

Seattle Permits

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

Lot Coverage, Height, Yard, and Garage Standards for Homes in Single Family Zones

Updated November 12, 2008

Seattle has three zones in which single family homes are the predominant type of development: SF 9600, SF 7200 and SF 5000. The abbreviation "SF" stands for Single Family, and the numbers following the abbreviation indicates the minimum lot area generally needed to build a home in that zone.¹ Other than the differing lot size requirements, Land Use Code standards that regulate the size and location of buildings are the same for all single family zones. Development in Residential Small Lot (RSL) zones is subject to different standards and is beyond the scope of this Client Assistance Memo (CAM).

New buildings and modifications to existing homes must conform to the lot coverage, height and yard standards described in the Land Use Code. Some examples of and exceptions to the requirements are presented here; however, you should also review the sections of the code that might apply to your project before preparing plans for a permit application. Code references are included in this CAM for convenience.

In addition to reading this pamphlet and the Land Use Code, you are welcome to discuss your project in person with a Permit Specialist or a Land Use Planner at the DPD Applicant Services Center, located on the 20th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower, 700 Fifth Ave.
HOURS: M/W/F, 7:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.; Tu/Th, 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. **PHONE:** (206) 684-8850.

¹ Some existing lots are smaller than the minimum size, and the code allows creation of small lots under certain conditions - see Section 23.44.010 of the Land Use Code, which is found in Title 23 of the Seattle Municipal Code (SMC). The section references used in this bulletin all begin with the chapter number (23), followed by the section number (.44) and the subsection (.020).

LOT COVERAGE

Homes (principal structures) and associated structures (accessory structures) may cover 35 percent of the lot on lots 5,000 sq ft or greater in area. On lots less than 5,000 sq ft in area, these structures may cover 1,000 sq ft plus 15 percent of the lot (23.44.010C).

This calculation is made on the footprint of all structures on the entire lot. Balconies, bay windows, and architectural projections must be included in calculating the footprint even though they do not actually touch the ground. However, the first 36 inches of eaves and gutters are exempted from this calculation.

Accessory structures and permitted portions of principal structures may cover no more than 40 percent of the required rear yard (23.44.016D1 & 23.44.014D6).

Lot Coverage Exceptions (23.44.010D)

If any of your lot lines abut a dedicated alley, you may add half the area of the alley to your total lot area, up to a maximum of 10 percent of your lot area, when computing lot coverage.

Certain structures are not counted in lot coverage. These include:

- Pedestrian access bridges that are 5 feet wide or less (uncovered and unenclosed).
- Barrier-free access ramps or other access for the disabled or elderly meeting Washington State Building Code Chapter 11.
- Decks or parts of decks which are not over 36 inches above the existing grade.
- Freestanding structures such as fences, bulkheads, freestanding walls but not arbors.
- Underground structures or the underground portion of a structure.
- The first 36 inches of eaves and gutters projecting from principal or accessory structures but not eaves associated with the roof of an arbor.

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- Solar collectors meeting the provisions of 23.44.046 and swimming pools meeting the provisions of 23.44.044.

Permit Application Requirements for Lot Coverage Calculations

As described in **CAM 103** and **103A**, you must calculate the lot coverage of existing and proposed development on your lot and show it on the site plan that you are required to submit with your application. If you are not sure of the requirements, ask a Permit Specialist in the Applicant Services Center for help. Permit Specialists are also available by phone, 1 p.m.-4:15 p.m., Monday-Friday, at (206) 684-8850.

HEIGHT

The base height of homes (principal structures) is 30 feet above existing grade or finished grade whichever is lower (23.44.012).

On lots 30 feet or less in width, the base height is limited to 25 feet (detailed measurement techniques are found in Chapter 23.86 of the Land Use Code).

Pitched Roofs

The ridge of a pitched roof on a principal structure may extend up to 5 feet above the base height limit as long as the pitch of the roof is at least 4 to 12 (see Fig. A).

