FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions

RETAINING WALLS

Q: Am I allowed to build a retaining wall on my property?

A: To answer this you must first check the following:

- **Does your property title have any restrictive covenants that regulate retaining walls?** On steep sloping land, there may be covenants that outright prohibit the construction of retaining walls. Covenants registered on other properties may permit retaining walls only if it is demonstrated that there is no impact on adjacent lands. *Note: Your property title can be searched through the Land Title Office (1-877-577-5872). Your lawyer or notary can assist you with this.*

- **Is your property located in a Natural Environment Development Permit (NEDP) area or Steep Slope Development Permit (SSDP) area as per the Official Community Plan (OCP)?**
  Check WebMap to see if your property is in a Development Permit (DP) area. If it is, the proposed retaining wall is subject to the guidelines of the NEDP and/or SSDP, which are found within the Official Community Plan and you will be required to obtain a DP or an exemption before beginning construction. Prior to submitting an application for a DP, a review of the proposal can be obtained by submitting details of the proposal to env-info@abbotsford.ca.

Q: Do I need a Building Permit to build a retaining wall on my property?

A: If the retaining wall is to be 1.2 m (3.9 ft) in height or greater, or you have a series of retaining walls with a total height of more than 1.2 m (see drawing on reverse page), you will need to obtain a Building Permit. You will also need to retain a Geotechnical or Structural Engineer to design and oversee the construction. The engineer will ensure the wall is properly constructed for site conditions.

Q: How high can I build my retaining wall?

A: Retaining wall heights shall comply with the relevant guidelines found in the OCP. The SSDP guidelines state that when designing retaining walls, respect the natural characteristics of the site and terrace walls to avoid overpowering the site with a large uniform wall face. As a general guide, retaining walls should not exceed 3.0 m in height adjacent to roads and services and 1.2 m in height between individual properties.

Q: Are there restrictions on the type of materials used to construct retaining walls?

A: The Development Bylaw prohibits wood walls (preserved or otherwise), as well as concrete lock block style walls where they are facing public rights-of-way or public lands. The OCP also discourages the use of concrete lock block walls in all areas of the site.

Q: Can I build my retaining wall on my property line?

A: If a retaining wall is less than 1.2 m, or shown on an approved lot grading plan, it can be constructed anywhere on your property, as long as it is outside of any registered easements, covenants, or right-of-ways. A retaining wall higher than 1.2m, and added after the lot grading has been approved, must be set back from lot lines in accordance with the Accessory Buildings and Structures setbacks of the property's zone (as shown in Webmap), as indicated in the Zoning Bylaw.

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BUILDING PERMITS & LICENCES
604-864-5525
building-info@abbotsford.ca

PLANNING SERVICES
604-864-5510
planning-info@abbotsford.ca

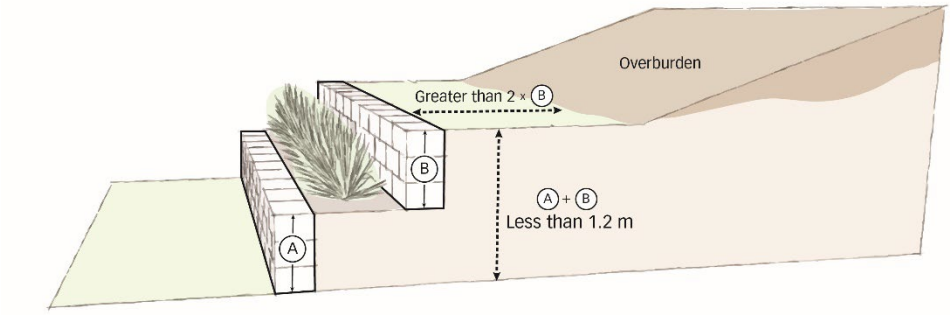
Q: Can I place a fence on top of my retaining wall?

A: Yes, a fence may be placed on top of a retaining wall. The total height of the fence shall include the height of the retaining wall if the fence and the retaining wall are located less than 1.0 m from each other; except where a guardrail is required by the BC Building Code, or where a retaining wall borders an Environmentally Sensitive Area. See the Abbotsford Zoning Bylaw, Section 140 for further detail regarding fences and retaining walls.

