

# Seattle Permits

— part of a multi-departmental City of Seattle series on getting a permit

## Decks, Fences and Arbors for Single Family Homes in Seattle

Updated November 12, 2008

This Client Assistance Memo (CAM) addresses the questions most commonly asked by homeowners wishing to construct decks, fences and arbors for their single family residences on Single Family and lowrise Multifamily zoned properties.

Decks vary widely in the scope of their construction, some requiring permits from the Department of Planning and Development (DPD). Fences generally do not require a building permit, but there are regulations that need to be followed. Arbors generally require a building permit.

### Decks

#### When do I need a building permit for a deck addition to my Single Family residence?

A permit is required if any portion of the deck is more than 18 inches above grade, or over any basement or story below. (Seattle Residential Code R105.2 Item 7).

#### How do I obtain a deck permit?

For most Single Family decks, a subject-to-field-inspection permit is issued within a couple of days of application at the DPD Applicant Services Center (ASC), located on the 20th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower, 700 Fifth Ave., (206) 684-8850.

#### What information will I need to apply for a deck permit?

##### ■ Site Plan

A scaled site plan which shows all structures on your site, including the proposed deck, is the primary requirement. The site plan dimensions must show that the deck meets land use requirements for location and lot area coverage. (See CAM 103)

##### ■ Elevation drawing

A scaled elevation drawing which shows the height of the proposed deck, including any guardrails and stairs, is required. Elevation drawings offer side views of structures, from the ground to the top of the structure being shown. (See CAM 303)

##### ■ Construction notes

Notes on your drawings should call out the size and type of posts proposed (e.g., pressure treated wood), the method of support for the posts (e.g., poured footings), joist size, span and spacing, and the method of attaching the deck to the house (e.g., joist hangers). (See CAM 303A)

##### ■ A field inspection application form

These may be obtained and filled out at the ASC when you apply. You will need the assessor's parcel number and legal description for your property.

*Please note that homeowners may do their own drawings. A professional stamp is rarely required on these plans.*

#### What are the land use requirements for decks?

##### ■ Lot coverage

For most Single Family zoned lots, the total lot coverage limit is 35 percent of the lot on lots 5,000 sq ft or greater in area and 1,000 sq ft plus 15 percent of the lot on lots less than 5,000 sq ft. For lots zoned Lowrise Duplex/Triplex, the limit is also 35 percent. For lots zoned Lowrise 1 and 2, the limit is 40. Lot coverage includes all structures with exceptions for features such as eaves and gutters, barrier-free access ramps, access bridges, and fences. Decks which are 36 inch or less above existing grade are also exempted from lot coverage. For more information on these exceptions, see the Seattle Land Use Code 23.44.010D for Single Family zoned lots, and 23.45.010C for Multifamily zoned lots.

##### ■ Location

*Single Family Lots.* As shown in the illustration of a typical interior lot in Seattle (see Figure 1), there are portions of your lot in the front, sides and back, in which decks more than 18 inches above grade

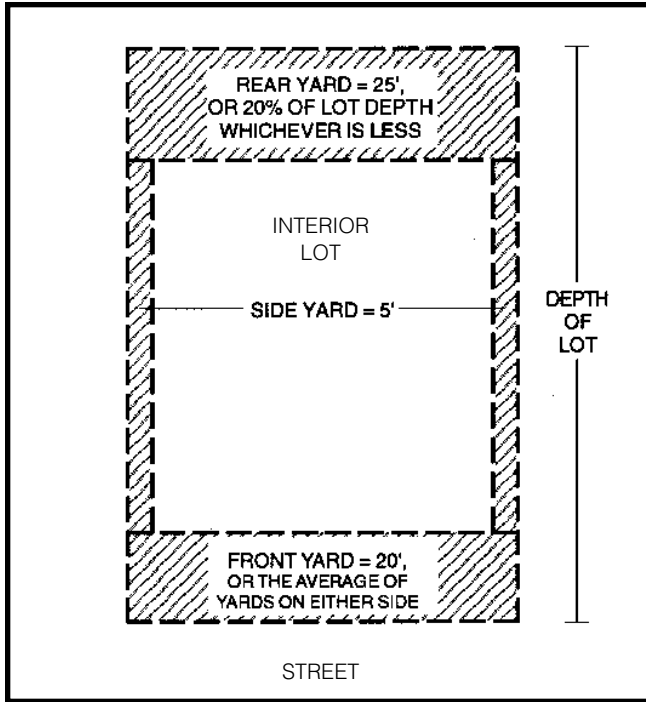
[www.seattle.gov/dpd](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd)



