current staff listings are correct. Please see Appendix 3a-b for detailed recommendations and examples of website errors.

4) Institute a method for gathering member feedback as projects are completed and identifying room for improvement. This feedback can be recorded with individual permit records, but should be accessible for data gathering and accountability.

5) Offer informational meetings/webinars to educate members about the responsibilities in the permit process, as well as GHI's obligations.

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[1] This is captured by several of the member comments received in response to permit fees.

Appendix 1: Recommendations to Improve the Permit Process

Improve the permit process

1. Clearly identify when permits are required and when they are not required. Also clearly identify what items are prohibited. (See Appendix 2)
2. Create a checklist for those improvements and/or alterations that are routinely performed that require a permit (e.g., patios). This checklist should be used when processing the permit and be made available to members as well.
3. Provide the email of the Technical Services Director (and/or delegate) consistently across all communication. For example, the Type II Permit Request Form does not identify where the form can be emailed. The "Contact" staff option on the website allows a member to send a message, but does not allow attachments. Members are thus unable to submit their permit applications and supporting documents under an email cover letter..
4. Unless explicitly documented on the website, no one except the Director of Technical Services may inform a member that a permit is required.
5. Provide the option of a virtual teleconference (ex: Zoom call) with GHI, the member, and optionally the contractor. This could help to eliminate miscommunications and going back and forth.
6. Make available on the website process checklists that state requirements needed for certain items and who is responsible for each step (member or GHI). For example, during a full kitchen/bathroom redo, what documentation is required up front? Who is responsible for updating the electrical, plumbing, subfloor? If wall studs are exposed, does GHI need access and what might they look for? During different inspections, what will be checked and what additional documentation is needed? Be sure to coordinate this with the Member Handbook to ensure there are no inconsistencies.
7. Institute a tracking mechanism that is accessible to both staff and members. Specifically look to the new Yardi management site to implement this. At minimum, a simple spreadsheet with one line per permit application must hold the data. The fields in the spreadsheet might be: (Application number);(Application type I,II, III); (Free form description of improvement to be made), date fields paired with action categories: for instance (Date received at GHI)(Complete vs Incomplete) (Date of initial staff ruling)(Ruling category) (Date of permit resolution)(Resolution category) (A field holding a history list tracking the flow chart path and actions). This field would be a series of pairs of the form (Date of action) (Action category) and would be updated with (Date of last action)(Last action category) appended when an action event occurs. A final pair of fields could hold (Estimated date of next action, Next action category).

Improve Current Permit Definitions

1. Provide clear explanations for permit timelines (e.g., why a Type I permit takes 30 days vs. a Type II that takes 20 days). There should also be different timelines for new projects (i.e., a new addition, porch, etc.) vs. replacing or upgrading what is already there.
2. Clarify what is meant by trash enclosure. A trash enclosure could just be posts surrounded by wooden lattices or just a vinyl shed. Some units have trash closets. If a shed is used to store

trash receptacles, then that structure would require a permit. The current Section X does not define these.

3. Clarify Section X.C.3 as to whether items not specifically requiring a permit can be utilized to penalize a member due to the requirements in either Section III.B.5 or otherwise affecting structure or historical integrity.
4. The permit definition regarding fire pits should be clarified. Some pits are permanent and some are temporary. A permanent fire pit could require a permit to make sure surface water drainage and swales are not adversely affected. A temporary fire pit should not require a permit.
5. Make permit requirements for electric car charging stations and the installation of solar panels available on the website.
6. Clarify the guidance around tankless water heaters. They are not prohibited, but there is an amperage issue with installing them in GHI units. The units only have a capacity of 125 amps, which usually will not support a tankless water heater.
7. Clarify the phrase "minor improvements" in the Member Handbook that do require a permit, since that phrase is problematic and does not meet current Technical Services definition.

