

Building an ADU in Los Angeles

The 2026 Reality Check

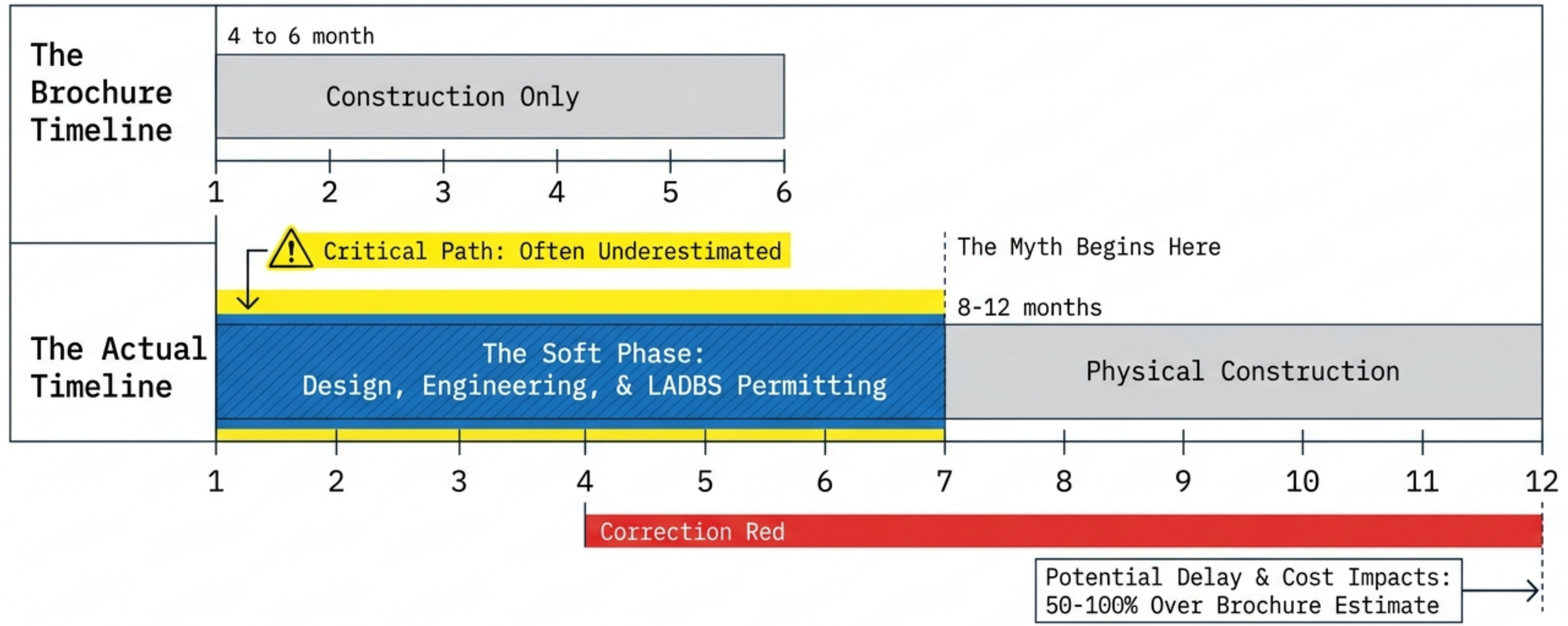
A master project dossier on timelines, hidden costs, and navigating LADBS.



**CONFIDENTIAL:
2026 DATA**

The Timeline: Marketing Myth vs. Construction Reality

The 4-6 month timeline you see in brochures only covers the physical build.
The realistic timeline for a new-build LA ADU is 8-12 months.



The 2026 ADU Archetypes: Choose Your Scope

Reconstructed data from 2026 representative Los Angeles projects.

