

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**QUESTION – I would like to build a fence. Do I need a permit? Where can I place the fence and how tall can the fence be?**



**ANSWER –** A fence can be constructed anywhere on private property. A no-fee fence permit is required for the construction of a fence located within a required front yard, side street side yard, yard adjoining a through-lot street frontage, or clear vision triangle. A fence permit shall not be required for the normal upkeep, repair or maintenance of an existing fence.

### Fence appearance and maximum height requirements:

Front yard:	Four feet, with a surface area that is no more than 50 percent obstructed (50% opacity).
Interior side and rear yard:	Six feet solid plus one foot of lattice (building permit required for any fence over six feet)
Side street side yard:	Six feet solid
Clear vision triangle:	Two feet, six inches above centerline grades of intersecting streets

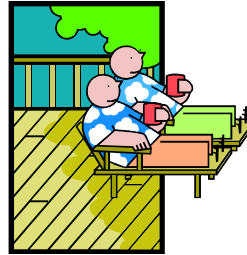
**QUESTION – I would like to build a small storage shed on my property. Do I need a permit? Where on my property can I place the building?**



**ANSWER –** A permit is required for an accessory building that is greater than 200 sf. The maximum size of an accessory building, without conditional use permit approval, is 600 sf. The front yard setback is the same as that which is specified for the principal residential structure. The interior side yard setback is three feet if the building is to be located more than 50 feet from the front property line. (Keep in mind, however, that the building code would require a layer of ½" gwb (gypsum wall board) on any wall that is between three and five feet and from the property line.) The minimum interior side yard

setback is five feet if the accessory building is to be placed closer than 50 feet to the front property line.

**QUESTION** – I'm planning on building a deck in the rear yard off the back of my house. Do I need a permit? What are the setback requirements?



**ANSWER** – A deck permit is not required for the following: decks not exceeding 200 square feet in area, that are not more than 30 inches above grade at any point, are not attached to a dwelling and do not serve the exit door required by Section R311.4. Otherwise, a permit is required.

Setbacks: Uncovered patios, decks, stairs and landings may encroach into required yards based on their height above finished grade or floor level, as follows:

If the deck is less than or equal to 12 inches above finished grade it may extend to the property lines

If the deck is more than 12 inches and less than or equal to 30 inches above finished grade it can encroach ten feet into the required front and rear yards, six feet into the side street side yard, and two feet into the interior yard

If the deck is more than 30 inches above finished grade, and less than or equal to the floor level of the first floor, it can encroach six feet into the required front and rear yards

If the deck is greater than the floor level of the first floor, encroachments are not permitted

**QUESTION** – I am planning a remodel of my home. Why should I get a building permit?



**ANSWER** – This is a question many people may ask themselves when planning alterations to their home. A decision not to get a permit could be a very costly one. Some homeowners are finding when they try to sell or refinance their home that prospective buyers or lending institutions want proof that alterations were performed in compliance with local codes. Without a permit and inspection on record there is no proof. The homeowner must then apply for a permit with no guarantee that the remodel will meet the

codes, and face the possibility that the remodel must be redone or removed. This is costly and frustrating and could cause delays in refinancing or a lost sale of their home.

**QUESTION – Do I need a building permit for everything I do to my home?**

**ANSWER –** No, not all items require permits. Following is a list of items that do not require a building permit. (Please note: even though a permit is not required, the project must still comply with all applicable construction and zoning codes.)

- One-story detached accessory structure used as tool and storage shed, playhouse and similar uses, provided the floor area does not exceed 200 square feet
- Fences not over six feet high
- Retaining walls that are not over four feet in height measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall, unless supporting a surcharge
- Water tanks supported directly upon *grade* if the capacity does not exceed 5,000 gallons and the ratio of height to diameter or width does not exceed 2 to 1
- Sidewalks and driveways
- Painting, papering, tiling, carpeting, cabinets, counter tops and similar finish work
- Prefabricated swimming pools that are less than 24 inches
- Swings and other playground equipment
- Window awnings supported by an exterior wall which do not project more than 54 inches from the exterior wall and do not require additional support
- Decks not exceeding 200 square feet in area, that are not more than 30 inches above *grade* at any point, are not attached to a *dwelling* and do not serve the exit door required by Section R311.4.