No portion of a shed roof (i.e., a roof with only one sloping plane) may extend beyond the base height limit.

Sloped Lots

Additional height is permitted for sloped lots at the rate of one foot for every 6 percent of slope that exists between the highest elevation wall and the lowest elevation wall (the downhill side of the structure) to a maximum of five additional feet. The additional height is added to the base height only on the downhill side of the structure (see Fig. B). Height for pitched roofs and exemptions are computed after the additional height for slope is added to the base height.

Exemptions for Rooftop Features

Under certain conditions, radio and television antennas and flagpoles are exempt from height limits.

Open rails and planters may extend no higher than the ridge of a pitched roof or four feet above a flat roof. Projections that accommodate windows, such as dormers, clerestories, skylights and greenhouses, may extend no higher than the ridge of a pitched roof or four feet above a flat roof provided that they are

also limited to 30 percent of the area of the roof and meet separation and setback standards discussed in 23.44.012C.

Chimneys may extend four feet above the ridge of a pitched roof or above a flat roof.

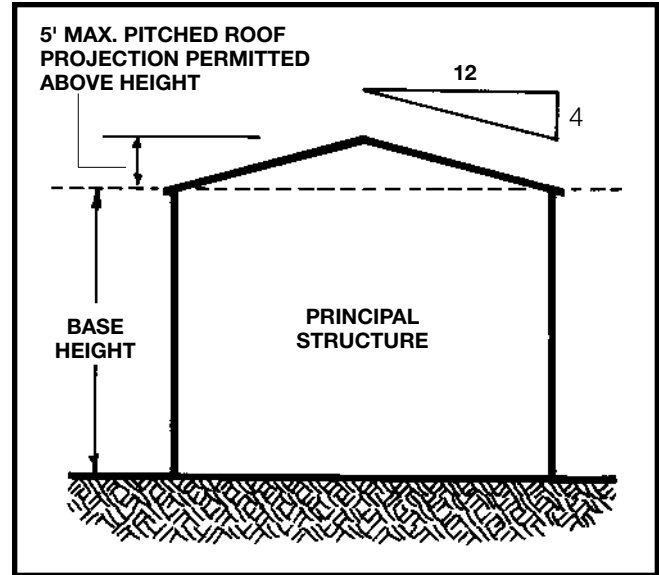


Figure A

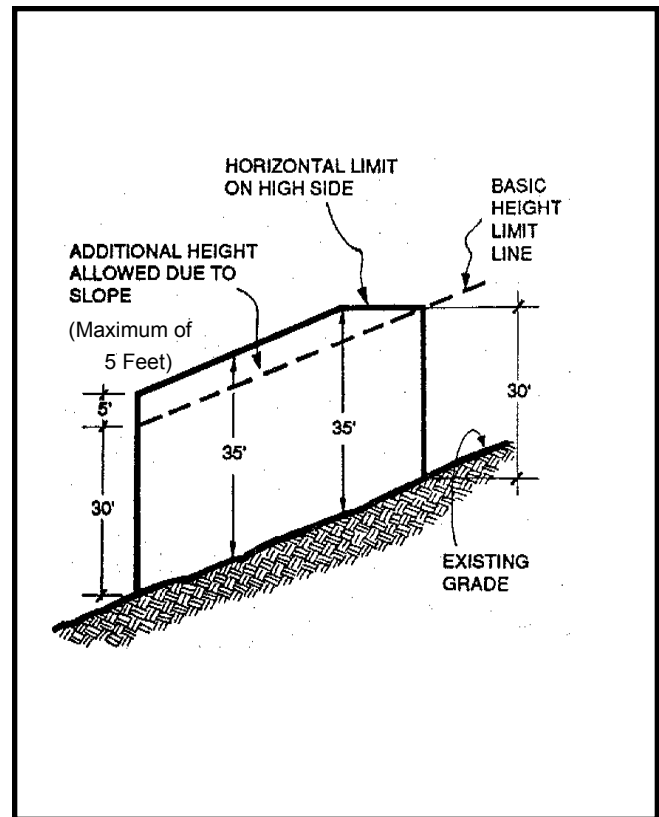


Figure B

Permit Application Requirements for Height Calculations

In general when the proposed structure is not within 2 feet of the base height limit: indicate the height in feet on elevation views of the structure as measured from the existing and finished grade.