Sherman Oaks Detached



750 sqft, 2 bed/1 bath, flat lot

Foundation:	New slab
Total Cost:	\$365,000 (\$400-\$600/sqft average)
Timeline:	39 weeks
Disruption:	Moderate

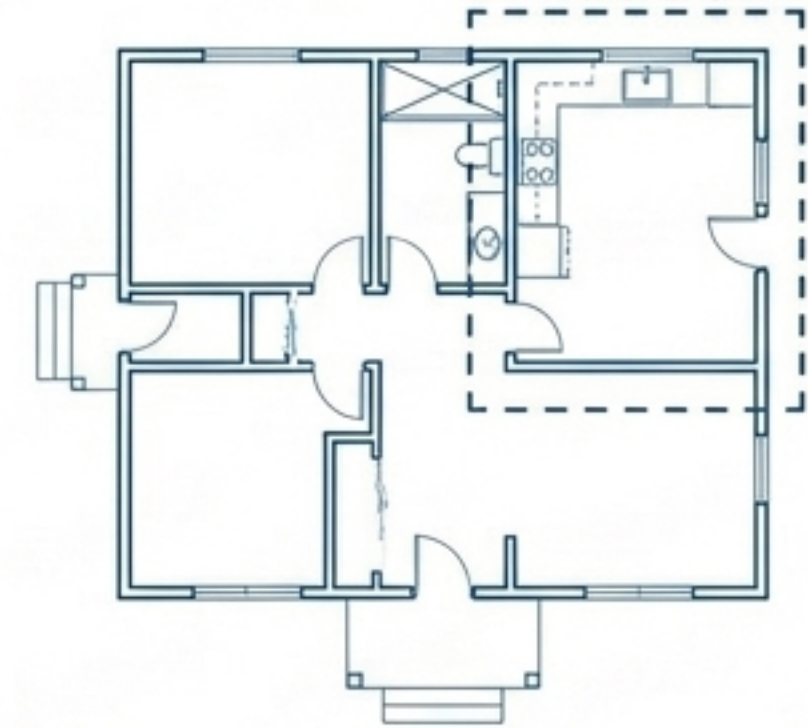
Eagle Rock Garage Conversion



400 sqft studio

Foundation:	New slab & structural upgrades
Total Cost:	\$160,000 (\$250-\$400/sqft average)
Timeline:	28 weeks
Disruption:	Moderate

