



**Snohomish County**  
Planning and Development  
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This Assistance Bulletin only applies to property within unincorporated Snohomish County and does not apply to property within incorporated city limits.

# Frequently Asked Questions

Assistance Bulletin

# # 50

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Snohomish County Planning and Development Services (PDS) receives many frequently asked questions. The following sections provide some of those questions and their answers. This bulletin consists of five parts, including:

- Tree Preservation and Critical Areas Questions (Pages 1, 2, and 3);
- Septic System, Water, Sewer, and Electricity Questions (Page 3);
- General Property Questions (Page 3);
- Permitting Process and Requirements Questions (Pages 4 and 5);
- Building and Land Use Questions (Pages 5, 6, and 7); and
- Records and Seeking Information Questions (Pages 7 and 8).

## Tree Preservation and Critical Areas Questions

### Q: Do significant trees need to be retained?

**A:** In new residential development located within unincorporated urban growth areas, significant trees—generally defined as a tree with a caliper of 10 inches, except vine maples and dogwoods that have a caliper of at least seven inches and excluding alder which are never considered significant trees—are required to be retained in:

- Critical area protection areas and their buffers
- Any required perimeter landscaping pursuant to SCC 30.25.020.

For additional information, please see [Bulletin #105](#), Urban Tree Canopy Coverage Requirements.

### Q: Do I need a permit to cut down trees on my property?

**A:** Trees that are located in a Native Growth Protection Area (NGPA) or Critical Area Protection Area (CAPA) or a County-approved landscaping plan may not be cut without prior approval from Snohomish County. Owners of properties that are less than two acres may remove as much timber as they wish, provided the timber is not removed from a critical area and the timber is for personal use only. For properties two acres or larger, up to 5,000 board feet of timber in a 12-month period may be harvested for personal use from areas that are outside of critical areas. If cutting over 5,000 board feet, or if any cut timber leaves the site to be traded, bartered, or sold, a Forest Practice permit is required.

### Q: Are there exemptions that permit a significant tree to be cut down and not replaced?

**A:** Yes, the following exemptions apply to significant trees:

This bulletin is intended only as an information guide. The information may not be complete and is subject to change. For complete legal information, refer to Snohomish County Code.

- Removal of any hazardous, dead, or diseased trees, and as necessary to remedy an immediate threat to person or property as determined by a letter from a qualified arborist;
- Construction of a single-family dwelling, duplex, or accessory or non-accessory storage structure on an individual lot created prior to April 21, 2009 or created by a subdivision or short subdivision for which a complete application was submitted prior to April 21, 2009;
- Construction or maintenance of public or private road network elements, and public or private utilities including utility easements not related to development subject to Chapters 30.23A, 30.34A, 30.41G, or 20.42E SCC;
- Construction or maintenance of public parks and trails when located within an urban residential zone; and
- Pruning and maintenance of trees.

**Q: Is there a penalty for cutting down a significant tree?**

**A:** Yes, pursuant to SCC 30.25.016(11), the County has the authority to issue a citation for the illegal cutting of a significant tree. The fine is \$5000 per tree per occurrence.

**Q: What type of waterbody is on this property?**

**A:** Streams and lakes are classified by Snohomish County according to a codified categorization process. Streams and lakes are classified into four different waterbody types. The types are determined by their physical characteristics, including channel width, gradient, fish use, stream flow, and human use. Generally, the larger streams with significant fish use are typed higher than smaller, non-fish-bearing streams. While the stream and lake classification system typifies all surface waters (natural and artificial), the County's critical areas regulations (see Chapter [30.62A](#) SCC) address only naturally occurring streams.

**Q: Is this property in a flood zone?**

**A:** The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) determines what areas are in flood zones. Specific FEMA flood map information can be found on the agency's website at [fema.gov](http://fema.gov), however, PDS also provides general flood map information through our [online interactive map services](#). Detailed information regarding what flood zones mean can be found in Chapter [30.65](#) SCC and from FEMA.

