



**City of Arlington**  
Community and Economic  
Development

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This Assistance Bulletin only  
applies to properties within  
Arlington City Limits

[www.arlingtonwa.gov](http://www.arlingtonwa.gov)  
[Arlington Municipal Code](#)

Assistance Bulletin

# COMMON BUILDING PERMIT EXEMPTIONS

# #32

**Q:** What work in Arlington City Limits does not require a building permit?

**A:** The following list contains the most common permit exemptions. Please note:

- While you may be exempt from a building permit, you may be required to obtain other types of permits and approvals. For example, you may not need a building permit to build a 100 square foot shed or 6-foot fence, but you will be required to meet structure setback requirements from property lines, and the structure must still comply with building code regulations.
- If your property is located in a flood hazard zone, a flood hazard permit is still required regardless if a project is otherwise exempt from a building permit.

## Building and other structures

**Note:** Permit-exempt structures are required to meet setback distances to property lines per the zoning code and setbacks/buffers to Critical Areas such as steep slopes, streams, lakes, and wetlands.

- Carports and patio covers under the residential code and not attached to other structures/buildings, provided they do not exceed 200 square feet.
- Uncovered decks (including deck steps) and uncovered porches not exceeding 30 inches above grade measured vertically from the finished deck floor to the grade below at any point within 36 inches (914 mm) horizontally to the edge of the open side.
- Unconditioned one-story detached accessory structures, regulated under the residential code, not used for human habitation: limited to 200 square feet.
- Flag and light poles that do not exceed 20 feet in height.
- Fences 6 feet or less in height that do not have masonry or concrete elements above 6 feet. Note: Fences and freestanding walls 6 feet or less in height may be located on the property line unless a landscaped area is required. Fences over 6 feet are required to meet building setback requirements
- Job shacks that are placed at the job site during construction and then removed.

## COMMON BUILDING PERMIT EXEMPTIONS #32

- Retaining walls and rockeries that are 4 feet or less in height (as measured from the top of the wall to the base of the footing) and that do not support a surcharge or impound Class I, II or III-A liquids.
- Prefabricated swimming pools, regulated under the residential code, that are 24" or less in depth and are accessory to a single family home or duplex.
- Swings and other playground equipment.
- Tents and canopies—less than 200 square feet.
- Window awnings for single family homes or duplexes, when the awning is supported by an exterior wall, does not project more than 54" from the wall and does not require additional support. Window replacement—direct replacement with no structural changes. Windows shall comply with adopted Washington State Energy Code.

### Mechanical

- Portable evaporative cooler.
- Portable heating appliances.
- Portable ventilation or cooling units.
- Propane tanks under 125 gallons. A gas piping permit is required for any interior and/or exterior gas piping installations.

### Other

- Non-fixed and movable fixtures such as cases, racks, counters, and partitions not over 5'9" in height.
- Painting, papering, tiling, carpeting, installation of cabinets or counter tops, and similar finish work.
- Removal of certain buildings typically exempt from a building permit, such as tool sheds, play houses, and similar type structures.
- Repair of plumbing leaks that don't require removal of existing traps, drain pipes, etc.
- Repair or clearing of stoppages that don't involve the removal and replacement or rearrangement of valves, pipes, or fixtures.
- Replacement of plumbing fixtures—like for like.

### Rules for Residential Buildings Exempt from a Building Permit

Exempt buildings include unconditioned one-story\* detached accessory structures not used for human habitation and used as tool and storage sheds, playhouses and similar uses, provided the floor area within the outside perimeter of the exterior walls does not exceed 200 square feet.

The sidewalls of an exempt structure that is regulated under the residential code and located inside the city limits shall not exceed 9 feet, measured from the grade average. Free standing carports and patio covers under the residential code meeting these requirements are included structures. If the exempt structure is to be located on property in a flood hazard zone, a flood hazard permit is required.

If located within shoreline jurisdiction per RCW 90.58, compliance with the city's Shoreline Management Program is required even if no shoreline permit is required.

## COMMON BUILDING PERMIT EXEMPTIONS #32

\*A **story** is defined as that portion of a building included between the upper surface of a floor and the upper surface of the floor or roof next above.

### Zoning

- Exempt structures are required to meet setback distances to property lines per zoning code and setbacks to Critical Areas such as steep slopes, streams, lakes, or wetlands.
- Structures under the residential code: No setback distance is required between individual exempt structures or between exempt structures and dwellings or other permitted structures.
- Structures under building code: General rule of thumb is that the exempt structure shall be setback 20 feet from ALL other buildings, structures, and property lines.

### Construction

- Exempt structures under the residential code must comply with the residential code regulations, and possibly the building code regulations. Exempt structures under the building code must comply with the building code regulations.
- Individual exempt structures shall be structurally independent and shall not be attached to other structures.
- A storage loft is allowed as long as the area of the loft area does not exceed 1/3 the building footprint.
- Eaves may extend maximum 24 inches past the exterior walls but shall not encroach into the setbacks.
- Per Table R302.6 a garage located less than 3 feet from a dwelling unit on the same lot is required to have not less than ½-inch gypsum wall board or equivalent applied to the interior side of exterior walls that are within this area.

### Drainage

- Exempt structures must comply with recorded easements and covenants for, and setback requirements from stormwater management facilities including both conventional stormwater facilities and low impact development best management practices (LID BMPs) and facilities.
- Site design should consider LID principles to preserve native vegetation and minimize impervious surfaces. Rooftop drainage from exempt structures must not impair the function of existing stormwater facilities. Drainage improvements may be necessary to accommodate runoff from new hard surfaces. LID BMPs should be considered for stormwater management.
- Existing stormwater management facilities must be protected from damage during construction (i.e. erosion, sedimentation, or soil compaction or vegetation damage from heavy equipment or building material staging).
- Building materials and earth materials should not be staged or stored upon permeable pavement areas without proper protections.