Highland Park JADU

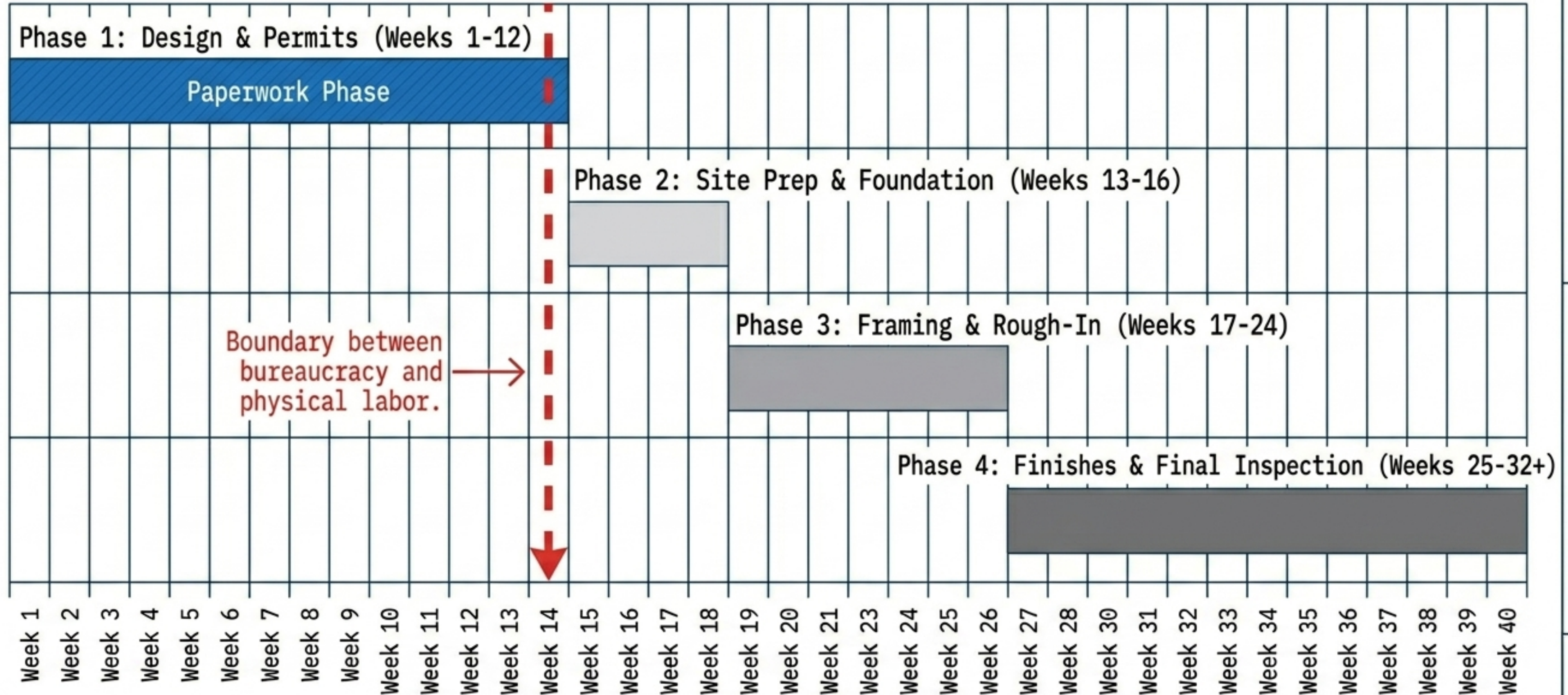


480 sqft within 1920s bungalow

Foundation:	Existing footprint
Total Cost:	\$105,000 (\$150-\$250/sqft average)
Timeline:	22 weeks
Disruption:	Maximum (living in the active construction zone)

The 40-Week Master Schedule (Detached New Build)

Administrative work often takes as long as the physical build.

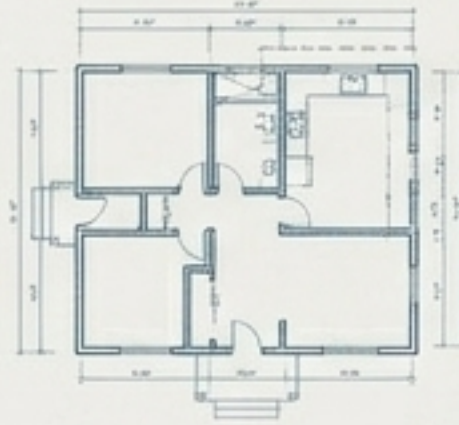


Phase 1: Design & Permits (Weeks 1-12)

This is the most unpredictable phase. A clean submittal sails through; errors add months of back-and-forth. State laws like AB 68 streamline, but do not eliminate, this process.