Increase Member Understanding of Permits

1. Include a permits flow chart, a list of items requiring permits, a list of items not requiring permits, and a list of prohibited items as part of the member orientation packet. Also include a list of member responsibilities regarding permits and the consequences of not upholding their responsibilities.
2. Provide a step-by-step general document that describes the permit process. The Task Force recommends the Technical Services Director produce such a document from their point-of-view.
3. Provide templates of exemplar permit successes for each Type (I, II, III, IV, and V)
4. Make clear in the permit process documentation (website, handbook, permit application forms), that denials of permits are based on rules in the Member Handbook and that all requests for exception are forwarded to ARC, Buildings, or another Committee who makes a recommendation to the Board of Directors. While this is the current process, many members may not be aware that it is their responsibility to request an exception from the appropriate standing committee. This leads to frustration and distrust among the Membership.
5. Section X. of the Member's Handbook must be updated to address the Permit Requirements and ensure consistency throughout Section X as well as the rest of the Handbook so that there is agreement between the governing documents. To that end, the Member Handbook on the website should be the official version of the Handbook. Members can request a hard copy for their use. The Board must consider how to bring this vital step to fruition, rather than relying on a volunteer task force.
6. The Task Force recommends that the above changes be implemented within one year of acceptance of this report by the Board of Directors.

Appendix 2a-c: Actions Currently Requiring a Permit

This section is an Excel Workbook created by members of the Task Force to see in a single document what improvements required permits. The information comes directly from the GHI website and the Member Handbook. This workbook should be viewed as a suggested template and living document that is updated by staff when changes are made. The Task Force recommends that an official version of a document like this be included on the GHI website.

Category	Type of Renovation	Type/ GHI Permit or Form Needed	Neighbor Consent Required	Permit/Neighbor Consent Exception Details	References	Reason
Home Exterior	Permanent changes to the structure or an improvement to the exterior appearance that substantially affects the historical nature or physical structure of the buildings (example: door awnings)	Conditional		Check with Director of Technical Services to determine whether your requested improvement needs a permit.	Staff recommends that Section X.C.3 allows that any change not specifically requiring a permit in Section 11.B that written approval is required.	appearance or structural stability is being affected
Home Interior	Bathroom: Replace/Add Fan/Ventilation	Type II			not in handbook yet (county permit needed for HIP)	
Home Interior	Kitchen: Replace/Add Ventilation	Type II			not in handbook yet (county permit needed for HIP)	
Home Exterior	Antennas and Satellite Dishes	SD-1			https://www.ghi.coop/node/89 https://www.ghi.coop/sites/default/files/docs/attachments/SD-1.pdf	Structural integrity, safety, visibility
Home Exterior	Add Wood Porch	Type I	Adjacent	Any neighbor with sightline	https://www.ghi.coop/sites/default/files/docs/attachments/TypeI_Permit%20Request%20Form%20%28Additions%20Decks%20Porches%29.pdf www.ghi.coop/content/xi-decks	constructed with permanent footings Insulation for Crawl Spaces Termite Treatment of disturbed earth & treated wood used
Home Exterior	Add Porch	Type I	Adjacent	Any neighbor with sightline	https://www.ghi.coop/sites/default/files/docs/attachments/TypeI_Permit%20Request%20Form%20%28Additions%20Decks%20Porches%29.pdf www.ghi.coop/content/xi-decks	constructed with permanent footings Insulation for Crawl Spaces Termite Treatment of disturbed earth & treated wood used
Home Exterior	Add Wood/Composite Deck	Type I	Adjacent	Any neighbor with sightline	https://www.ghi.coop/content/xc-major-improvements	constructed with permanent footings Termite Treatment of disturbed earth & treated wood used
Home Exterior	Replace Existing Deck	Type I	Adjacent	Assumed neighbor consent. Required for new decks	https://www.ghi.coop/sites/default/files/docs/attachments/TypeI_Permit%20Request%20Form%20%28Additions%20Decks%20Porches%29.pdf www.ghi.coop/content/xi-decks	constructed with permanent footings Termite Treatment of disturbed earth & treated wood used
Home Interior	Additions With Plumbing	Type I	Adjacent	Any neighbor with sightline	https://www.ghi.coop/sites/default/files/docs/attachments/TypeI_Permit%20Request%20Form%20%28Additions%20Decks%20Porches%29.pdf www.ghi.coop/content/xf-gardenside-end-additions www.ghi.coop/content/xg-serviceside-additions-frame-homes www.ghi.coop/content/xh-serviceside-additions-masonry	architectural style of the buildin
Home Interior	Additions Without Plumbing	Type I	Adjacent	Any neighbor with sightline	https://www.ghi.coop/sites/default/files/docs/attachments/TypeI_Permit%20Request%20Form%20%28Additions%20Decks%20Porches%29.pdf www.ghi.coop/content/xf-gardenside-end-additions www.ghi.coop/content/xg-serviceside-additions-frame-homes www.ghi.coop/content/xh-serviceside-additions-masonry	architectural style of the buildin

