

This essay and the sample plans were done by Paul Tacy, C.B.O. Though a somewhat light-hearted approach to the importance of building plans and permitting, I feel this is a valuable resource to all seeking building permits.

Robert C. Borden  
Building Commissioner

## A Two Bedroom Ranch in G-Minor

About the time Bach and Beethoven began writing the top 40 hits of their day, Thomas Jefferson was drawing up the plans for Monticello, his home in Virginia. They each had a vision in their mind's eye (or ear) which they needed to share with others. Once it was on paper, a skilled musician or carpenter could read and execute the vision for all to hear or see. But in order for that to happen, the writer had to make it very clear what he meant, and the performer had to know how to read the music or plans.

Fortunately, there were *rules* in place for creating both. These rules, the structure by which all songs were written and all houses were drawn, had been developed and perfected long before Beethoven and Jefferson came along. *All* music followed the same rules, as did *all* building plans. By knowing and following the rules, their dreams could be conveyed on paper and brought to life as they envisioned them.

And three hundred years later these rules still apply! A whole note still looks like a squashed circle, and an eighth note still has that perky little flag on it. Beams, rafters and bricks are still drawn the same way. You have to follow the rules if you expect others to know what you mean, regardless of how bright you may be. Lennon and McCartney were pretty bright, and certainly free thinkers. They broke a lot of rules. But even they had to follow the rules when they wrote music, or they never would have made it out of Liverpool. If you look at the sheet music for "A Hard Day's Night", every note, rest, sharp and flat are where they belong. The time signature and key signature are there to set things up, just like the rules say. No mistaking what they meant.

Like a song, a set of building plans needs to be *complete*. Every piece of the building needs to be there, and *drawn according to the rules*, using the proper symbol for each material. (If you draw cute little pink panthers in your walls, the Building Official will not know you mean insulation.) And like the time signature of a song, the scale of a plan needs to be there to create the format.

Complete. Pointing to a deck in the plan and writing, "Framing per code" is like a song writer leaving a bunch of measures blank and writing, "use some notes here that follow the rules".

Complete. Walls have thickness. They have studs, plates, sheathing, insulation, siding, interior covering and maybe more. These all need to be shown on the plans. There are building code rules about ceiling height, stair width, door sizes, smoke detectors, framing sizes and spacing, and a million other things. Learn the rules, and put this stuff on the plans.

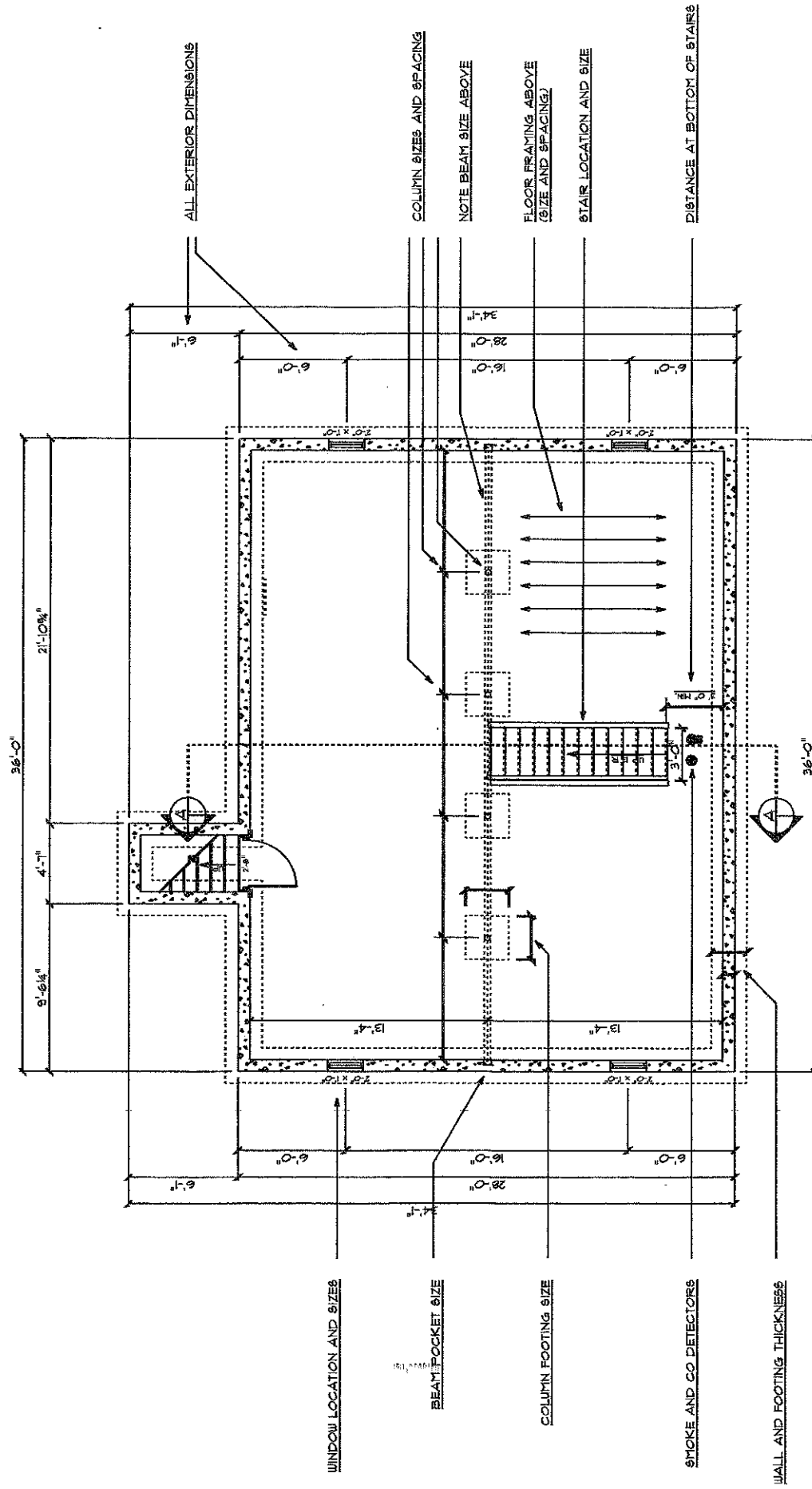
So plans, like music, are all about *structure* – how something is put together. The creative, aesthetic stuff is the vision; the plans are how to achieve the vision. Showing someone a full color 3d picture of your dream home is like playing a song on the piano. They may get the idea of what it will look like, but it doesn't help them understand how it's built. Jefferson understood this, and everyone since – you can't build a house "playing it by ear".