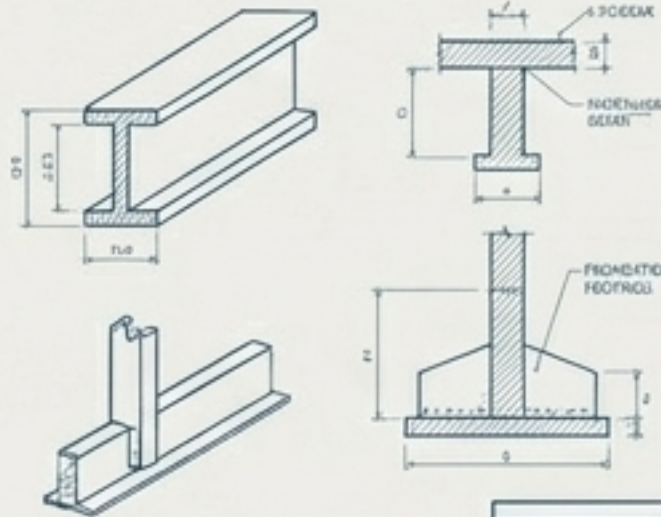
1. Architecture

Floor plans, elevations



2. Engineering

Structural load paths, foundation design



3. Compliance

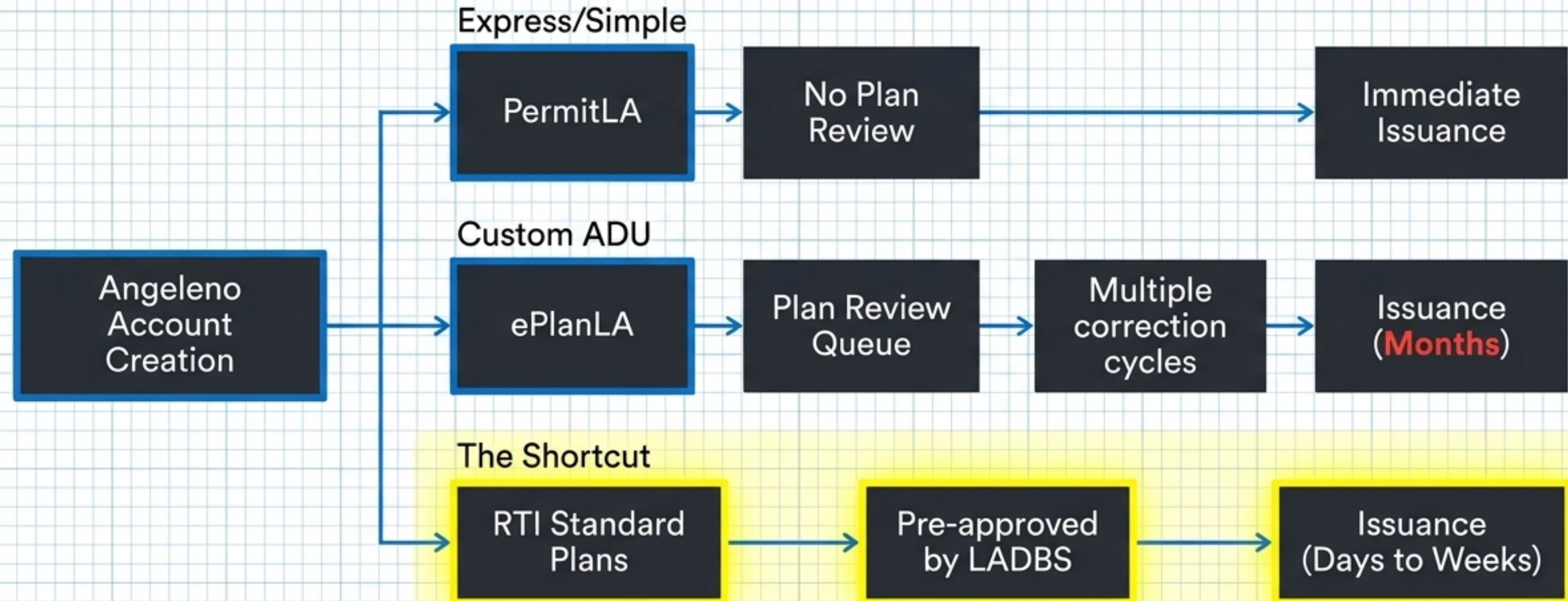
Title 24 energy calculations, fire safety, seismic codes



Warning: Owner Action Required - Make decisions quickly and fund the project. Architect/Expediter handles the city interface.

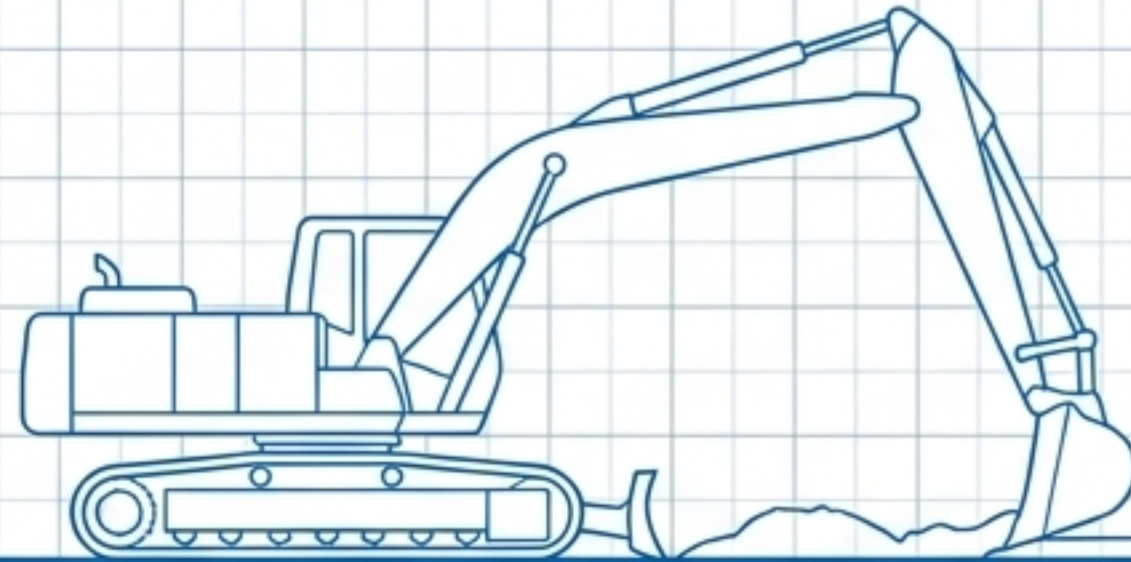
Navigating City Hall: The LADBS Ecosystem

Insight: Bypassing the custom queue is the single biggest time-saver available to homeowners.