When the proposed structure is at or within two feet of the base height limit, or a height bonus is used on a sloping lot: on a site plan, show existing and finished grade, using 2-foot contour intervals. This information must be shown on a topographic survey showing two foot contours and prepared and signed by a state of Washington licensed surveyor.

Elevation Views: As illustrated in Fig. C & D, building elevations are scaled drawings of the exterior of the building showing what it will look like when constructed. Show all elevations of the building. Indicate existing finished grade elevations at corners. Also show the elevations of all floor lines, top of wall, roof ridges and finished grade.

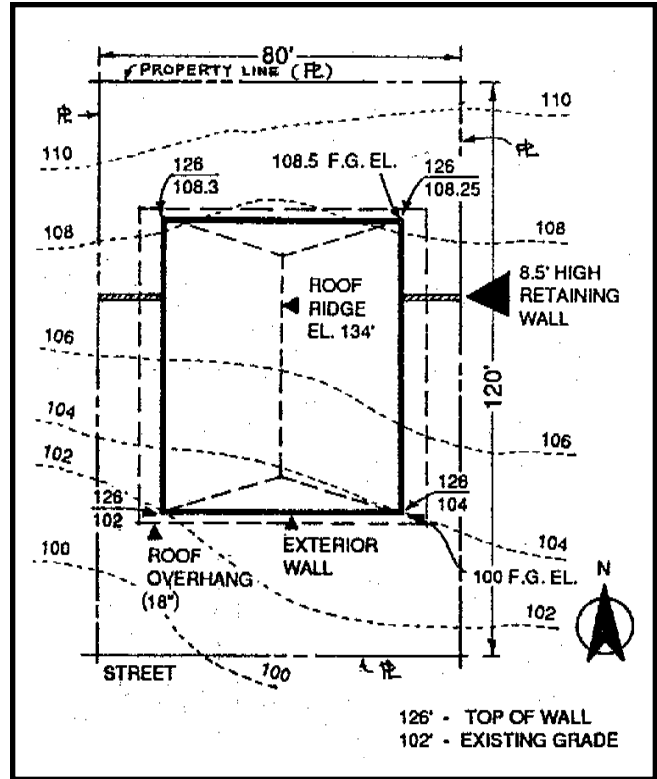


Figure C

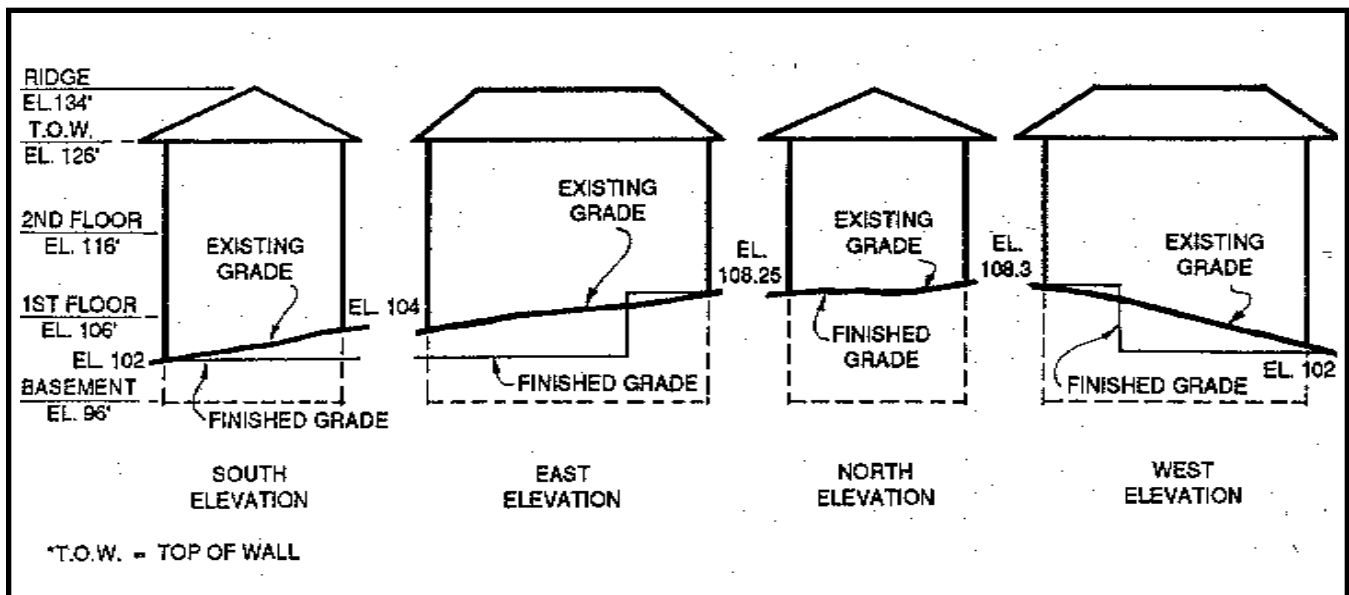


Figure D

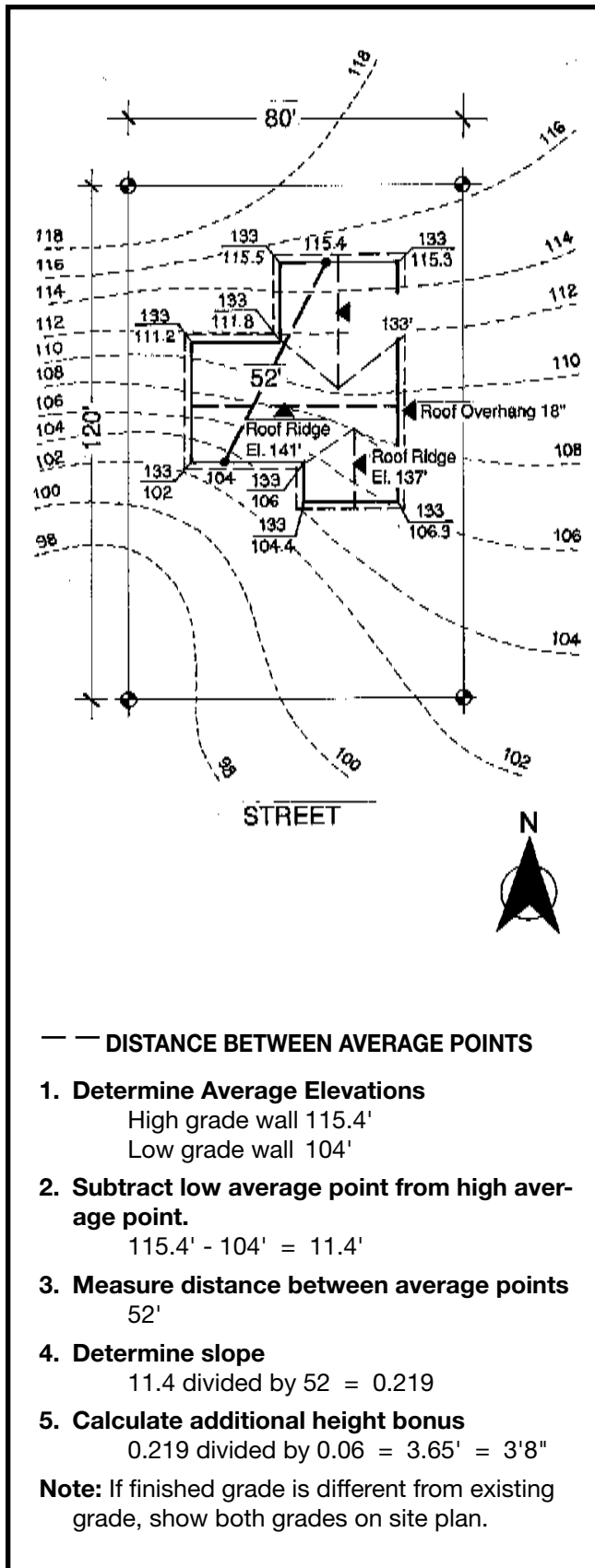


Figure E

Calculating a Height Bonus: Fig. E provides an example of height bonus calculation. Using existing grade:

- Determine the average elevation of the high grade wall.
- Locate this average point where it actually occurs on the wall, based upon existing grade.
