

## Retaining Walls

The Port Townsend Municipal Code, Chapter 17.68 Fences, Walls, Arbors and Hedges, addresses retaining walls. Excerpts from this chapter are:

- Walls must be built on private property. (*“Not Permitted in Open or Unopened Public Street Rights-of-Way”* per 17.68.030.A.)
- Any wall over 30 inches in height needs to be built a distance away from the corner to provide a clear vision area. (*“No fence, wall, arbor, hedge or other partially or totally sight-obscuring installation or feature over 30 inches in height which poses a traffic safety hazard shall be located within a clear vision area, defined as a 20-foot by 20-foot sight triangle measured from the sidewalk, edge of pavement, or rolling surface”* per 17.68.030.B.)
- The property owner must know their property line locations prior to building the wall. (*“The burden shall rest upon the property owner to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the director the lot line locations”* per 17.68.030.C.4.)
- Walls *“shall comply with the requirements of the International Residential Code”* (per 17.68.030.G).

The 2021 International Residential Code (IRC) states in Section R105 Permits that work exempt from a building permit includes:

***“Retaining walls that are not over 4 feet (1219 mm) in height measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall, unless supporting a surcharge”*** (R105.2).

A surcharge is defined as an overturning horizontal force acting against the wall. The surcharge can be created by a structure located near the top of the wall, such as a building, fuel tank, water tank or parking area. A surcharge can also be created by an upward slope from the top of the wall. City staff can assist in making a determination on surcharge. **Retaining walls that will support a surcharge require an engineered design, and a building permit, regardless of height.**

Prior to building a wall and certainly during the planning stages of building a wall, *please contact the City Development Services Department*. Staff can provide a map that illustrates the approximate location of property lines and topography, and potential critical areas. As mentioned above, it is up to the property owner to know the exact location of property lines to confirm that the wall will be built on private property and not in the public right-of-way.

Please provide a sketch of the wall, and information about the amount of soil that will need to be imported and/or excavated in order to build the wall, and the location of the construction entrance. a stand-alone retaining wall would be a Residential Misc Building Permit, applied for online.