Phase 2: Site Prep & Foundation (Weeks 13-16)

The main risk here is the unknown beneath the dirt. Rain is the other enemy; you cannot pour a slab in a downpour.



ABOVE GROUND

BELOW GROUND

1. Trenching coordination
(LADWP / SoCalGas for
water, sewer, power)

2. Uncompacted fill
requiring soils
engineering

3. Unexpected
bedrock

4. Abandoned
septic tanks

Phase 3: Framing & Rough-In (Weeks 17-24)

The building must become weather-tight before the critical sequence of interior rough-in work begins.

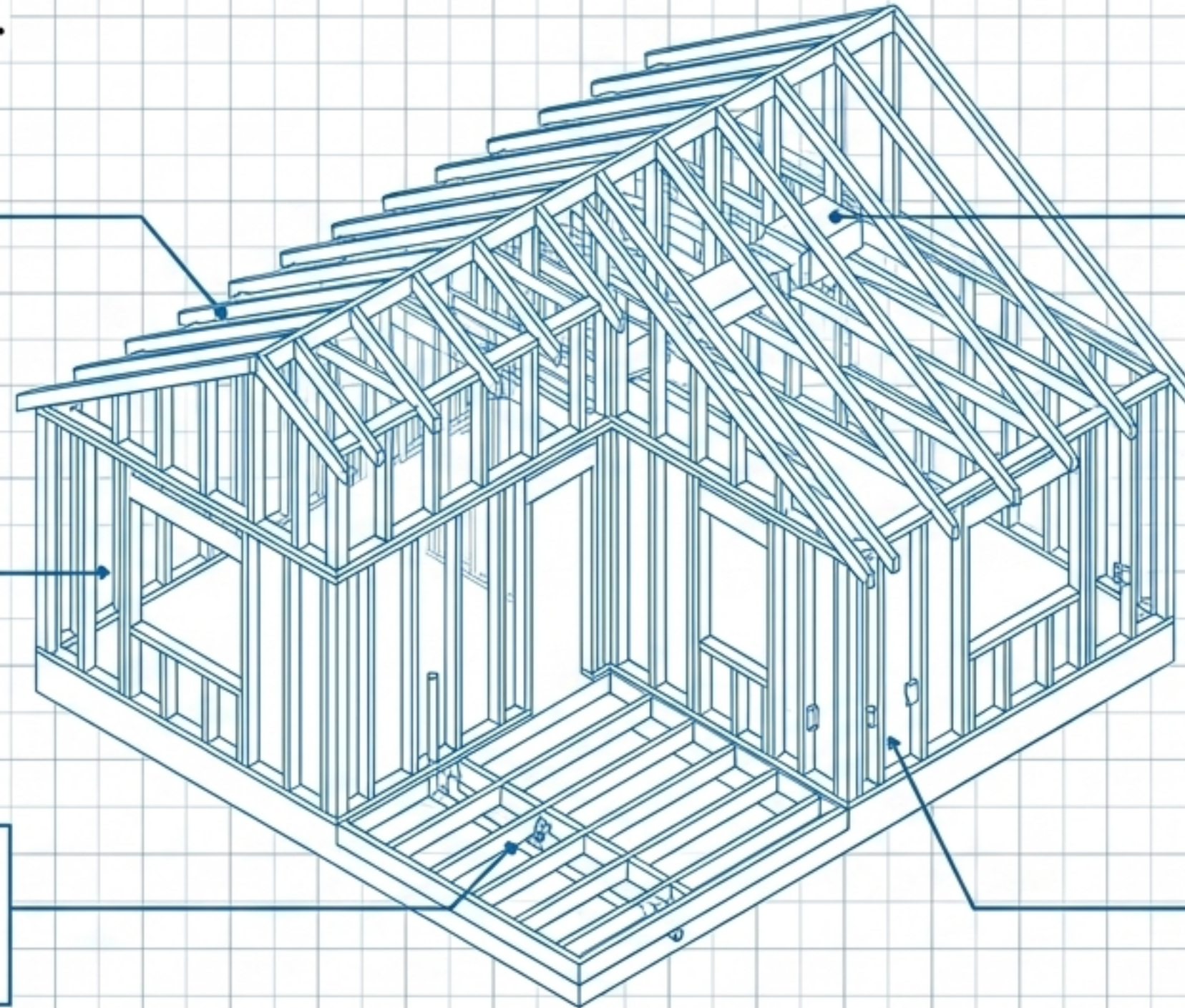
Step 1: Walls, roof trusses, sheathing, and wrap.

