

# RETAINING WALLS

Type: All Construction

Subtype: Residential / Non-Residential

City of Tukwila - Permit Center  
6300 Southcenter Blvd, Suite 100,  
Tukwila, WA 98188  
[www.tukwilawa.gov/departments/](http://www.tukwilawa.gov/departments/)



## RETAINING WALL PERMIT REQUIREMENTS

Each retaining wall constructed in the City of Tukwila requires a building permit in accordance with section 105 of the current Washington State Adopted Building Codes.

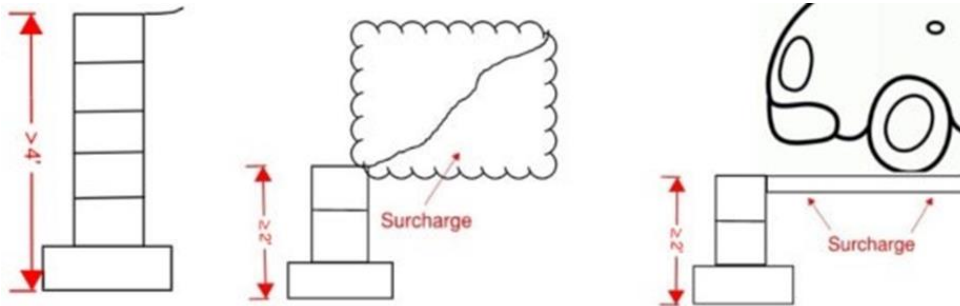
- All retaining walls constructed shall have a minimum of a 12-inch embedment into the soil, to anchor and be supported below the frost depth for our region.
- Please note that ornamental designs anchored to the wall will be included in the total height when determining if a permit is required.
- No retaining wall placed in a Critical Area in accordance with TMC 18.45 shall be exempt from permit.
- Walls over 4 feet in height (measured to the bottom of the footing) without a surcharge and walls with a surcharge over 2 feet in height.

### Applicable Regulations:

- [Title 16 Tukwila Municipal Code](#)
- [Title 18 Tukwila Municipal Code](#)
- [Washington State Building Code](#)

### Resources:

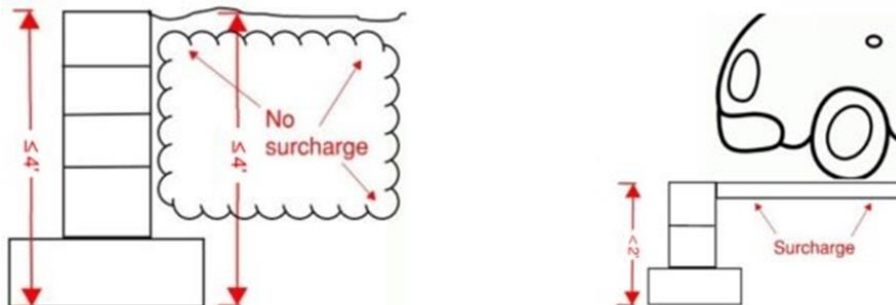
- [Tukwila Permit Center](#)



## PERMIT EXEMPTION

The following exemptions from permit may apply to your project:

1. Retaining walls not over 4 feet tall are exempt from permit, unless supporting a surcharge that is within a 45-degree angle of the bottom of the footing. This exemption does not apply to engineered systems.
  - a. No retaining wall that is more than 36 inches above finished grade shall be exempt from permit.
2. Retaining walls less than 24 inches in height and are supporting a surcharge are exempt from building permit.
  - a. No retaining wall that is more than 12 inches above finished grade and supporting a surcharge shall be exempt from permit.
3. Walls up to 4 feet in height (measured to the bottom of the footing) without a surcharge and walls up to 2 feet in height supporting a surcharge.



**Note:** All retaining walls must be properly drained; International Residential Code, Section R404.4

# Retaining Walls

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Retaining walls are additionally regulated by Tukwila Municipal Code Title 18 – Zoning as follows:

TMC 18.06.800 - Structure

*“Structure” means a combination of materials constructed and erected permanently on the ground or attached to something having a permanent location on the ground, but excluding all forms of vehicles even though immobilized. **Not included are residential fences up to six feet in height, retaining walls or rockeries with up to four feet of exposed face, and similar improvements of minor character.***

Structures, which includes retaining walls four feet and higher, are not permitted within required yard setbacks for a given property unless a Retaining Wall Setback Waiver is provided as outline below:

18.50.150 - Retaining Wall Setback Waiver

*Retaining walls with an exposed height greater than four feet may be allowed in required front, side or rear yard setbacks as a Type 2 Special Permission decision to the Community Development Director under the following circumstances:*

- 1. When the applicant’s property is on the lower side of the retaining wall and it is not visible from adjacent properties or is screened by landscaping; or*
- 2. When a wall built on a property line or perpendicular to it benefits the lots on both sides, and the owners of both properties agree to jointly maintain the wall; or*
- 3. When a wall in a front yard is required due to roadway expansion or improvements.*

To apply for a Retaining Wall Setback Waiver, please visit the [City of Tukwila Land Use Portal](#).