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**Figure 1. Typical Interior Single Family Lot in Seattle**

are not allowed. Generally, no decks above 18 inches are allowed in the front 20 feet of your lot, the side 5 feet, and the rear 25 feet (or the rear 20 percent of the lot depth, whichever is less. Note: The minimum required depth of a rear yard is 10 feet.) CAM 220 explains in greater detail the yard limitations in single family zones. Please discuss specific conditions, including corner and through lots, with DPD staff in the ASC.

**Important exception to rear yard provisions:**

Covered, attached decks may project into the required rear yard as long as the deck is no closer than 12'-0" to the rear property line, and the deck cover is no taller than 12'-0" above the existing or finished grade, whichever is lower.

Roof decks on garages and carports located in required yards are generally prohibited, with some exceptions for safety guardrails. Roof decks on houses must meet the general location standards for houses, with some exceptions for existing nonconforming houses. An open railing four feet above the maximum allowable height for houses is allowed for roof decks.

*Residential Small Lot Zones.* Please discuss with DPD staff in the ASC.

*Lowrise Duplex/Triplex and Lowrise 1 & 2 Lots.* For deck additions to single family residences in these

multifamily zones, please discuss your project with DPD staff in the ASC. The rules in these zones are similar to Single Family zones.

**What are the main Building Code requirements for deck additions to single family residences?**

■ **Structural**

The deck design must provide sufficient structural support and attachment. Minimum live load design is 40 pounds per square foot. Questions about structural requirements should start with permit specialists in the ASC.

■ **Guardrail**

A guardrail is required for deck surfaces more than 30 inches above adjacent surfaces. The following standards apply to guardrails: minimum height 36 inches, maximum openings 4 inches.

■ **Stairs**

When proposed, these are the stair requirements: maximum rise 7-3/4 inches, minimum run 10 inches, minimum width 36 inches. One handrail is required for stairs with four or more risers. When required, these are handrail requirements: must be from 34 to 38 inches above the nosing of treads and landings; the handgrip shall be from 1-1/4 to 2 inches in cross-sectional dimension.

■ **Decks over windows of habitable space**

When a deck is built above windows to habitable rooms, the deck must be at least 7 feet above grade, and a longer side of the deck must be open and unobstructed for at least 65 percent of its length.

■ **Wood/earth separation**

Treated wood or wood of natural resistance to decay is required for wood in contact with concrete, or wood close to earth.

**Fences**

**When do I need a building permit for a fence for my single family residence?**

Permits are not required for fences which do not exceed 8 feet in height, and with no masonry or concrete elements over 6 feet. (Seattle Residential Code R105.2 Item 4)

**What are the land use requirements for fences?**

■ **Lot coverage**

Fences do not count in lot coverage.