Step 2: Windows and exterior doors (weather-tight).

Step 3: Plumbing (supply and drain lines).

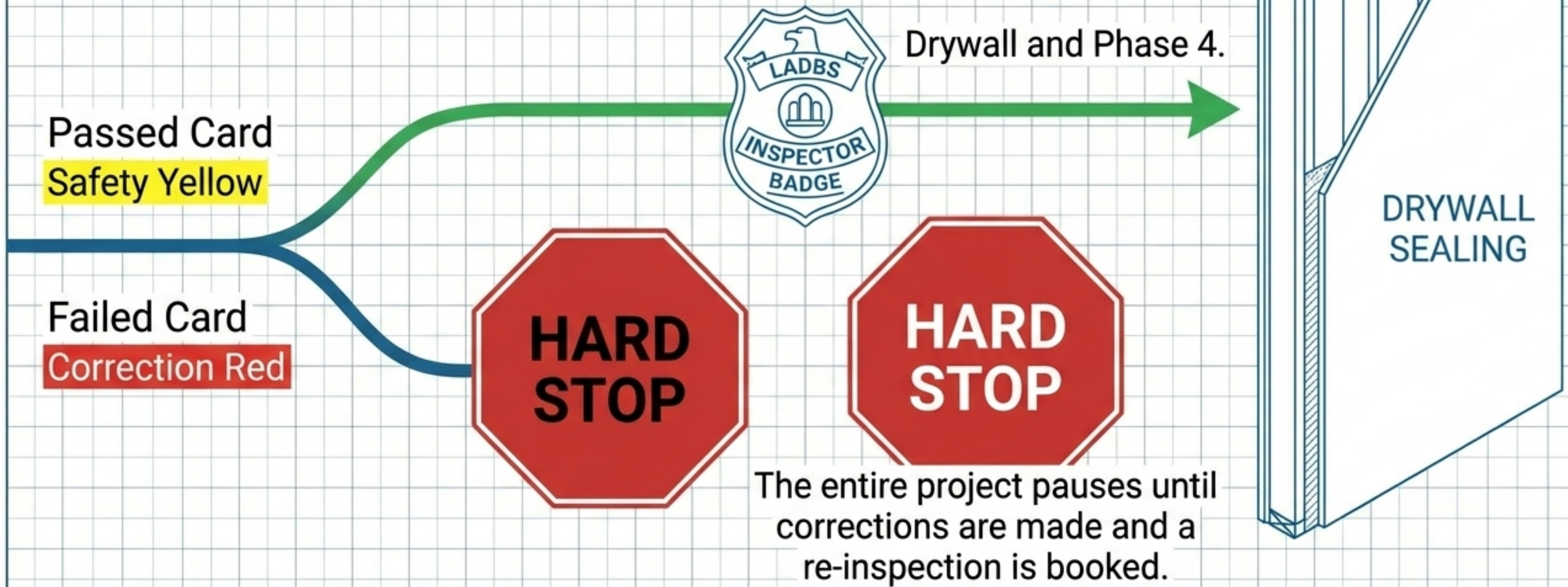
Step 5: HVAC (ductwork installation).

Step 4: Electrical (wiring to every box).