**Q: What can I do in a Native Growth Protection Area (NGPA) or Critical Area Protection Area (CAPA)?**

**A:** Chapter [30.62A](#) SCC specifically states that no clearing, grading, or construction of any kind can occur in these areas. Passive recreational activities that do not disturb vegetation or soils are not a problem, although there are exceptions to these restrictions. In order to determine what is allowed in any individual NGPA or CAPA, review the recorded restrictions on file with PDS.

**Q: What do I do about a hazardous (dangerous) tree in an NGPA or CAPA tract or greenbelt tract?**

**A:** Hazardous (dangerous) trees can be removed from the NGPA or CAPA tract or greenbelt tract with the conditions placed on the recorded subdivision, short subdivision, or recorded easement. The property owner must check recorded restrictions placed on the NGPA or CAPA tract or greenbelt tract to determine how the NGPA or CAPA tract or greenbelt tract restrictions allow the removal of hazardous trees. In most cases the NGPA or CAPA tract or greenbelt tract is owned in common by the lot owners within a subdivision or development and may require approval from the property owners association to remove the hazardous tree. Checking any applicable bylaws should provide clarification on how to proceed with the owners association on removal of the hazardous tree.

A copy of the recorded subdivision or short subdivision, or NGPA or CAPA recording easement, may be acquired from the County's Auditor's Office. To determine if a tree is considered hazardous, a qualified tree arborist should be consulted before removing the tree. A "Hazardous tree" means a tree which poses an imminent danger of falling on structures, or which constitutes an airport hazard.

**Q: Does this property have critical areas such as steep slopes, wetlands, streams, lakes, rivers, geological hazards, or other protected areas?**

**A:** PDS will have this information available if the property is a lot within a plat or short plat, or where an NGPA or CAPA easement has been recorded against the property. The recorded documentation will include maps that have identified these areas. Most lots created by plat or short plat prior to 1995 do not contain this information. If you need assistance in determining whether or not your property is subject to any of these features, you can use our [online interactive mapping software](#) for a cursory review. For a thorough analysis of the site, you may need the assistance of a qualified expert consultant.

## Septic System, Water, Sewer, and Electricity Questions

**Q:** Does PDS have drawings of where my water and sewer lines connect to my house?

**A:** This information is available from your water and sewer purveyor. PDS maintains a [map layer of water and sewer purveyors](#), but does not guarantee the completeness or accuracy of the information.

**Q:** Who is the sewer and/or water purveyor for this property?

**A:** Snohomish County does not operate sewer and water systems. There are various sewer and water districts and cities that provide these services to properties in unincorporated Snohomish County. PDS maintains a list of water and sewer purveyors but does not guarantee the completeness or accuracy of the information.

**Q:** Where is my septic tank located?

**A:** The [Snohomish Health District](#) may have information on the location and type of septic tank that is located on a property. Detailed records are retained by the agency. If as-built drawings for a property are readily available, they can be reviewed by visiting [dave.snohd.org](http://dave.snohd.org).

## General Property Questions

**Q:** Who is the owner of the property? How do I find out the parcel number for a property with no address?

**A:** The Snohomish County Assessor's Office has ownership information, which can be researched from [snohomishcountywa.gov/Assessor](http://snohomishcountywa.gov/Assessor).

**Q:** What should I do if I am having a dispute with a neighbor over a property line or their vegetation encroaching into my property?

**A:** This is a civil matter. You may need to contact an attorney if you are unable to reach an agreement with your neighbor.

**Q:** What are the dimensions of and/or square footage of this property?

**A:** Newer plats and short plats have the dimensions and square footage of each lot on the face of the recorded plat map. You can visit [snohomishcountywa.gov/Auditor](http://snohomishcountywa.gov/Auditor) to see if the recorded plat map is available. If your property is not part of a plat or short plat, then this information may not be available, and you may need to contact a surveyor.

**Q:** Where are my property lines?

**A:** To have the property lines physically established or located on the ground, you will need to contact a surveyor. Snohomish County does not provide surveying services.

## Permitting Process and Requirements Questions

**Q:** Do small accessory storage type buildings require a building permit?

**A:** You do not need a building permit for a one-story tool shed, playhouse, storage type building that does not exceed 200 square feet in building area (wall to wall) and carports with two or more sides open that do not exceed 200 square feet. However, properties located outside of the County's designated Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) are

allowed to have buildings up to 400 square feet without the requirement for a building permit. To determine if your property is located within or outside of a UGA, please consult our online interactive map for the districts theme. (also, see PDS [Bulletin #74](#), Common Building Permit Exemptions.)