Category	Type of Renovation	Type/ GHI Permit or Form Needed	Neighbor Consent Required	Permit/Neighbor Consent Exception Details	References	Reason
Home Exterior	Trash Enclosures	Type I or II		Type I if modifying part of building. Type II if building a shed enclosure/shed.		
Home Exterior	Screen in Existing Porch	Type I*	Adjacent	Any neighbor with sightline	Assume but not explicit	Insulation for Crawl Spaces
Home Exterior	Florida Rooms	Type I*	Adjacent	Any neighbor with sightline	Assume Type I. Covers Additions and Porches	
Home Exterior	Add Screen/Storm Doors	Type II			building-openings-windows-doors-	
Home Exterior	Install or Expand Exterior Door	Type II			building-openings-windows-doors-	
Home Exterior	Install or Expand Window	Type II			building-openings-windows-doors-	
Home Exterior	Modify/Remodel Attached Garage	Type II			requirements	
Home Exterior	Replace Exterior Doors on Home	Type II	Adjoining	Only required for non approved paint colors	building-openings-windows-doors-	
Home Exterior	Replace Siding on Home	Type II				
Home Exterior	Replace Windows on Home	Type II			building-openings-windows-doors-	
Home Exterior	Exterior Lighting	Type II				
Home Interior	Add Outlets/Install Light Fixtures	Type II		If new light locations	major-improvements	
Home Interior	Basement Remodel	Type II				
Home Interior	Bathroom Remodel	Type II				
Home Interior	Bathroom Replace Sink	Type II				
Home Interior	Bathroom Replace Tile/Flooring	Type II				
Home interior	Basement Finishing	Type II				
Yard	Fire Pits	Type II		If permanent		
Yard	Hot Tubs	Type II				
Yard	Ponds and Fountains	Type II		diameter		
Yard	Pools	Type II		diameter		
Yard	Planting Tree	Type II			https://www.ghi.coop/node/70	
Yard	Planting Hedges	Type II	Adjoining	Neighbor consent if on shared property line	https://www.ghi.coop/node/70	
Yard	Yard Grade/drainage modification	Type II			construction-specifications	
Home Interior	Bathroom Replace Toilet	Type II				
Home Interior	Bathroom Replace Tub/Shower	Type II				
Home Interior	Boiler Room Remodel	Type II				
Home Interior	Compost Toilets	Type II				
Home Interior	Fireplace	Type II				
Home Interior	HVAC installation	Type II	Adjacent	All within sight line for exterior condensors	major-improvements	
Home Interior	Install Skylight	Type II				
Home Interior	Kitchen Remodel	Type II				
Home Interior	Kitchen Replace Refrigerator	Type II			construction-specifications	Evaluation on change in electrical load
Home Interior	Wood Stove	Type II				
Yard	Add Stone Patio	Type II				
Yard	Compost Bins	Type II		if only one pile smaller than 6' by 6'		
Yard	Raised Garden Beds	Type II				
Yard	Retaining Wall	Type II				
Yard	Sheds	Type II			storage-shelters-sheds	treated wood used
Yard	Gazebos, Permanent	Type II *				
Yard	Fences	Type III				
Yard	Privacy Screens	Type III	Adjoining	Neighbor consent if on shared property line	major-improvements	rainbarrels
Yard	Rain Barrel	Type IV	Adjoining	Neighbor consent if on shared downspout	major-improvements	
Home Exterior	Solar Panels	Yes			solar-photovoltaic-energy-systems	

