

RETAINING WALLS

What Are the Town's Requirements for Retaining Walls?



What is a Retaining Wall?

A retaining wall is a structure designed and constructed to resist the lateral pressure of soil, loose rock, or similar material, resulting in a change to site grades.

General Requirements

Retaining walls must:

- Modify the existing drainage of the lot, including ensuring that there is positive drainage across the site and not diverting drainage onto neighbouring properties.
- Not be located within an overland drainage right-of-way.
- Not be located within a utility right-of-way, unless the wall is less than 0.3 metres in height and is perpendicular to the direction of the right of way.
- Adhere to any other easements registered on the property that may restrict the development of retaining walls, such as restrictive covenants and utility right-of-way agreements.
- Not encroach onto Town-owned property.
- Be located entirely within the owner's property boundaries.
- Be designed and constructed so they do not adversely affect adjacent properties, municipal infrastructure, or natural features.

Development Permit Requirements

A Development Permit is not required for a retaining wall where the retaining wall:

- is less than 1.0 metre in height (measured from the grade to the top of the wall);
- is not within 30 metres of the top or toe of an escarpment (i.e. steep slope, ravine, coulee, river valley, or similar natural feature); and
- adheres to the above requirements and setbacks of the Land Use Bylaw.

In all other cases, a Development Permit is required for a retaining wall.

Property owners are encouraged to contact Planning & Urban Design before construction if there is uncertainty regarding permit requirements.

Building Permit Requirements

- A Building Permit is required for retaining walls 1.0 metre or greater in height.
- Applications must include structural engineering drawings prepared by a qualified professional.
- Additional engineering or geotechnical information may be required depending on site conditions.

Retaining Walls Near Slopes and Escarpments

The construction of a retaining wall of any height within 30 metres of the top or toe of an escarpment may undermine or pose a risk the stability of the slope, which may result in a failure of the slope. In this circumstance, a comprehensive slope stability geotechnical report prepared by a geotechnical engineer must be submitted unless the slope has been previously engineered to the satisfaction of the Town.

The slope stability geotechnical report must demonstrate the following:

- Location of the top and/or toe of the escarpment (where the slope changes to less than 15% grade);
- The current condition of the slope and the impact of the retaining structure; and
- Identification of the current and proposed factor of safety for the development (which must be 1.5 or greater) to be allowed.

If your property is located near the Sheep River valley, a ravine, coulee, steep bank, or other significant slope feature, contact the Town before beginning construction.

Utility Rights-of-Way and Easements

Retaining walls must not obstruct access to utilities or interfere with drainage systems. The construction of retaining walls should always be avoided within utility rights-of-way and overland drainage easements. However, retaining walls can be constructed perpendicular to a utility right-of-way provided they are less than 0.3 metres in height. Property owners are responsible for determining the presence and location of all registered easements and rights-of-way before construction begins.

Property Lines

Retaining walls cannot be constructed into public lands and must be located entirely within private property boundaries. Property owners are responsible for confirming property lines before construction.

A real property report prepared by an Alberta land surveyor can identify:

- Property boundaries;
- Easements;
- Utility rights-of-way; and
- Other registered encumbrances.

The Town of Okotoks does not provide property line staking. An Alberta Land Surveyor should be retained where property boundaries are uncertain.

Neighbouring Properties

Retaining walls are the responsibility of the property owner. Responsibility for construction costs, maintenance, repair, or replacement of shared retaining walls is a matter to be resolved between affected property owners. Disputes that fall outside municipal regulations are civil matters between property owners.

Before You Dig

Always contact Alberta One-Call before starting any excavation work.

Call: 1-800-242-3447

Website: www.albertaonecall.com

Need More Information?

Planning & Urban Design

Town of Okotoks

Phone: 403-995-2760

Email: planning@okotoks.ca

This information sheet is provided for general guidance only. Property owners are responsible for complying with the current Town of Okotoks Land Use Bylaw, Municipal Development Plan, Building Code requirements, and any applicable provincial legislation.