(SOME JURISDICTIONS MAY REQUIRE MORE)



## MINIMUM INFORMATION FOR SIMPLE FOUNDATION PLANS

(SOME JURISDICTIONS MAY REQUIRE MORE)



FOUNDATION PLAN

SCALE: 1/4" = 10'

PLAN NAME

SCALE

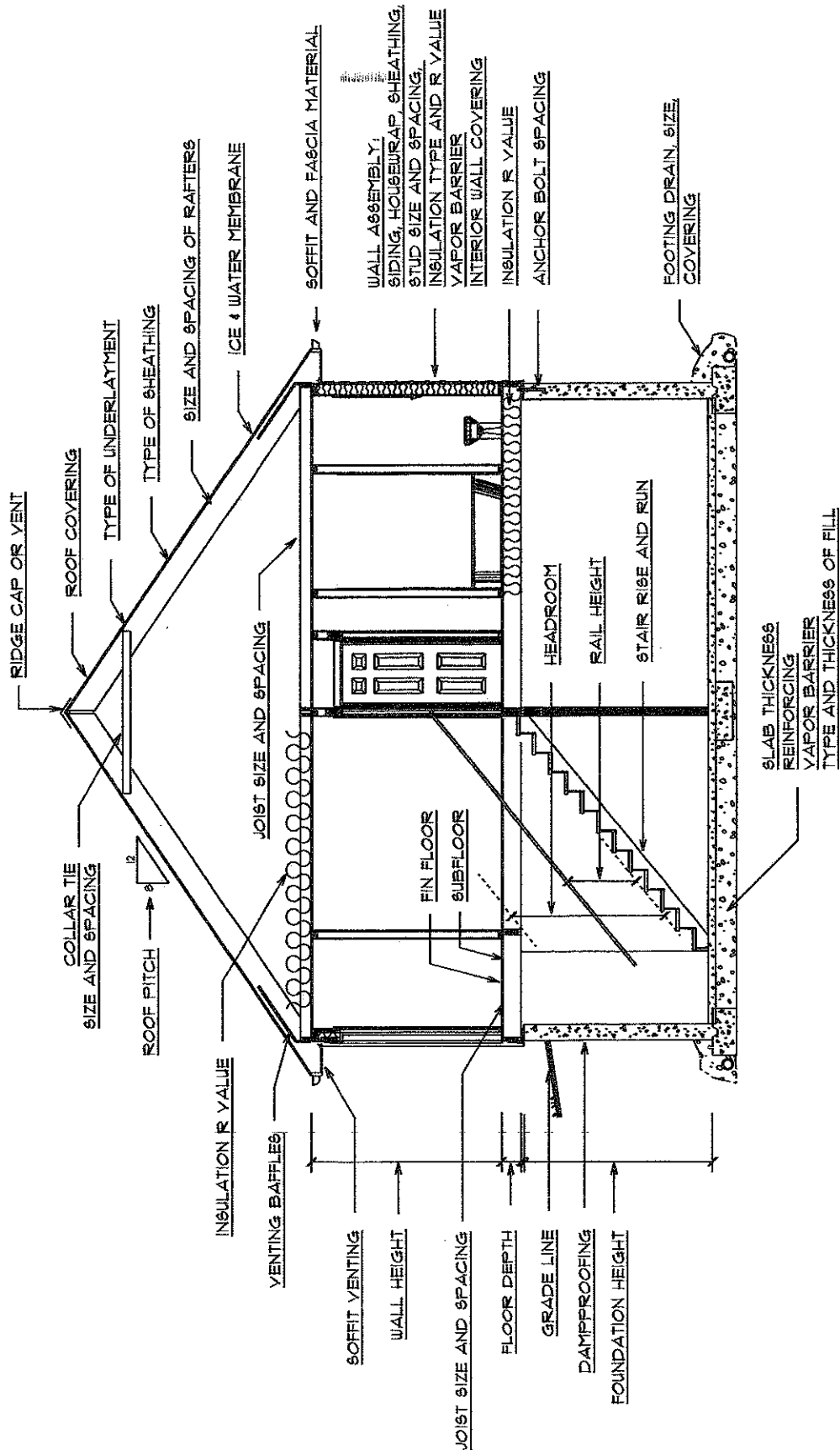
PLAN NAME

**SCALE**

SCALE: 1/4" = 1'0"