**Q: Do I need a building permit to do maintenance work on my house?**

**A:** See PDS [Bulletin #74](#), Common Building Permit Exemptions. For electrical work, please consult the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries at [lni.wa.gov](http://lni.wa.gov).

**Q: Do I need a building permit to build a deck?**

**A:** If the deck is uncovered and does not exceed 30 inches above any grade within six feet of the deck, a building permit is not required. See PDS [Bulletin #21](#), Decks, Porches, and Steps, for information on how to obtain a building permit if required.

**Q: How much is a building permit going to cost?**

**A:** The cost of the permit is based on the valuation of the structure. Generally, the larger a structure, the higher the plan review and permit fees. The actual cost is determined at the time the building permit application is submitted and a detailed review of the project is made. To get a general idea of the approximate cost, see PDS [Bulletin #18](#), Residential Building Permit Fees, or visit the PDS website for additional details on permitting.

**Q: Where do I get an electrical permit?**

**A:** PDS does not issue electrical permits. For electrical permitting, please consult the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries at [lni.wa.gov](http://lni.wa.gov).

**Q: I want to install a fence. What are the rules?**

**A:** Fences up to eight feet in height do not require a building permit from PDS. However, there are restrictions and setback requirements. If you have a corner lot, for example, there are fence height limitations. Fences more than 6 feet in height must comply with building setback distances. (See PDS [Bulletin #6](#), Fences.)

**Q: If I buy a piece of property and find out that the previous owner did work without permits, what do I do? How do I make a structure “legal” that was built without a permit?**

**A:** You, now being the current owner, are responsible for obtaining the proper permits and having the work inspected. In addition, an inspection report may or may not be needed, depending on the nature of the work and building. Our recommendation is to visit our Permit and Zoning Counter to explain the issues associated with the work done without a permit. PDS staff will then determine the appropriate course of action.

**Q: How do I get a building permit?**

**A:** You may pick up one of our informational application packets in our office or visit our Applications page online at [snohomishcountywa.gov/1190](http://snohomishcountywa.gov/1190). You will need to submit the application(s) to us either in-person or via [mybuildingpermit.com](http://mybuildingpermit.com) (where available). Certain types of permit applications require an appointment to submit. The County and any required reviewing agencies will process the permit application for code compliance and either issue a decision or request additional information if necessary prior to issuing a decision.

**Q: Do I need a permit to replace my mobile home with a new one?**

**A:** Yes, a permit is required any time a mobile home is placed on a property, regardless of whether it is new or a replacement. See PDS [Bulletin #36](#), Manufactured/Mobile Home Permit Process, or view the Mobile Home Application Packet and Information on the PDS website at [snohomishcountywa.gov/1863](http://snohomishcountywa.gov/1863).

**Q: Does the County require verification that a contractor’s license is valid?**

**A:** Yes, verification means the receipt and duplication by the city, town, or county of a contractor registration card that is current on its face, checking the [Washington State Department of Labor and Industries](http://Washington State Department of Labor and Industries) online database or by calling the agency to confirm if the contractor is registered.

## Building and Land Use Questions

### Q: How do I find out the zoning of my property?

**A:** The official zoning of a property is determined by our zoning maps. You can obtain the current official zoning from our offices, or rely upon our [interactive](#) or “[static](#)” online maps. You can get zoning confirmed by contacting PDS at [AskPermitTech@snoco.org](mailto:AskPermitTech@snoco.org).

Please also bear in mind that some zoning restrictions reference the Comprehensive Plan land use policies and Future Land Use Map. Official copies of these documents are also maintained at our offices, but you may seek out our online versions using the same [interactive](#) and “[static](#)” map services to verify Future Land Use Map designations and the [Comprehensive Plan land use policies](#).