Appendix 2a: Improvements Requiring Permits (Template)

Category	Type of Renovation	Type/ GHI Permit or Form Needed	Neighbor Consent Required	Permit/Neighbor Consent Exception Details	References	Reason
Home Exterior	Window Boxes					
Home Interior	Replace Hot Water Heater			GHI Responsibilty.		
Yard	Trampolines					

Appendix 2b: Improvements Not Requiring Permits

Category	Type of Renovation	or Form Needed	Consent	Consent Exception	References
Home Exterior	Add Shutters	None		If shutters are stationary	https://www.ghi.coop/content/x-improvements-alterations-additions
Home Exterior	Repaint Block/Brick Home	None		29 Larger homes and homes with siding may not be painted.	https://www.ghi.coop/content/paint https://www.ghi.coop/content/xi-exterior-painting https://www.ghi.coop/content/painting
Home Exterior	Paint Exterior Door	None	Adjoining	Entry doors are excluded from the approved color restrictions, and can be painted any color; if the desired color is not on the approved color list, written approval of neighbor(s) is required	https://www.ghi.coop/content/xc-major-improvements https://www.ghi.coop/content/xi-exterior-painting
Home Interior	Refinish Existing Wood Floors	None			https://www.ghi.coop/content/x-improvements-alterations-additions
Home interior	Wall Covering (e.g. wallpaper)	None			https://www.ghi.coop/content/x-improvements-alterations-additions
Home interior	Wall Painting	None			https://www.ghi.coop/content/x-improvements-alterations-additions
Home Interior	Air Conditioner - window	None		Many requirements (see handbook)	https://www.ghi.coop/content/xk-air-conditioner-installation
Yard	Children's Play House	None		if they are not larger than fifty (50) square feet, no higher than six (6) feet, and the floor is level and on grade.	https://www.ghi.coop/content/x-improvements-alterations-additions
Yard	Temporary Structure (e.g. canopy, gazebo, cantilevered umbrella, screened room)	None		Max 100sq ft. Statement of Responsibility for Temporary Structure & Removal must be filed and structure Must be removed by Oct 1	https://www.ghi.coop/content/temporary-garden-structures https://www.ghi.coop/content/ix-storage-shelters-sheds
Home Interior	Replace Existing (non-bathroom) Flooring	None		Unless removing original flooring (asbestos) or if a problem is discoved when removing old flooring	https://www.ghi.coop/content/x-improvements-alterations-additions

Appendix 2c: Prohibited Improvements

Category	Renovation	Permit or	Consent	Consent Exception	References
Home Exterior	Repaint Block/Brick Home	None		29 Larger homes and homes with siding may not be painted.	https://www.ghi.coop/content/paint https://www.ghi.coop/content/xi-exterior-painting https://www.ghi.coop/content/painting
Home Exterior	Remove Paint from Brick/Block Exterior	Prohibited		Only natural weathering once painted	https://www.ghi.coop/content/xi-exterior-painting
Yard	Treehouse	Prohibited			Section X.A.1
Home Exterior	Security Bars	Prohibited			Section X.N.4
Exterior	Piercing of Vinyl Siding for any exterior hangings other than unit numbers or mailboxes	Prohibited			Section III.B.5

