



**Snohomish County**  
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**ONLINE INFORMATION**

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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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This bulletin provides answers to common residential and building questions received by County staff. The common questions are categorized as follows:

- Tree Preservation and Critical Areas
- Septic System, Water, Sewer, and Electricity
- General Property
- Permitting Process and Requirements
- Building and Land Use
- Records and Seeking Information
- Complaints

## 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 dogwood which are never consider 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 [Assistance 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.

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.

**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:

- 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 [30.42E](#) 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 the information available if the property is a lot within a recent (after April of 1995) plat or short plat, or where NGPA or CAPA have been recorded in the form of a Critical Area Site Plan. 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? Where can a well, septic system, or drainfield be located on my property?

**A:** The [Snohomish County Health Department](#) 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 the Health Department's online portal at [onlineRME](#).

## **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 <https://snohomishcountywa.gov/5167/Assessor>.

**Q:** What can 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 the Auditor at <https://snohomishcountywa.gov/176/Auditors-Office> to see if the recorded plat map is available. Your property description and sometimes a drawing are in the title documents; you may need to work with a title company and possibly a surveyor to physically locate the boundaries at the property.

**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:** For structures under the residential code, you do not need a building permit for an unconditioned (no heating and/or cooling) one-story tool shed, playhouse, storage type building that does not exceed 200 square feet in building area and carports with two or more sides open that do not exceed 200 square feet. Rural properties, outside designated Urban Growth Areas (UGAs), may use the same criteria to construct a building up to 400 square feet without a building permit. The building area is the area within the outside perimeter of the exterior walls. 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 [Assistance Bulletin #74](#) (Common Building Permit Exemptions) for additional requirements.

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

**A:** See [Assistance 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, does not exceed 30 inches above grade (measured vertically from the grade to the finished deck floor), and does not exceed 30 inches above grade at any point within 36 inches horizontally of the deck edge, a building permit is not required. See PDS [Assistance 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. The actual cost is determined at the time the building permit application is submitted and may be adjusted if necessary when a detailed review of the project is made. To get a general idea of the approximate cost, see [Assistance 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 put up 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 some fence placement restrictions. If you have a corner lot, for example, there are fence height limitations as the fence approaches the corner. See [Assistance 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:** The current owner is responsible for obtaining the proper permits and having the work inspected. An inspection report may in determining what permits are required. Our recommendation is to reference [Assistance Bulletin #83](#) for more guidance.

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

**A:** All permit applications should be submitted online through the PDS Permit Portal. For information on using our online permitting system, please see the following web page: <https://snohomishcountywa.gov/3920/Online-Permitting>. If you need additional assistance with the online process, please call our office at 425-388-3311.

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 [Assistance Bulletin #36](#) (Manufactured/Mobile Home Permit Process) or visit <https://snohomishcountywa.gov/6553/Mobile-Manufactured-Homes-and-Temporary->.

**Q: If I am using a contractor, does the County require verification that the contractor 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](#) 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 look at the county's zoning maps online either on our interactive [PDS Map Portal](#) or on the set of "static" online maps on the [PDS iGallery](#). You can get zoning confirmed by contacting PDS at 425-388-3311

Please also bear in mind that some zoning restrictions reference the Comprehensive Plan land use policies and Future Land Use Map. You can verify Future Land Use Map designations by looking at the Future Land Use Map online through our interactive [PDS Map Portal](#) or the [PDS iGallery](#) and by reviewing the online [Comprehensive Plan land use policies](#).

Information on how to use our online map services can be found in [Assistance Bulletin #60](#) (Map and GIS Data Resources).

**Q: What can I do in my zone / is \_\_\_ allowed in my zone ?**

**A:** Chapter [30.22](#) SCC contains use matrices for each zone. See [Assistance 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 [Assistance 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 [Assistance 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 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 and lot size, you may be allowed to construct more than one single-family dwelling unit on a legal building lot. The County has provisions for temporary dwellings, additional dwelling units and duplexes. Bulletins on Attached Accessory Dwelling Units ([Assistance Bulletin #13](#)), Detached Accessory Dwelling Units ([Assistance Bulletin #12](#)), and Temporary Dwellings ([Assistance Bulletin #49](#)) can provide additional information.



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

**A:** 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 [Assistance Bulletin #36](#) (Manufactured/Mobile Home Permit Process).

**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.

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

**A:** Development code provisions allow 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 raising these animals is not for the primary consumption of or use by the occupants of the premises. You should also be aware that privately recorded restrictive covenants in a plat or short plat may restrict animal ownership.

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

**A:** As with other animals, structures used to house or feed the horses must maintain a setback of 30 feet from all property lines. Additional restrictions apply if you are proposing to have an equestrian facility for commercial purposes, see [Assistance 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:** Travel trailers are not considered full-time dwelling units and cannot be used as a permanent residence. Travel trailers are allowed on parcels for up to 180 days for temporary recreational purposes. See [Assistance Bulletin #53](#) (Recreational Vehicles.)

## **Records and Seeking Information Questions**

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

**A:** You may visit one of two websites to check the status of a permit. You may use the [PDS Permit Search](#) application on the PDS website. You may also use the “Permit/Application Status Search” feature on the PDS permitting system. For more information on the permitting system, please see the following web page: <https://snohomishcountywa.gov/3920/Online-Permitting>. If you need additional assistance, please call our office at 425-388-3311.

### **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 information request form](#) to determine if copies are available. You will need to have an address or property tax parcel number. If you are not certain of an address or tax account number, visit the Assessor’s Office website at <https://snohomishcountywa.gov/5167/Assessor>.

### **Q: Development is occurring nearby 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 visit the [Project Status web page](#) 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 Room. You may contact our Records Room at 425-388-3622 or submit an [online information request form](#) to determine if copies are available.

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

**A:** Aerial photos of the county are available online using the PDS Map Portal. Go to the following PDS web page: <https://snohomishcountywa.gov/3752/PDS-Map-Portal> and search for the property on the Map Portal. There are instructions on how to use the Map Portal and search by property address or tax account/parcel number. There are several layers to the map that you can view including aerial photography, zoning, comprehensive plan designation, fire district, locations of streams and lakes and much more. Just toggle on and off your selections.

Snohomish County Public Works also has many aerial photos of the county. You can visit them on the 5th floor of the Admin West 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. Contact the PDS Records Room at 425-388-3622 for more information.

### **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 Room at 425-388-3622 or submit an [online information request form](#) to determine if copies are available. 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.

## **Complaints**

**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 <https://snohomishcountywa.gov/5167/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 <https://snohomishcountywa.gov/1152/Code-Enforcement>, or call Code Enforcement at 425-388-3650 to obtain an investigative report form. Fill out the form and return it to the PDS office, either in person or by mail (complaint forms are not accepted via email). Also see [Assistance Bulletin #51](#), Reporting Code Violations. 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.