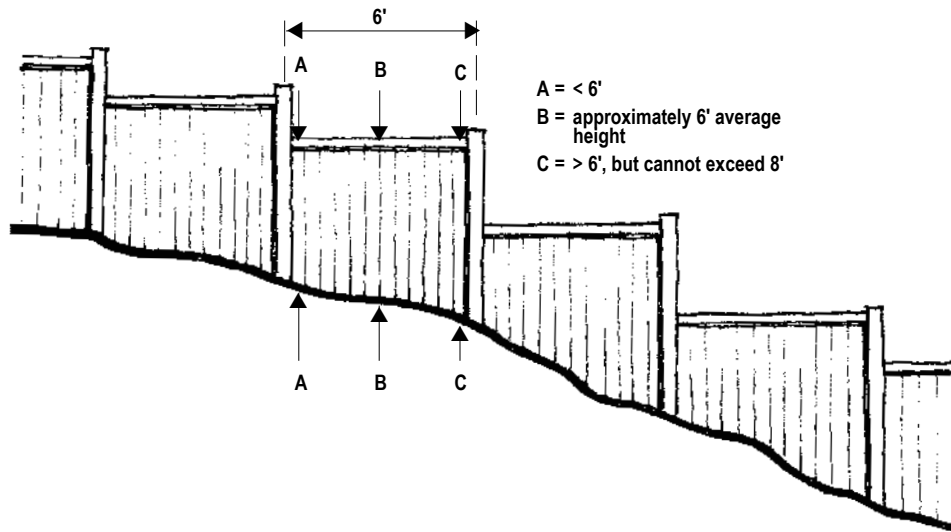


Figure 2. Averaging Fence Height for Sloping Lot Conditions

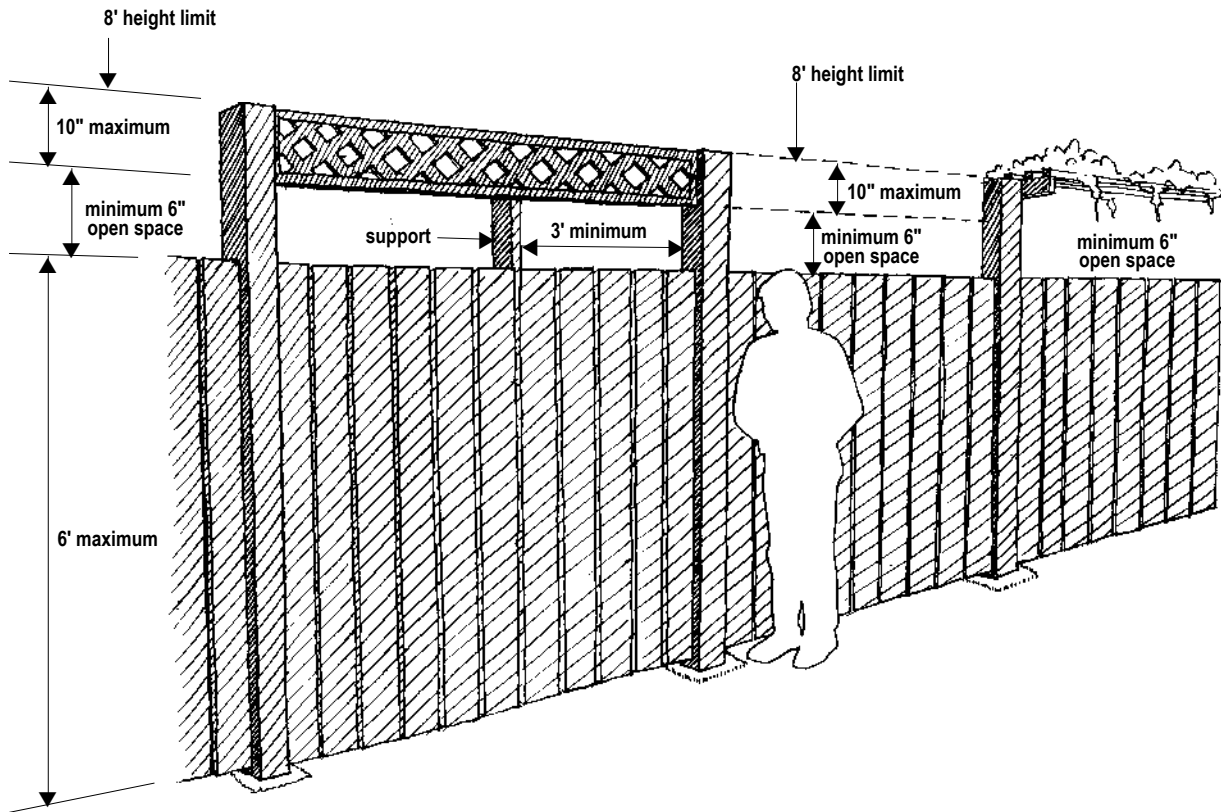


Figure 3. Height Requirements for Fences with Trellises

## ■ Height

*Single Family and Multifamily Lots.* For single family residences on Single Family and Multifamily lots, fences in required yards and setbacks are allowed if they are 6 feet or less above existing or finished grade, whichever is lower. For sloping lot conditions, the height may be averaged for each six foot segment, with no height greater than 8 feet. (See **Figure 2**).

Architectural features such as trellises may be added to the top of a 6 foot fence, up to 8 feet above grade, but without averaging. The space above the six foot fence must be predominantly open. (See **Figure 3**). Talk to DPD staff at the ASC about specific standards for these features.

If you wish to place a fence above a retaining wall used to raise the grade of your property, the combined height of the retaining wall and fence is limited to 9-1/2 feet. If the retaining wall is necessary to protect a cut in grade, the normal height limitations apply to the fence, as long as the fence is set back three feet from the retaining wall.

## ■ Location

Fences which do not exceed the height standards described above are allowed anywhere on the property.

## ■ Fence sides

City codes do not regulate fence sides. Either side may face your property.

## Arbors

Seattle's Land Use Code defines arbors as landscape structures, freestanding or attached to another structure, consisting of an open frame with horizontal and/or vertical latticework.

### When do I need a permit for an arbor for my single family residence?

Permits are not required for arbors not exceeding 120 square feet in projected area. (Seattle Residential Code 105.2 Item 5)

### How do I obtain an arbor permit?

For most arbors, a Subject-to-Field-Inspection permit is issued at the ASC, within a couple of days of applications.

### What information do I need to apply for an arbor permit?

The same drawings are required as are listed above for deck permits.