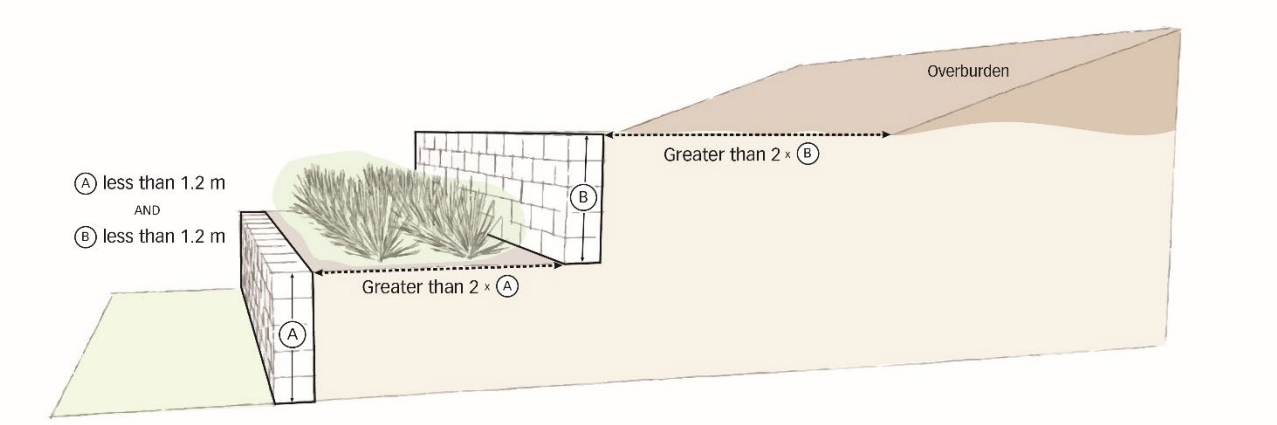
Q: Do I need a Building Permit if I'm terracing the retaining walls?

A: You don't need a Building Permit or Professional Engineer design for the following scenarios:

(1) terraced walls where the combined height of both walls is less than 1.2m



(2) terraced walls where each individual wall is less than 1.2m in height and the distance between terraces is twice the height of the preceding wall



Note: *the "Overburden" (i.e. soil excavated during construction) must be located at a distance that is no closer to the uppermost wall than twice the height of the uppermost wall.*

Setback requirements, Right-of-Way locations and easements should be determined prior to the start of construction. The City of Abbotsford accepts no responsibility for the design of retaining walls; they should be built in accordance with best practices and by persons qualified in such construction.

Q: If there is a retaining wall between my house and my neighbour's, who is responsible for repairs/maintenance?

A: The owner of the property that the retaining wall is located on is responsible for the retaining wall. The location might be shown on the approved lot grading plan. To see if a lot grading plan exists for your lot please reach out to planning-inquiry@abbotsford.ca. If a lot grading plan does not exist, a Site Survey (showing the location of buildings and structures on site) may be available in the Building Permits & Licences Division. To see if a Site Survey exists please reach out to building-info@abbotsford.ca.

Q: I have an existing retaining wall that exceeds the maximum allowable height. Can I replace it to its current height and configuration?

A: An existing retaining wall that exceeds the maximum allowable height may be replaced to its existing height and configuration **only** if it meets all of the following conditions:

i. It was first constructed prior to January 1, 2022;
ii. It is located entirely within the legal boundaries of one property;
iii. There are no legal encumbrances affecting its location; and
iv. Site conditions limit its ability to comply with the maximum allowable heights outlined in the Zoning Bylaw and OCP.

**Note: A Building Permit is required to construct a retaining wall that exceeds the maximum allowable height. Additionally, a Steep Slope Development Permit may be required.*

Q: What information is required for a Building Permit?

A: For Building Permit application, apply online through the Building Permit Portal:

- Site Plan showing locations, lengths and maximum heights of retaining wall(s).
- Cross sections of retaining wall(s) with Geotechnical Engineer's seal (for block type walls) or Structural Engineer's seal (for poured concrete walls). Drawing(s) must also show drainage requirements.
- Schedule B with Geotechnical or Structural Engineer's seal.

For general information on Building Permits, see the information online.

Q: Do I need any other City permits?

A: Your retaining wall should avoid the critical root zones of trees (which is generally the area below the tree canopy). If that is not avoidable, an Arborist should be retained to provide recommendations on how to avoid impacts. If a tree must be removed, a Tree Cutting Permit may be required. If soil is brought to or removed from the property, a Soil Permit may be required.

DISCLAIMER: This FAQ is not a legal document. Any contradiction, dispute or difference between the contents of this FAQ and applicable City bylaws, plans, policies or guidelines will be resolved by reference to the bylaws or other official documents.