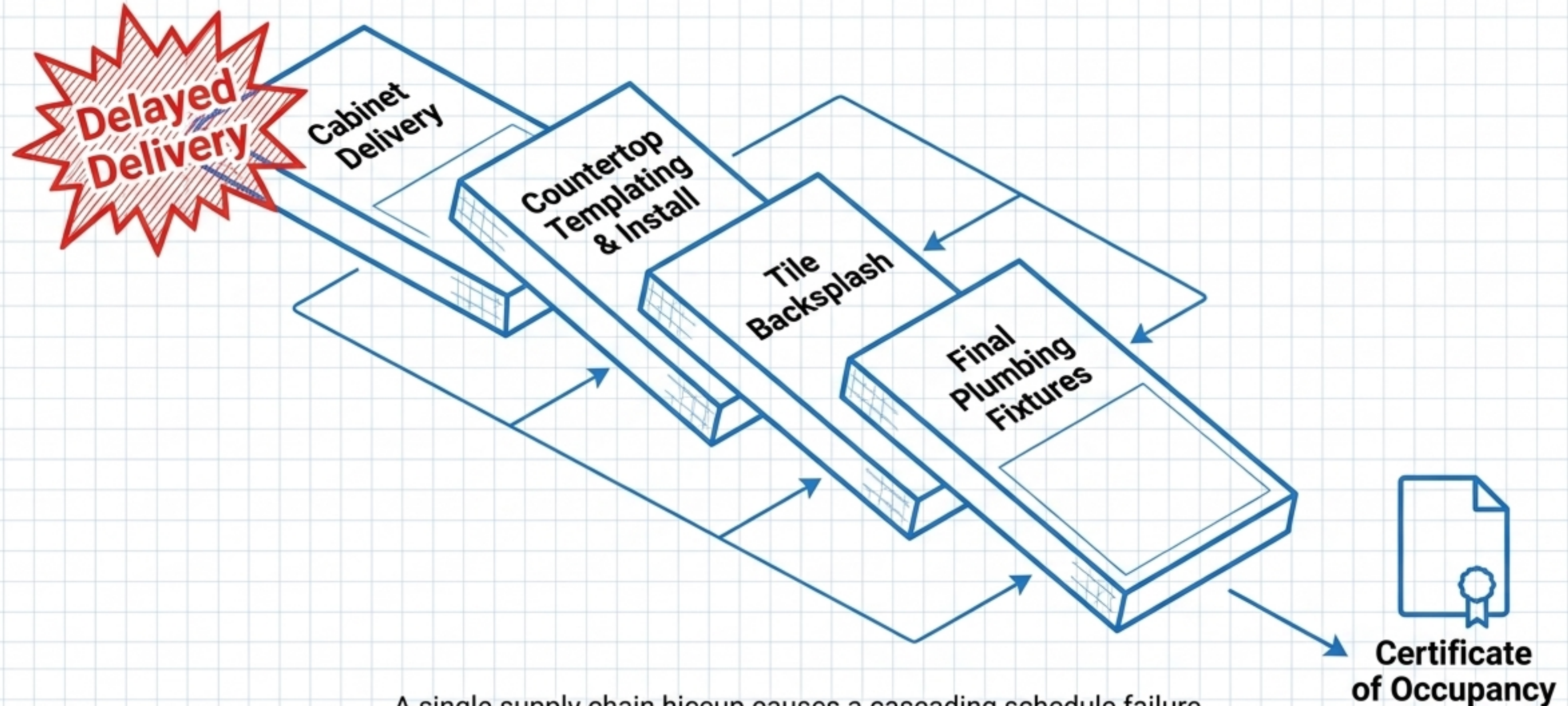
The Inspection Gauntlet

Rule: Trades must have work inspected and signed off on the inspection card before anything can be covered with drywall.



Phase 4: Finishes & Final (Weeks 25-32+)