## What are the land use requirements for arbors?

### ■ Lot coverage

In Single Family zones, arbors are exempt from lot coverage requirements; however, in Multifamily Low-rise zones, arbors are not exempt from lot coverage requirements. Lot coverage requirements in Lowrise zones vary according to the type of structure and the designated Lowrise zone; please refer to section 23.45.010 of the Seattle Land Use Code for the specific requirements.

### ■ Location

*Single Family and Multifamily Lots.* Arbors are allowed in required yards if they meet the following provisions: in any required yard, an arbor may be erected with no more than a forty square foot footprint, including eaves, to a maximum height of 8 feet. Both the sides and the roof must be at least 50 percent open, or, if latticework is used, there must be a minimum opening of 2 inches between cross-pieces.

Additionally, in any required yard abutting a street, an arbor with a footprint no greater than 30 square feet is allowed over a private pedestrian walkway. The arbor must be open as described above.

## What are the Building Code Requirements for Arbors?

### ■ Structural

Like fences, the primary focus is on the posts and supports, as well as any attachments to other structures. You may wish to discuss your proposal with DPD staff at the ASC.

## Questions?

For further information please contact a permit specialist or land use planner at the ASC, located on the 20th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower, 700 Fifth Ave., or call (206) 684-8850.

## Access to Information

Links to electronic versions of DPD **Client Assistance Memos (CAMs), Director's Rules,** and the **Seattle Municipal Code** are available on the "Publications" and "Codes" pages of our website at [www.seattle.gov/dpd](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd). Paper copies of these documents, as well as additional regulations mentioned in this CAM, are available from our Public Resource Center, located on the 20th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower at 700 Fifth Ave. in downtown Seattle, (206) 684-8467.