Appendix 3: Recommendations for Updating the GHI Website

1. Remove and update contradictory and incorrect information.
   a. See Appendix 3a, test runs through the permit process with commentary and examples of poor communication
2. Ensure all broken links are working and continue to work with switch to Yardi
3. Provide a clear list of when a permit is, and is not, required. Utilize the new permit spreadsheet provided by Task Force (Appendix 2). For example, the Type II permit form declares it covers appliances, but is a Type II permit needed to replace an appliance like a microwave? The website has no clear indication whether refrigerators, stoves, or dishwashers require permits, but staff claim they do. Decks have a permit form and Member Handbook section, but both are silent about patios.
4. Create downloadable checklists listing the information members must submit and/or processes they must follow for all common types of projects. These project checklists should cover, at a minimum, patios, decks, fences, ceiling fans, electrical outlets, rain barrels, privacy screens, and additions. These forms should be available on the GHI website and be updated when necessary.
5. Upload examples of completed permit applications (with personal information redacted) that meet GHI expectations and were rapidly approved, as templates for new applications.
6. Review the current permit forms, revise them as necessary to reflect current requirements, and upload the revised forms to the website. For example, nowhere on the permit request form does it explain how to go about the permit process, that permits need to be closed, and how to close permits.
7. Identify subject matter experts to update the website as a routine part of their work responsibilities. Hopefully, the new Yardi property management system will make updating information easier on staff and finding information easier for members.
8. Develop a separate webpage for the permit process that includes a list of alternations/improvements, which category each alteration/improvement is in, and links to blank and example permit applications for either a minor, moderate, or major alteration/improvement. The website should include template plans for projects and requirements (such as stud width or how many electrical outlets per linear foot are needed, etc).
9. Develop a simplified online/interactive permit for certain common items, such as rain barrels or sheds that include sample drawings or recognize common brands rather than the current PDF version. Investigate an online system where members could track the progress of their permits and upload drawings or documentation.
10. Ensure the process flow chart referenced in the permit form is kept current and available on the website.
11. Ensure that information about the documentation required for each type of permit application is kept current and available on the website.

Appendix 3a: Member Attempts to Use GHI Website for Permit Process

The following examples are an attempt by members of this task force to use the existing website to determine how to properly obtain a successful permit for their projects.

Sample Kitchen Renovation

Trying out the Permit Process as a New-ish Member:

I went through the site to find information on doing an update, to see what was brought up regarding the permits. What I decided to search was kitchen remodel, as I think with the age of these houses this is an extremely popular activity and with so many home improvement shows, folks may think they can DIY it and may just visit the GHI site to see if there are any rules or even photos of other kitchen remodels.

- If you use that search tool at the top of the website, all the info you get is to external sites, nothing for GHI.
- If you are new to GHI and didn't go through HIP you would likely click on Homes Improvement Program thinking that has something to do with a kitchen remodel. There should be something there like, "looking to remodel or improve your GHI? Click here to access the GHI Remodel and Improvement Process portion of this site."
- If you click Member Resources, there is Kitchen & Bathroom Renovations. If I click on Kitchen Renovations, thinking this may be where I learn about kitchen remodels in a GHI, I get in the same tab (meaning I am no longer on the GHI website) a YouTube video for the 2014 Photos of results for the Architectural Review Committee's Kitchen Renovation Contest - Frame Homes. As a minimum, this video should be embedded on the site with an explanation of what the heck this is. Again, there should be links saying, "Are you looking for X? Then click here to visit it."
- Reopening the website, I go back to Member Resources and there is nothing there or anywhere else on the menu specifically mentioning permits, renovations, updates, and changes to your GHI. Considering how much confusion those emails mentioned, I think such a tab on the main menu is a necessity.
- I went to Tool and Rules just because I knew after visiting the site many times over the years that this is where the information is. But Tools and Rules is incredibly vague and if you're not familiar may think it's tools and rules for living here, or maybe renting tools and the rules about it?
- Clicking Guidelines, Rules, and Permits I'm hit with a big chart. I click CTRL-F to find Kitchens, click the blue word kitchens and get https://www.ghi.coop/content/kitchen-0

This page has the following text:
Rule Type:
Renovation
GHI Rules:
X.C. Major Improvements

Permit:
Type II Improvement Permit Request
Neighbor Consent Required:
No
Required:
clearances: Do not install [ceiling] heater closer than 12" to any adjacent vertical surface (e.g. any open combustible cabinet doors). Clear access to the electric panel.
Prohibited:
Removal of heating source.
Prince George's County:
Electrical permits are required.
City of Greenbelt:
Electrical permits are required.
Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission:
Plumbing permits are required.