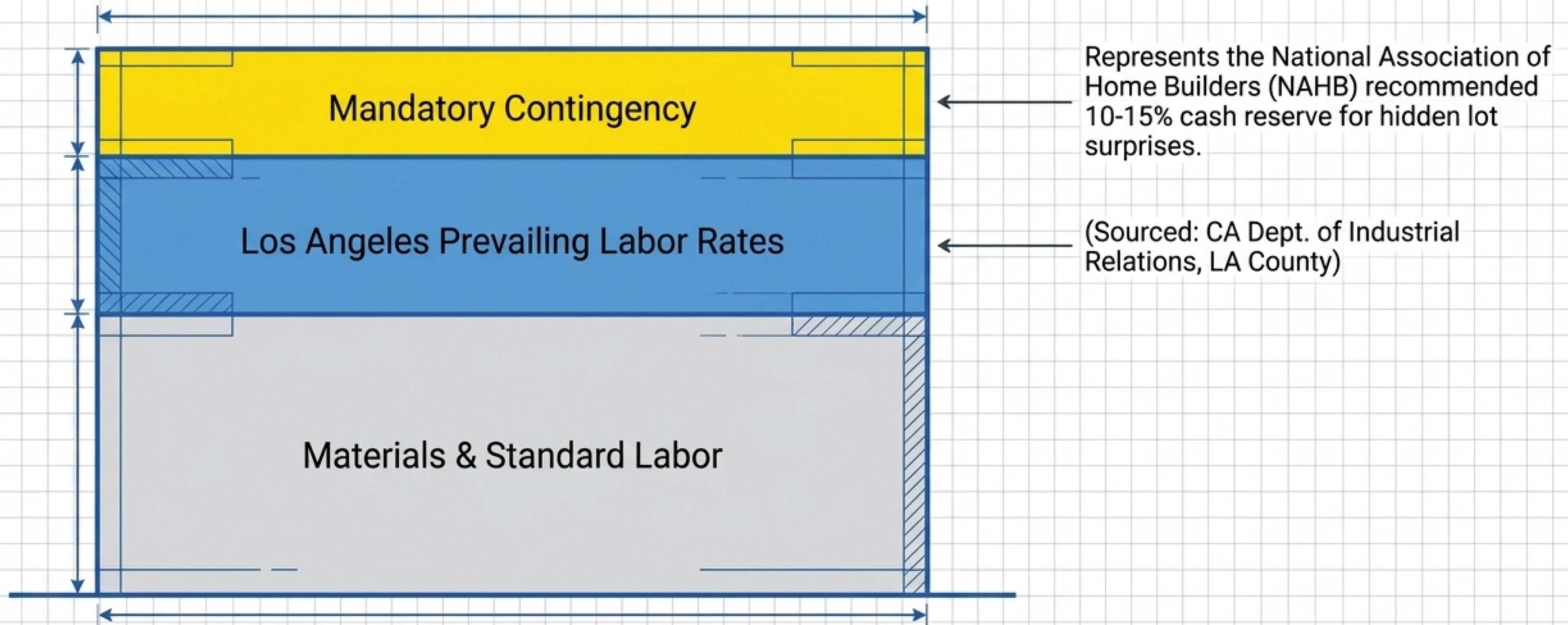
The Finish Trades Ballet. Insulation and drywall give way to visible surfaces, where dependencies are tightly interlocked.



A single supply chain hiccup causes a cascading schedule failure.

The 2026 Financial Reality (\$400-\$600 / sq ft)

Insight: Building a small house is still building a house. High costs are driven by mandatory labor rates and necessary risk buffers.



Timeline Killers: What Blows It Up

How a 6-month project turns into a 10-month ordeal.

Unforeseen Site Conditions

Expansive clay soil, un-permitted sewer lines buried exactly where new footings need to go.

Permitting Quagmires

Building in a Hillside Area or Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) adds layers of bureaucratic review.

Homeowner Change Orders

Moving a wall after electrical is run = demolition, re-work, and re-inspection. Zero change orders equals zero delays.

The Fast-Track Playbook: What Compresses It

How smart homeowners save up to six weeks before signing a contract.

Playbook 1: Use RTI Standard Plans

Cuts the plan check phase from **months to days** by utilizing pre-approved LADBS architectural designs.

Playbook 2: Enforce a Scope-Lock Date

Finalize every faucet, tile, and paint color before contract execution. Zero changes permitted once work begins.

Playbook 3: Hire an ADU Specialist

General contractors guess; specialists have a system, know the local LA codes, and have relationships with LADBS inspectors.

The Master Blueprint: Mandatory Schedule Milestones

A real schedule is more than a start and end date; it is a map of dependencies. Do not sign a contract missing these dates.

- Scope-lock date for all owner selections
- Permit set submittal to LADBS
- Target date for permit approval
- Foundation form and pour dates
- Target date for foundation inspection
- Framing inspection date
- Rough electrical, plumbing, and HVAC inspections
- Cabinet and appliance order-by dates
- Target date for final inspection
- Target date for Certificate of Occupancy

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