**QUESTION –** What if I have made an alteration to my home without realizing I needed a permit and I want to correct the situation. Will I be subject to a fine? Do I have to tear the whole project down and start over?



**ANSWER –** Penalties can be levied for those who refuse to comply with the law. The City would rather see a building conform to the code than punish a homeowner. If a homeowner discovers they did not obtain a permit when required, they do not necessarily have to tear the project down and start over. If the alteration can meet the applicable codes they will be approved. Our inspectors won't necessarily approve something they cannot see and may require small sections of a wall or roof covering be removed to verify the construction meets the code. There can be no guarantee that some changes may need to be made, and some may not be easy to accomplish.

**QUESTION – What is the purpose of permits and codes?**



**ANSWER –** The purpose behind building codes is to give reasonable assurances that a home is safe from structural failure, fire hazards from electrical and heating systems, electrical shock and health risks. The permits provide a permanent record of the work performed and inspections conducted on the project.

**QUESTION – Do I need a permit to reroof my house?**



**ANSWER –** Yes. The cost of a reroof permit for a one- and two-family dwelling is \$54.50.

**QUESTION – If I take out a permit to remodel a home that was constructed ten years ago, do I build to the code in effect when the home was originally constructed?**

**ANSWER –** The new work must be constructed under the current codes in effect today.

**QUESTION – If I remodel my house, do I have to bring the entire home up to the codes in effect today?**

**ANSWER –** No. Only the new portion must meet the current codes unless the remodel creates a hazard for the existing building, such as overloading an existing beam.

**QUESTION – Why should I use a licensed contractor?**

**ANSWER –**In Washington State, all contractors who perform, advertise or submit bids or proposals in this state must be registered with the Department of Labor and Industries, post a bond, and carry general liability insurance. Another reason is the registration provides some protection to the homeowner from being charged for work and materials not provided or paying twice for them (any supplier of materials, workers and subcontractors can place a lien on your home if they do not receive payment from your contractor). Dissatisfied consumers may pursue restitution with civil action in Superior Court against a contractor's bond. There are also trade licenses for those persons doing plumbing and electrical work to provide some assurances that they have adequate knowledge and training in those fields.

**QUESTION – Do I have to have a license to do work on my own home?**



**ANSWER –** No. A homeowner may do any or all of the work (building, plumbing, mechanical [heating and air conditioning] and electrical). If you are not sure of your abilities to do any work, it is recommended that you hire a licensed professional.

**QUESTION – Do I have to have my plans drawn by a professional designer, architect or engineer?**



**ANSWER –** Maybe. The owner or anyone they choose may draw the plans as long as they are clear and detailed enough to indicate what and how the project will be constructed. In some cases, the complexity of the project may require the skills of a professional.

**QUESTION – If I am having my project done by a licensed contractor, should I rely on my contractor to get the permits?**

**ANSWER –** Be wary of contractors who ask you to buy the building permit. Property owners can purchase a permit for work they personally do on their own property, but only a registered contractor can buy a permit for work on someone else's property. Also, make sure that all inspections required under the permit are conducted.

**QUESTION – What are the basic design requirements for the City of Fircrest?**

**ANSWER -**

Wind Speed:	80
Snow Load:	25 psf
Seismic Zone	3

**MORE CONSUMER RESOURCES:**

Office of the Attorney General web site: <http://www.atg.wa.gov/>

Better Business Bureau

Website: General: <http://www.bbb.org>

Washington State Department of Labor and Industries

Website: <https://fortress.wa.gov/lni/bbip/>