- Determine the average elevation of the low grade wall.
- Locate this average point where it actually occurs on the wall, based upon existing grade
- Calculate the difference.
- Measure the distance between the average point on the high grade wall and the average point on the low grade wall.
- Divide the difference in elevation by the distance between the points.
- This will give you the slope on the lot.
- Divide by .06 (6) to get the additional height allowed as a sloping lot bonus (maximum of 5 feet).
- Calculate to the nearest inch.

YARDS

Required Front Yard: 20 feet or the average of the front yards of the single family residence on either side of your lot, whichever is less.

Required Rear Yard: 25 feet, or 20 percent of lot depth (minimum of 10 feet) whichever is less.

Required Side Yard: 5 feet. 10 feet for street facing side yard of a reversed corner lot.

The Land Use Code requires that certain portions of your lot be set aside for front, rear and side yards. In general, no portion of your house may extend into these required yards. You may place accessory structures such as garages, sheds, decks, porches or arbors in these areas only if certain criteria are met. Exceptions from standard yard requirements are described in the following sections. Of course, you may provide more than the required minimum yard. Yards are measured from the property line in toward your structure. Property lines are not always obvious. Do not rely on physical features such as fences and sidewalks to indicate property lines. They may be on your neighbor's property or in the street right-of-way.

The basic yard requirements for single family zones are illustrated on Fig. F.

Additional requirements or exceptions may apply to a yard that borders an alley, is a corner lot, has an irregular shape, is a through lot (a lot with two street front-

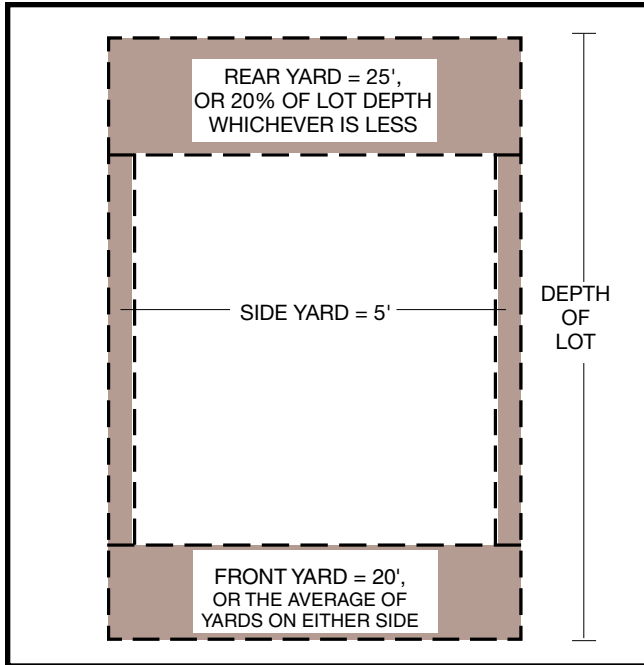


Figure F

ages opposite of each other), or is on a sloping lot that is greater than 35 percent. Please check the Land Use Code or ask an Applicant Services Center staff member for help if you have one of these conditions on your lot.