I opened the three hyperlinks into new tabs to go over them looking for information on kitchens. The first one Rule type: Renovation goes to a page that looks like this:

Home ›
Renovation

Clarified altering windows & doors in original buildings w/construction of addition
Date:
Thu, 04/26/2012
Read more

Addition Maintenance Task Force
Addition Maintenance Task Force Meeting

Read more

Kitchen
Read more

If I click on Kitchen, whether it's the word or "read more" I go back to the exact same page I was on.

When I click on X.C. Major Improvements I go to this page: https://www.ghi.coop/content/xc-major-improvements which is the general information for all major improvements, from an addition to a shed to changing the color of your front door but nowhere on that entire page is the word kitchen.

The top of the page has:
REQUESTS. Only the member may make the request in writing to the GHI Technical Services Office. A request form is available from that office.

If you click on either REQUESTS or request form, you go to https://www.ghi.coop/node/372 which is a generic page for all requests, but I have no idea which request form I need. At the very bottom there are request forms for three types of permits but I have no idea what kind of permit I need. Oh yeah, on that first page it said I needed a Type 2 permit. So let me go to Type II, even though it still doesn't mention kitchens but instead, "This information package is for GHI members desiring sheds, yard/grade/ interior modifications, appliances & HVAC installation." I click on it and go to: https://www.ghi.coop/content/type-ii-improvement-permit-request and again I get the same,

"This information package is for GHI members desiring sheds, yard/grade/ interior modifications, appliances & HVAC installation." No mention of kitchens. But I click on the permit PDF:

https://www.ghi.coop/sites/default/files/docs/attachments/TypeII_Permit%20Request%20Form%20%28Sheds%20Yard%20Interior%20Etc.%29.pdf

There are a lot of words about permits, but nowhere in that request form does it explain how to go about the permit process, that permits need to be closed, how to close them.

Inside the PDF permit request it says there is a flowchart to see the process graphically, yet when I click it, it opens in the same browser, losing the PDF, and it comes to a page saying, "The requested page "/techservices/GHIpermitflowchart.doc" could not be found."

This is the point when I gave up and began reading through all the emails that folks sent about the fee process.

I went through all of the emails plus took the experience I and many other members I know have experienced: the permit process is confusing. We don't know what needs and doesn't need a permit, and we don't understand the permit process for the county, city, and coop. I think every discussion I have had over the 20 years living in this community relating to GHI has included frustrations over renovations and the confusion of the permit process.

The GHI site needs to have it very clear what does and does not need permits, but also how to acquire permits, how to go about ensuring they are closed, and how it is on the member not the contractor to ensure they are closed. This needs to be the same exact information one gets if they call and speak to anyone working at GHI, or bump into them in the community. And it needs to be exactly the same wording in the Green Book.

If fees need to be implemented, how about a fine for unclosed permits? The hope is that owners will take care of this aspect, and instead of fining them for wanting one, fining them for not closing one will still motivate owners to go through the proper channels to update their homes.