# MINIMUM INFORMATION FOR SIMPLE SECTIONS

(SOME JURISDICTIONS MAY REQUIRE MORE)

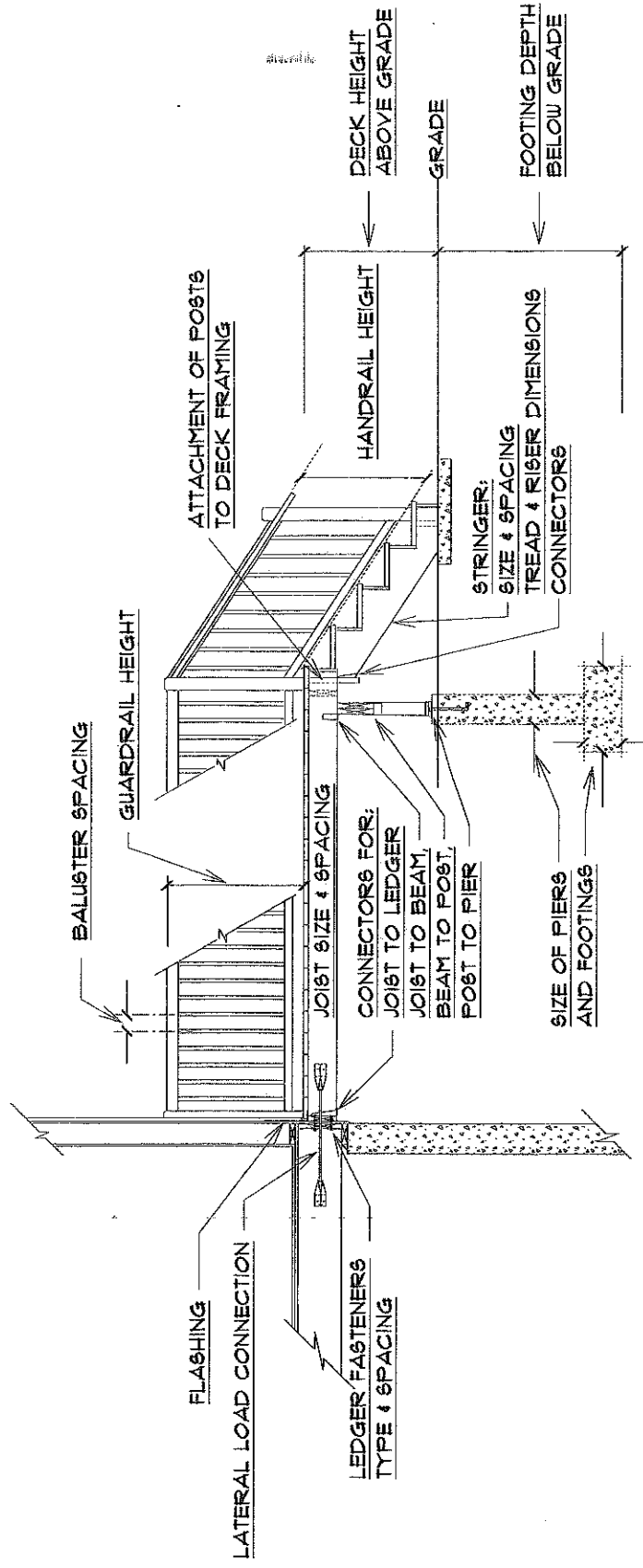


**SECTION A - A** → SECTION DESIGNATION

SCALE: 1/4" = 1' - 0" → SCALE

# MINIMUM INFORMATION FOR SIMPLE DECK SECTION

(SOME JURISDICTIONS MAY REQUIRE MORE)



## SECTION THROUGH DECK

SCALE: 1/4" = 1' - 0"