



City of Palo Alto

Department of Planning and Community Environment
Planning Division, 250 Hamilton Avenue
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REGULATIONS FOR ACCESSORY STRUCTURES

WHAT IS AN ACCESSORY STRUCTURE?

An accessory structure is defined as any structure that is incidental to and customarily associated with a specific principle use or facility. Such examples include detached garages and workshops, playground structures, trellis structures and gazebos (excluding noise-producing equipment in single family residential (see section below), and hot tubs or spas, which are both subject to different restrictions).

ACCESSORY STRUCTURES – RESTRICTIONS AND LOCATIONS

RESTRICTIONS:

Generally, any accessory structure 120 square feet or larger in area will require a building permit, and will count towards lot coverage and floor area maximums for the lot. Structures under 120 sq. feet in size will not count towards floor area, but will count against the lot coverage maximum. Check with the Building Division to ensure if a building permit is required.

LOCATIONS:

Accessory structures shall be located on private property, outside of the required setback areas of a lot.

Required Setback	Zone Districts			
	R-1	R-1 (650, 743, 929, 1858)	RE	R-2, RMD
Front	20' if block average <30', otherwise contextual *	20' if block average <30', otherwise contextual *	30 feet	20 feet
Rear	20 feet	20 feet	30 feet	20 feet
Interior-Side	6 feet	8 feet	15 feet	6 feet
Street-Side	16 feet	16 feet	24 feet	16 feet

* Please see Code Section for 18.12.040 (e) for calculation, "contextual" or "average" front setback applies if the average front setback of the block is 30' or more.

EXCEPTIONS TO THE REQUIRED SETBACK:

Accessory structures may be located within the required setbacks if the following conditions are met:

1. In R-1 zoning districts*, on lots 95' in depth or more, the structure is located at least 75 feet from the front property line;
 - NOTE: On lots less than 95' in depth, detached covered parking may be located in the required interior side or rear yard (and less than 75' from front property line) if placed in the rear half of the lot.
 - NOTE: For Corner Lots, such structures shall be located at least 20 feet from the streetside lot line.
 - In other low density zoning districts (R-2, RMD, RE) the structure is located at least 75 feet from the front property line, and for corner lots at least 20 feet from the streetside lot line.
2. The structure shall not be used for living or sleeping purposes;
3. The structure shall not be located closer than three feet to any other structure;
4. The structure meets the following height restrictions:
 - Accessory buildings located within a required interior yard as permitted by this section shall be subject to a maximum height established by a daylight plane beginning at a height of eight feet at the property line and increasing at a slope of one foot for each three feet of distance from the property line, to a maximum height of 12 feet;
5. No such structure greater than 200 square feet in size shall have more than two plumbing fixtures;
6. The structure(s) shall not individually or cumulatively occupy an area exceeding fifty percent of the required rear yard.

REQUIREMENTS FOR NOISE-PRODUCING EQUIPMENT:

All noise-producing equipment, such as air conditioning units, pool equipment, and generators shall not be located within the required side, rear or front setbacks. Additionally, all such equipment shall be insulated and housed. For corner lots such equipment may be located up to 6 feet into the required (16') streetside setback. The Planning Director may permit installation without housing and insulation if the applicant can show such equipment, with technical specifications, location/buffering, noise measurements will comply with the noise ordinance at the nearest property line. Replacement of noise-producing equipment shall also conform to these requirements where feasible.

For more information, please contact the Planning Division:

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