



Community Development Department Planning Division

BUILDING ADDITIONS TO RESIDENCES IN THE SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL (RS) ZONE

WHAT IS A BUILDING ADDITION?

A building addition is any change to the exterior of your residence that involves the construction of a new structural part of the building. Examples are new rooms, attached garages, sun rooms, covered patios, enclosed porches, decks, or balconies. Buildings or structures which are not physically attached to the main structure, such as detached sheds or gazebos, or uncovered detached decks which are less than 30 inches high, are not included. To be considered a building addition, the new construction must be attached to or directly abutting the house. Please note that detached accessory structures and accessory dwelling units are governed by a separate set of regulations. If you are interested in either of those, separate information is available on the regulations governing those structures.

WHERE CAN BUILDING ADDITIONS BE PLACED ON MY LOT?

Generally, building additions must meet the same setbacks as the residence on the lot. There are a number of exceptions for certain types of additions, which are described in a later section. In the RS (single-family residential) zone, the required setbacks are:

- Front.....20 feet
- Rear.....15 feet
- Side..... 5 feet
- Corner Side.....10 feet (where the side property line is along a street frontage)

A sample plot plan is shown on the last page of this handout. Setbacks are measured from the property line. In the older parts of Benicia, the front or street-side property line often does not coincide with the street pavement area or the sidewalk. In the newer parts of town, such as Southampton, the property line is usually at the back edge of the sidewalk. If you are unsure of the location of your property line, contact the Public Works Department at 746-4240 or the Planning Division at 746-4280.

EXCEPTIONS TO SETBACK REQUIREMENTS:

Certain types of additions do not need to meet the above setback requirements. They are allowed to project into the required setback areas as listed below:

Type of Structure	Allowed Projection into Setback
Fireplace/Chimney	18 inches
Eaves/cornices	2 feet
Stairs, canopies, awnings, sun rooms and covered porches	6 feet (front/rear yard) 3 feet (corner side yard) 2 feet (interior side yard)
Balconies/bay windows	2.5 feet (front/rear yard) 2 feet (corner side yard) 1.5 feet (interior side yard)
Uncovered porches, decks, and platforms not more than 30 inches in height	6 feet (front yard) 4 feet (corner side yard) NOTE: There is no minimum setback for these additions in the rear or interior side yard
Attached decks above the first floor level where the rear property line of the lot adjoins an area of permanent open space	6 feet (rear yard only)

Established Neighborhoods: In addition, the Zoning Ordinance allows some variations in the front yard setback requirement in older, established areas of the community. If the properties on the block are developed with residences that do not meet the current 20-foot setback requirement, it is possible to take the average of the existing setbacks on the street, and use that figure as the setback. Please speak with a member of the Planning staff if you think this may apply to your property.

Substandard Lot Widths: There is one final exception to the setback requirements which applies to lots of substandard width. If your property has a width of less than 50 feet, the required side yard setback may be reduced to a figure equal to 10 percent of the lot width; for a corner side yard, it may be reduced to 20 percent. For example, the required side yard setback on a 40-foot wide lot would be 4 feet on an interior side, and 8 feet on a street side (as contrasted with the normal requirements of 5 feet and 10 feet, respectively).

HOW BIG CAN IT BE?

The maximum size of any building addition is limited by a regulation in the Zoning Ordinance known as "lot coverage". Generally speaking, lot coverage is the percentage of the total area of the lot which is covered by structures over 30 inches in height. To calculate the lot coverage, you will need to calculate the total square feet of all buildings on the site that have roofs, or any decks that are over 30 inches in height. That includes the house, garage, patio cover, sheds, or any other structures with roofs on your property. (Small structures under four feet in height, and used solely for housing animals, such as doghouses or coops, are not included in that total. For multi-story buildings, use only the ground floor area.) That total is then divided by the area of the lot to obtain the lot coverage.

In the RS zone, lot coverage cannot exceed 40 percent of the total lot area. For example, if you have a 7,000 sq. ft. lot with a 1,700-sq. ft. single-story house, and an 800-sq. ft. detached shed, you would calculate the existing building area as follows:

$$\begin{array}{r} 1,700 \text{ sq. ft. house} \\ + \quad 800 \text{ sq. ft. shed} \\ \hline 2,500 \text{ sq. ft. total building area} \end{array}$$

You would then calculate the lot coverage as follows:

$$2,500 \text{ sq.ft. building area} \div 7,000 \text{ sq.ft. lot area} = 35\% \text{ coverage}$$

To calculate how large an addition you can build, multiply the total lot area by 40% (the maximum coverage allowed), and subtract the existing building area from that figure:

$$7,000 \text{ sq.ft.} \times 40\% = 2,800 \text{ sq.ft. (maximum coverage allowed)}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 2,800 \text{ sq. ft. (maximum coverage)} \\ - \quad 2,500 \text{ sq. ft. (existing coverage)} \\ \hline 300 \text{ sq. ft. (available building area)} \end{array}$$

Thus, a 300-sq. ft. addition could be constructed on the property.

HOW TALL CAN IT BE?

Building additions must meet the same height requirement as the main residence. In the RS zone, the height limit is 30 feet. The height limit applies to all portions of the building, with the exception of chimneys, which may exceed the height limit by two feet. **Please note: If your property is located in the waterfront area, an additional height restriction may apply.** The waterfront height limit of 24 feet applies to the residential areas west of First Street, located within 150 feet of the shoreline. Please contact the Planning staff if you are uncertain about the waterfront height restriction in relation to your property.

WILL THE BUILDING DESIGN BE REVIEWED?

Except in the Downtown Historic Conservation District, there is no required design review of building additions. The Planning staff will review the plans for compliance with the Zoning Ordinance as part of the building permit review. If your property is located in the Downtown Historic Conservation District, design review is required for all building additions or modifications to historic homes. Please refer to the separate information sheet on design review of historic homes.

DO I NEED A BUILDING PERMIT?

The need for a building permit is based on the requirements of the Uniform Building Code and that determination is made by the City's Building Division. You should contact the Building Division at 746-4230 and discuss your project with them. For building additions, a permit is nearly always needed. If a permit is not required, the addition must still meet the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance with regard to setbacks, coverage, and height.

RELATED FORMS AND INFORMATION:

- Property Development Standards
- Accessory Structures
- Accessory Dwelling Units

