

## How to Measure Building, Fence and Wall Height in Solana Beach:

1. How is building height measured to determine if a Structure Development Permit is required?
2. How is building height measured to determine if the proposed design complies with maximum allowable height for the zone?
3. How are fence and retaining wall heights measured?



## **How is building height measured to determine if a Structure Development Permit (SDP) is required?**

Buildings which exceed 16 feet in height above pre-existing grade require a Structure Development Permit. (SBMC 17.63.040)

**Pre-existing Grade** is defined as *“the natural grade of the site or graded condition of the site as of July 1, 1985.”*(SBMC 17.08030)

**Finished Grade** is defined in the SBMC as *“The final elevation of the ground surface after development.”*

For the purposes of determining whether a proposed project requires an SDP, if the proposed building exceeds 16 feet above the pre-existing grade on the site at any point, then an SDP is required. Note that there is no exclusion for chimneys in this measurement. Therefore, if even only a fireplace chimney exceeds the height limitation of 16 feet, then the project does require an SDP.

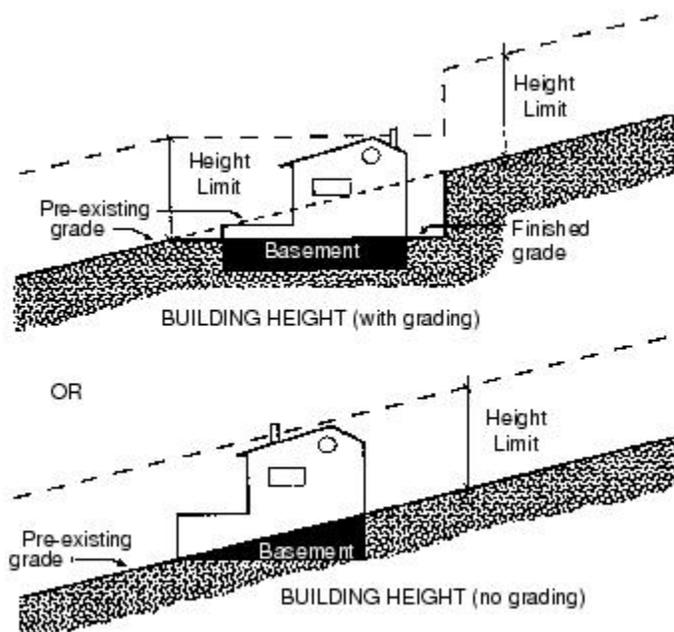
Refer to SBMC Chapter 17.63 for the SDP Municipal Code provisions. This Chapter also lists the requirements for the placement of story poles on the site and the related view assessment regulations. These regulations will apply if a view assessment appeal is filed after the story poles are erected. See SBMC 17.63.040 for SDP waivers, which are only allowed for very minor additions to *existing* structures.

When a Structure Development Permit is required a story pole plan and height certification that is prepared by a licensed surveyor is also required that shows the three dimensional building envelope of the actual heights proposed. The story pole plan data is utilized later at the time of the framing inspection to verify that the project was constructed at the same heights depicted by the story poles earlier in the planning process. (It should be noted that the height of the roofline height is measured to the top of the roofing material, not the top of the framing structure.)

## 2. How is height measured to determine if the proposed building design complies with maximum allowable height for the zone?

The maximum allowable height allowed by the zoning regulations is measured differently than in the process noted above for making an SDP determination. The definitions of pre-existing grade and finished grade noted above still apply.

The first step in this process is to find the maximum allowable height listed in the Municipal Code for each of the project components. Review the SBMC land use zone requirements for the project site, the building type (principal or accessory), and appurtenances (chimneys and antennae). Determine whether the project site is subject to the provisions of the Scaled Residential Overlay Zone (SBMC 17.48.040.) Finally, determine whether the project site is subject to a Specific Plan (SBMC 17.95 North Rios Specific Plan or SBMC 17.100 Highway 101 Corridor Specific Plan) and whether there are special height provisions in the Specific Plan that also apply the project.



Once all of the Municipal Code height provisions are identified, then check the height for each element of the building compared to both pre existing and the

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proposed finish grade to ensure the maximum allowable heights are not exceeded.

The definition of **Building Height** is: *“The vertical distance between the lower of the pre-existing grade or finished grade to the highest point of the structure, excluding approved architectural features and appurtenances such as, but not limited to, chimneys, vents and antennas. The height measurement shall run with the land in accordance with the applicable grade and shall be made within the planes of the exterior walls. Those portions of basements not visible and below pre-existing and finished grade shall not be included in height measurement.”*

A site plan should be prepared to check the building envelope for compliance, including all proposed structures, retaining walls, patios and site features. The site plan should reflect both the pre-existing and proposed finished grade contours for the entire site. It may be necessary to provide spot elevations along the exterior perimeter of the building at the top of retaining walls to supplement the information on the topographical site map. This will clearly delineate the proposed building and wall height measurements relative to the adjacent pre-existing and proposed grades.

Prepare elevations of all the building features which show the pre-existing grade as a dashed line and the proposed finish grade as a solid line, (if it differs) with a parallel line above it that shows the height limit for the zone related to the lower of the two grades where the grade.

Chimneys, vents and antennas are excluded from the definition of building height; however, Staff reviews the proposed configuration of these appurtenances to allow for the minimum size and height that is required by building and fire code clearances above the roof line.

The height of a building façade that is adjacent to a window well is not taken to the bottom of the window well. Window wells meeting the standard size (see SBMC Section 17.48.040) are treated as part of a basement that is below grade. Therefore, the height measurement is taken at preexisting and the proposed

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grades at the edge of the window well, rather than the bottom of the window well.

### **3. How are fence and retaining wall heights measured?**

The definition of a Fence is: *“An artificially constructed barrier of any material or combination of materials erected to enclose or screen areas of land or to hold back earth above the natural grade. Fences include retaining walls, earthen berms, graded fill slopes and such similar devices when they occur above the natural grade. For the purposes of measuring fence height, a retaining wall/ fence combination shall be considered a single fence whenever the horizontal distance between the retaining wall portion of the fence and the above ground portion of the fence is less than the height of the retaining wall portion alone. The height of a fill slope/fence combination shall be measured in the same manner.”*

SMBC 17.20.040.O states that *“Fences, Walls, and Retaining Walls. No fence or wall shall be constructed which exceeds the allowed height limits above the pre-existing grade, except when the city council or director of community development, as a condition of approval of a discretionary matter under their jurisdiction, requires that a fence or a wall be constructed to a height greater than otherwise permitted by this paragraph in order to mitigate against potential adverse effects. On fill or cut slopes, the height of all fences, walls, retaining walls, or any combination thereof shall be measured above the level of the pre-existing grade:”*