Exceptions to Standard Yard Requirements

Additions to the principal structure in front, side and rear yards (when the structure is already built into that yard): If an existing structure is already “nonconforming” with respect to a required yard, and the nonconforming wall is at least 60 percent of the total width of the respective facade, then the existing wall line may be extended according to Sec. 23.44.014D4.

Different conditions apply to front, side and rear yards. The portion of an existing structure that is non-conforming with respect to front or rear yard setbacks can be increased, to a limited extent, in order to accommodate a habitable basement or attic, per Sec. 23.42.112A1.

Projections into front yard on lots 30 feet or less: On lots 30 feet or less in width, projections up to 4 feet into the required front yard are allowed above 8 feet of facade height. A minimum 5 foot front yard must be provided (see Fig. G).

The chart on page 6 illustrates other possible exceptions that may be applicable to your lot. Please check the designated section of the Land Use Code for details.

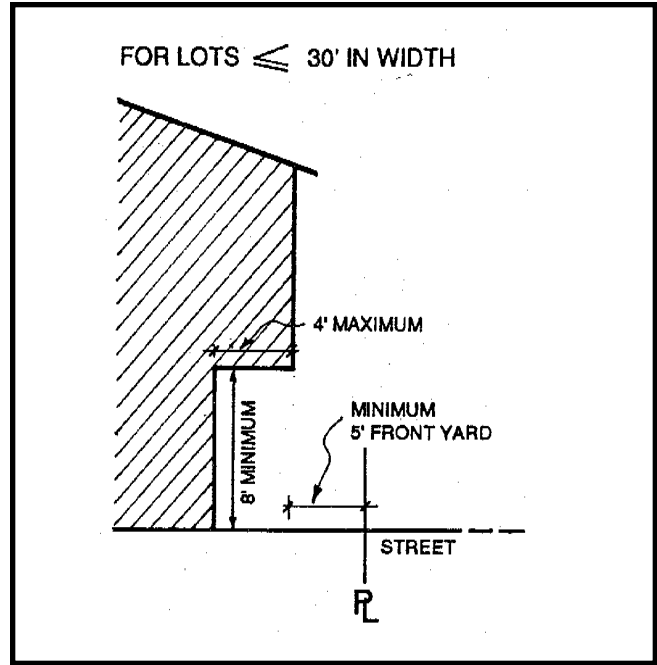


Figure G

Additional Information for Yard Requirements And Exceptions

In addition to the specific references described in the preceding table there may be additional requirements that are applicable to your project. Sections 23.44.016, 23.44.044 and 23.44.048 describe development standards for structures that are permitted as accessories to your home, such as garages, swimming pools and solar collectors.

Measurement techniques are presented in Sections 23.86.008 and 23.86.010 and definitions of technical zoning terms are found in Chapter 23.84A.

In addition, you should consult the Seattle Residential Code and Seattle Building Code which also regulates construction close to the property line.

The Seattle Building Code (SBC) and the Seattle Residential Code (SRC) both regulate the construction of buildings near property lines to prevent the spread of fire. SBC Sections 602.1 and 704 and SRC section R302 regulate the construction of walls, projections from exterior walls and openings in walls near property lines.

Permit Application Requirements for Yard Calculations

Your basic site plan will give the DPD staff most of the information it needs to check your plans for compliance with yard requirements. Provide front yard information

(graphically show the dimensions on your plans) of adjacent properties if you are averaging to determine your required front yard. If your lot is sloping, you may need to provide additional topographic information.

If you wish to take advantage of exceptions to yard requirements that require an agreement or easement, you must bring the agreement or easement with you.