### Q: What can I do in my zone?/Can I do...in my zone?

**A:** Chapter [30.22](#) SCC contains use matrices for each zone (see PDS [Bulletin #37](#), Uses Allowed in Zones). These chart use categories and whether those uses are allowed in certain zones, allowed as a conditional use permit in certain zones, or prohibited. (See PDS [Bulletin #37](#), Zoning Code Use Matrix.) Chapter [30.23](#) SCC defines minimum lot size, maximum lot coverage, and maximum building height by zone and use.

### Q: Is my lot a legal building lot?

**A:** Generally, if the property is an established lot within an approved plat or short plat, that lot is considered a legally created lot. Development of a lot is subject to compliance with applicable building codes and land development ordinances. If a parcel is not a platted or short platted lot, the parcel will need to obtain lot status certification. See PDS [Bulletin #24](#), Legal Lots, for information on how to obtain lot status certification.

### Q: Is my property subdividable?

**A:** It depends on the zoning of the property, proposed land use, and other special land development requirements. For instance, criteria in the Urban Growth Area include meeting minimum lot size, net density, road network, and Urban Residential Design Standards requirements, in addition to other code requirements. County staff can provide additional general information, but you will need to consult a private land use expert to develop a subdivision proposal, if feasible.

### Q: Can I have two dwellings on one lot?

**A:** Depending upon your zone, you may be allowed to construct at least one single-family residence per legal building lot. The County also has provisions that may allow for temporary dwellings, accessory apartments, and duplexes. Bulletins on Attached Accessory Apartments ([Bulletin #13](#)), Detached Accessory Apartments ([Bulletin #12](#)), and Temporary Dwellings ([Bulletin #49](#)) can provide additional information.

### Q: Can I store a mobile home on my property?

**A:** Residential zones generally only allow one residential dwelling unit per lot (refer to Chapter [30.22](#) SCC). If you are replacing an existing mobile home with another dwelling (stick-frame built or another mobile home), the existing mobile home must be removed from the property within 30 days after the final inspection of the new dwelling. The existing dwelling could possibly be converted to a guesthouse by removing the kitchen facilities. A conversion to a storage building might be possible if the unit was manufactured prior to 1976. In the event that a property owner owns a vacant lot and wants to “store” a mobile home on their property, it is not permitted unless a mobile home permit is obtained meeting all mobile home standards and requirements. (See PDS [Bulletin #36](#), Manufactured/Mobile Home Permit Process.)

### Q: Where can a well, septic system, or drainfield be located on my property?

**A:** The [Snohomish Health District](#) may have information on the location and type of septic tank or drainfield that is located on a property. Detailed records are retained by the agency. If as-built drawings for a property are readily available, they can be reviewed by visiting [dave.snohd.org](http://dave.snohd.org).

### Q: Can I operate a home business from my residence?

**A:** County code defines these as “[home occupations](#),” which are permitted in residential zones of Snohomish County, provided they meet the strict criteria outlined in SCC [30.28.050](#). In urban zones, the business must be operated from within the dwelling and not in a garage or other detached building. In rural zones, it is possible to operate the business from a detached building. Some home occupations may require a certificate of occupancy and annual inspection for compliance.

### Q: What are the setbacks from property lines?

**A:** Setback requirements depend on:

- The zone that the property is located in;
- The type of building that is being constructed;
- Whether or not there are streams and water bodies adjacent to the property;
- Other recorded NGPAs or CAPAs;
- Restrictions contained with a recorded plat or short;
- Other specific performance standards contained in Title 30 SCC; and
- Building setback lines or utility and access easements encumbering the property.

General setbacks are outlined in PDS [Bulletin #27](#), Residential Building Setbacks. Chapter [Section 30.23](#) SCC outlines general setback requirements.

### Q: Can I raise and have chickens, turkeys, pigs, sheep, goats, rabbits, or similar small animals on my property?

**A:** Yes, the development code allows a person to have these types of farm animals for non-commercial purposes in residential and rural zoned areas. Structures used to house or feed these animals must maintain a setback of 30 feet from all property lines. In the R-7,200, R-8,400, R-9,600, R-12,500, R-20,000, and WFB zones, you need a minimum of five acres and a conditional use permit if these animals are not for the primary consumption of or use by the occupants. Privately recorded restrictive covenants in a plat or short plat may restrict animal ownership.