It had me thinking about the benefit of some sort of spreadsheet on the site. You can tab down for your type of remodel and find out everything there with links to the appropriate pages. Example:

Type of Renovation	Category	GHI Permit Needed	Type	City of Greenbelt Permit Needed	Details	PG County Permit Needed	Details	Requires Update to Mutual Owner Contract (MOC)
Rain Barrel	Yard	X	Type IV					
Fences	Yard	X	Type III					
Privacy Screens	Yard	X	Type III					
Sheds	Yard	X	Type II					Yes
HVAC installation	Home Interior	X	Type II					Yes
Kitchen Remodel	Home Interior							
Retaining Wall	Yard	X	Type II	X	Link	X	link	
Replace Hot Water Heater	Home Interior							
Bathroom Remodel	Home Interior							
Bathroom Replace Toilet	Home Interior							
Bathroom Replace Sink	Home Interior							
Bathroom Replace Tub/Shower	Home Interior							
Bathroom Replace Tile/Flooring	Home Interior							
Bathroom Replace/Add Fan/Ventilation	Home Interior							
Kitchen Replace Refrigerator	Home Interior							
Kitchen Replace/Add Ventilation	Home Interior							
Kitchen Replace Flooring	Home Interior							
Repaint Block/Brick Home	Home Exterior							
Replace Siding on Home	Home Exterior							
Replace Windows on Home	Home Exterior							
Replace Exterior Doors on Home	Home Exterior							
Add Screen/Storm Doors	Home Exterior							
Add Shutters/Window Boxes	Home Exterior							
Replace Existing Deck	Home Exterior							
Add Wood/Composite Deck	Home Exterior							
Add Wood Porch	Home Exterior							
Add Stone Patio	Yard							
Gazeebos	Yard							
Hot Tubs	Yard							
Trampolines	Yard							
Fire Pits	Yard							
Raised Garden Beds	Yard							
Add Outlets/Install Light Fixtures	Home Interior							
Refinish Existing Wood Floors	Home Interior							
Replace Existing Flooring	Home Interior							
Additions Without Plumbing	Home Interior							
Additions With Plumbing	Home Interior							
Florida Rooms								
Boiler Room Remodel								
Basement Remodel								
Pools								
Ponds and Fountains								
Antennas and Satellite Dishes								
Fireplace								

But I think along with that, there should be a page that we build that details the permit process. Let's write down exactly how to go about getting the GHI permit, and then from there if you need a city permit, how to do it, and then for the county. And then explain how to close permits, the reason why these permits are necessary and closing them, and then if there is any fine for not closed permits, mention it here and explain how the fee came to be.

Shed Permit Test

GHI Member applying for a shed permit, using the resources available on the GHI website on 5/26/2021

- First I went to the GHI website, and navigated to the "tools, rules, and permits" section.

Shed	IX. Storage Shelters - Sheds	Type II Improvement Permit Request

For Sheds, member handbook reference is IX Storage shelters-sheds, and the type of permit needed is Type II Improvement Permit Request.

Under the rules.. (https://www.ghi.coop/content/ix-storage-shelters-sheds)

Sheds are mostly limited to the garden side, there is a size limit, and the materials are limited.

Under Type II Permit… (https://www.ghi.coop/sites/default/files/docs/attachments/TypeII_Permit%20Request%20Form%20%28Sheds%20Yard%20Interior%20Etc.%29.pdf)

In Item 1: There is a link to the permit request, within that link, there is a link to a process flowchart, **this link is broken**. (https://www.ghi.coop/techservices/GHIpermitflowchart.doc)

In Item 3: Time for approval ranges from up to 20 days (business?) to 8 weeks (if the BOD needs to approve the permit)

In Item 5: Notice for hiring contractors (this is the first mention of GHI doing final inspection, no mention of requirement to close out permits, nor if permits expire)

Requirements for shed permit

1. Shed plan, drawing, with reference to a GHI standard shed plan, but no link or information to be able to obtain said shed plan. Can we add this to the permit request?

2. Material of shed

3. Type of platform (again referencing the GHI standard shed plan).

4. Screening of the shed.

Those 4 items and the permit application filled out, should be submitted to obtain a permit.

Nowhere does it state if/when Permits expire. Final inspection re: sheds is referenced on the first page in passing, with respect to contractors.