Exception for:	Permitted in:	Features	Code Section
Non-conforming Principal structure	front or rear yard	May be extended in order to accommodate habitable basement or attic	23.42.114A1
Principal structure	Side yard	Zero lot line with side yard easement	23.44.014D3
Detached accessory structure	Side yard	Zero lot line with side yard agreement with neighbor	23.44.014D2
Uncovered porches no higher than 4 feet	Front, side or rear yards	Various provisions	23.44.014D5
Chimneys, cornices, columns, and eaves	Front, side or rear yards	May project no more than 18 inches	23.44.014D6a
Bay windows	Front, rear and street side yards	May project no more than 2 feet; limited to 8 feet in width	23.44.014D6b (see also 6d)
Garden windows	Front, side or rear yards	Minimum of 30 inches above floor, 6 feet tall and 8 feet wide	23.44.014D6c (see also 6d)
Attached, covered and unenclosed decks	Rear yard	Various provisions	23.44.014D7a
Garages	Front, side or rear yard	Various provisions	23.44.016D
Pedestrian access bridges	Front, side or rear yards	5 feet in width, no less than 3 feet to the side lot line	23.44.014D8
Barrier-free access	Front, rear or side yards	Meeting WA State Building Code C31	23.44.014D9
Fences, free-standing structures, bulkheads	Front, side or rear yards	6 foot height with additional height with special conditions	23.44.014D10
Decks	Front, side or rear yards	No higher than 18 inches	23.44.014D11
Heat pumps	Front, side or rear yards	No closer than 3 feet to any lot line	23.44.014D12
Solar collectors	Front, side or rear yards	3 feet from side yard, 15 feet from rear yard and 6 feet into front	23.44.014D13 and 23.44.046
Critical areas	Front and rear yards	25% reduction, up to a maximum of 5 feet	23.44.014D14
Arbors	Front, side or rear yards	40 sq. feet coverage with maximum 8' height, 50% open	23.44.014D16a
Arbors	Yards abutting a street	30 sq. feet coverage over pedestrian walkway, 40 sq. feet coverage with maximum 8' height, 50% open	23.44.014D16b

Garages (23.44.016F)

Garage entrances on corner lots may be located on only one street front; garage width standards will be measured based on the width of the facade facing the same street as the garage entrance.

The size and location of garages are regulated to reduce their visual impact. The combined width of garage entrances on a street-facing facade may not be more than 50% of the structure width or 10 feet, whichever is greater (see Fig. H). This standard does not apply to detached garages located behind the principal home or garages that face alleys.

Garages may not project beyond the front of a home. Specifically, no garage wall may be closer to the street lot line than 80% of the street-level facade that is not a garage (see Fig I). If the entire street-level facade is garage, no portion of the garage may be closer to the street lot line than 80% of the facade of the story above the street-level facade. The facade of a building is measured from the outside of the exterior wall and does not include eaves. Where the facade includes a covered porch or deck, the facade will be measured from exterior of the covered porch or deck.

Limited exemptions to the garage entrance standards are allowed for sites with irregular lot shape, topography, or structure configuration and are listed in 23.44.016 F3.