### Q: Can I have horses on my property?

**A:** Yes, but as with the above animals, structures used to house or feed the horses must maintain a setback of 30 feet from all property lines. Additional restrictions may also apply, depending upon the intended use. If you are proposing to have an equestrian facility for commercial purposes, see PDS [Bulletin #2](#), Stables and Equestrian Centers. Check for any private covenants that may restrict this type of activity.

### Q: Can I live in a travel trailer?

**A:** Generally no, travel trailers are not considered full-time dwelling units and therefore, cannot be used as a permanent residence. In certain rural zones, however, travel trailers are allowed on parcels for up to 180 days for recreational dwelling purposes. (See PDS [Bulletin #53](#), Recreational Vehicles.)

## Records and Seeking Information Questions

### Q: What is the status of my permit?

**A:** You may visit PDS’ online permit information service and search for your permit record by permit number, address, or tax account number at [snohomishcountywa.gov/2299](http://snohomishcountywa.gov/2299). You may also contact us, but will need to provide the permit number.

### Q: How do I find out if a structure had a building permit?

**A:** For properties in unincorporated (outside of all city limits) Snohomish County only, you will need to research the permitting history. You can do so by contacting our Records Center at 425-388-3622 or submit an [online records request form](#) to determine if copies are available for your review. You will need to have an address or property tax parcel number, which you can find by visiting the Assessor’s Office website at [snohomishcountywa.gov/Assessor](http://snohomishcountywa.gov/Assessor).

**Q: Development is occurring near me, what is the status of it?**

**A:** If there is a “Proposed Land Use Action” sign posted on the property, you can obtain the project tracking number and name of the staff member handling the project from the sign. If there is no sign, you must determine the address or tax account number of the property. Then you may call our office or visit the [online permit information](#) for more information about the project. If you are not certain of an address or tax account number, you may use the PDS Active Projects and Permits Interactive map to find development status of a parcel at this link:

<https://snohomishcountywa.gov/3820/PDS-Active-ProjectsPermits>

Project files are available for review in the PDS Records Center. You may contact our Records Center at 425-388-3622 or submit an [online records request form](#) to determine if copies are available and may be set aside for your review.

**Q: Where can I get aerial photos of properties in Snohomish County?**

**A:** Snohomish County Public Works has many aerial photos of the county. You can visit them on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor of the Robert J. Drewel Building or contact them at 425-388-3488 to obtain copies of aerial photography. You can view generally current and historic aerial photography from online services like Google Maps and Bing Maps.

**Q: Do you have the plans of my house on file at the PDS office?**

**A:** More than likely we do not have a copy of the structural/architectural plans on file. PDS keeps structural/architectural plans for houses during the construction process and for 90 days after the final inspection. After the 90 days, the structural/architectural plans are destroyed.

**Q: Do you have a drawing of how my house sits on the property?**

**A:** We refer to this as a “site plan.” If the house was built after 1982, PDS permit records will contain this information. You may contact our Records Center at 425-388-3622 or submit an [online records request form](#) to determine if copies are available and may be set aside for your review. Please note, however, that during construction of the house, minor changes in the field could have occurred, so the house location may not precisely match the site plan on file.

**Q: What do I do if I have a noise complaint about a construction site?**

**A:** If “Proposed Land Use Action” signs are posted, the project manager’s name and extension will be available on that sign. You should contact the individual listed. If no sign is posted, PDS will need an exact address or a tax account number to assist you. If you are not sure what the address or tax account number is, please visit the County Assessor’s website at [snohomishcountywa.gov/Assessor](https://snohomishcountywa.gov/Assessor).

**Q: How do I get someone from the County to come out and look at a piece of property that appears to have a code violation?**

**A:** You may report a code violation online, download an Investigative Report form at [snohomishcountywa.gov/1154](https://snohomishcountywa.gov/1154), or call Code Enforcement at 425-388-3650 to obtain an investigative report form. (Also see PDS [Bulletin #51](#), Reporting Code Violations.) Fill out the form and return it to the PDS office. Upon receipt of a completed form, a Code Enforcement Officer will visit the site to determine whether there is a violation and, if needed, initiate the code compliance process.