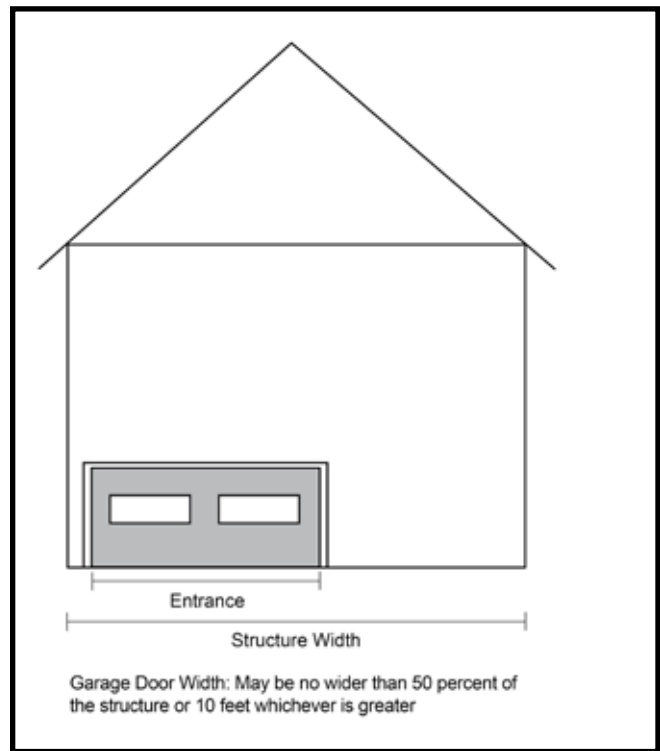


Figure H

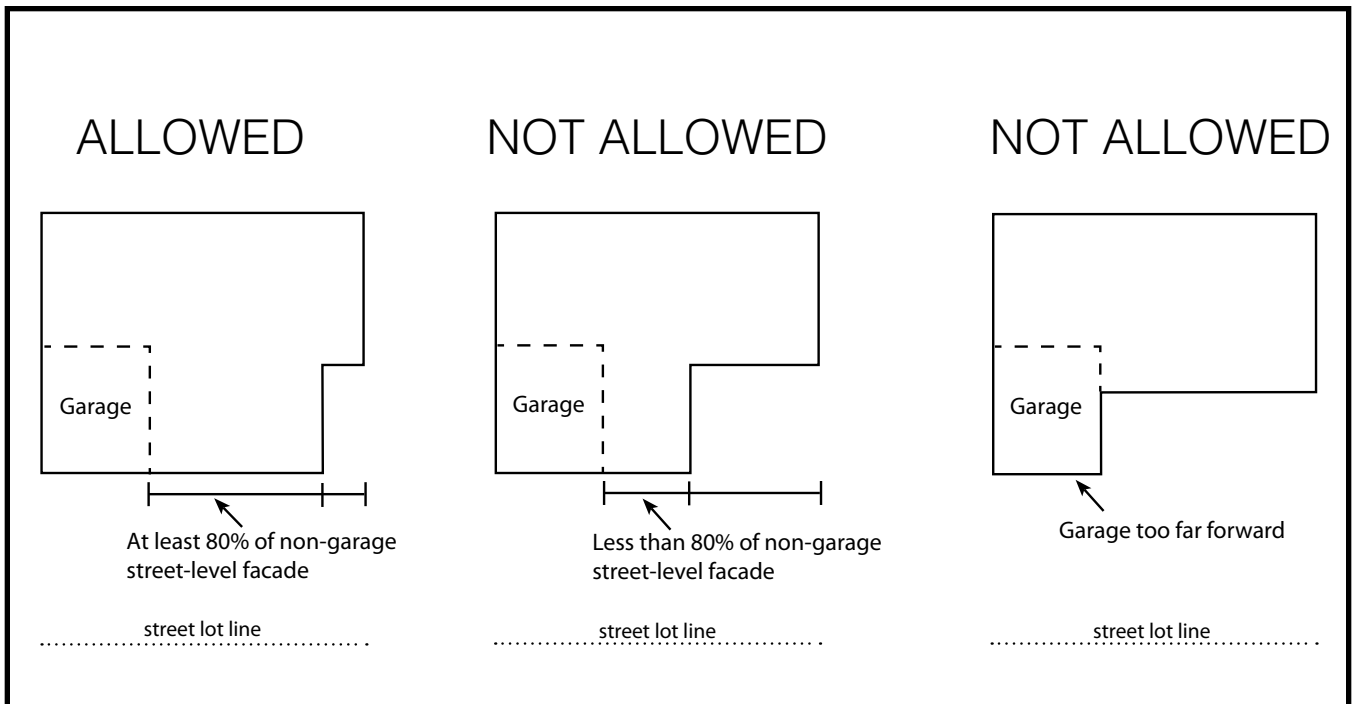


Figure I