



RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN (RAD) REVIEW—STANDARDS AND PROCESS

The Residential Architectural Design (RAD) Review process was adopted by the El Cerrito City Council in 1994. It was intended to strike a balance between allowing home additions and maintaining sunlight and views on adjacent properties. The RAD Review process was also intended to foster dialogue between neighbors. It includes neighbor notification of new or expanded second-story construction.

Along with the review and notification processes, the Council adopted building envelope standards that apply in all single-family residential (RS) zoning districts. The standards effectively require upper stories to be set back farther than first stories.

RAD Review is required for:

- Any new house with two or more stories, and
- Any addition to any existing house that creates, expands, or modifies a second or higher story.

The Building Envelope

The building envelope is a volume within which any new house or additions to an existing house must fit. The envelope is defined by minimum setbacks, maximum heights, and required daylight planes. It is like an imaginary tent that sits within a property, anchored on the setback lines.

Setbacks

A setback is a minimum required distance between a property line and any structure. Minimum setbacks for the single-family residential districts are listed below.

Zoning District	Minimum setback (ft) from property lines			
	<i>Front</i>	<i>Rear</i>	<i>Interior Side</i>	<i>Street Side of Corner Lot</i>
RS – 5	10	15	5	8.5
RS - 7.5	20	15	6	8.5
RS – 10	20	20	6	8.5
RS – 20	30	25	12	12

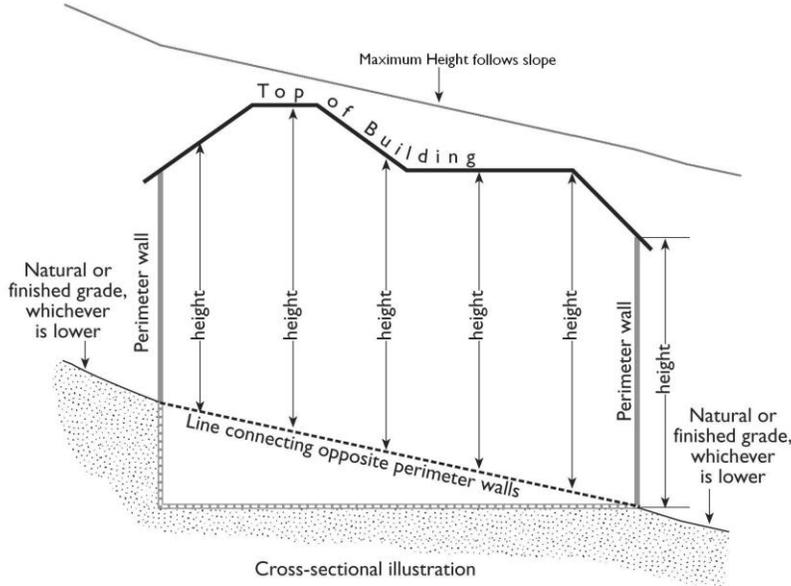
Height Limits

Building height limits in single-family residential districts range from 25 to 35 feet, depending on the slope of the lot. See Figure 19.06-B on page 3 of this document. The building height allowed by right is referred to as "base height," while the height that may be allowed through a special application process (See p. 6) is referred to as "maximum height."

Rules for determining height are found in Section 19.03.050 of the Zoning Ordinance. Generally, height is the vertical distance from the highest point of any structure to the ground level directly below. On sloped lots, height is

measured from any point on top of the building to a line directly below that connects to opposite perimeter walls, or other perimeter support systems, at the lower of natural or finished grade, as illustrated in the following diagram:

FIGURE 19.03-C: MEASURING BUILDING HEIGHTS ON SLOPED LOTS



Daylight Planes

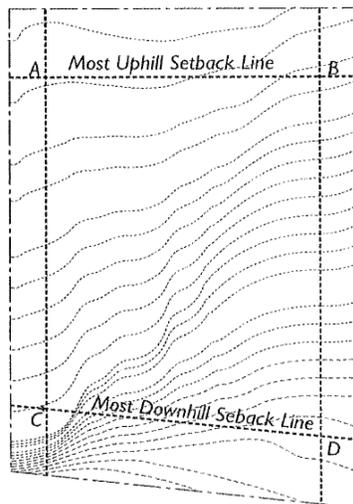
The height and horizontal extent of upper stories are controlled not only by setbacks and height limits but also by required daylight planes, which are imaginary included planes. The required daylight planes for a particular lot begin at each setback line at a specified height above grade, then extend upward and inward toward the center of the lot at a 45-degree angle. See Figure 19.06-B on the following page for specified heights. Daylight planes effectively require upper stories to be set back farther than lower stories. They are intended to preserve sunlight and views on adjacent properties.

Lot Slope

The maximum height and required daylight plane vary according to lot slope, with somewhat greater allowances for steep lots.

Section 19.03.070 of the Zoning Ordinance describes how to determine lot slope for this purpose. The elevation (based on existing grade) of each of four points where the setback lines intersect is measured, and these elevation numbers are used to calculate the average slope of the lot.

For development on a lot with greater than 10% slope, and for which the additional height allowance will be used, a slope calculation will need to be included on the site plan. The elevations of the four points used in the calculation must be based on a survey by a qualified individual such as a surveyor or civil engineer.



$$\frac{\text{Average elevation of uphill setback line} - \text{Average elevation of downhill setback line}}{\text{Average distance between the downhill and uphill setback lines}}$$

$$\frac{\left(\frac{A + B}{2}\right) - \left(\frac{C + D}{2}\right)}{\left(\frac{\text{Length of line AC} + \text{Length of line BD}}{2}\right)}$$

FIGURE 19.06-B: HEIGHT LIMITS AND REQUIRED DAYLIGHT PLANES - RS DISTRICT

Ground Slope	Maximum Height at Setback Line	Base Height	Maximum Height - Requires CUP	Diagram
10 % or less	15 ft	25 ft	30 ft	
Greater than 10% Less than 40 %	20 ft	30 ft	35 ft	
40% or greater	25 ft	35 ft	40 ft	

Allowance for Architectural Projections

The following architectural features are allowed to project beyond the height limits and daylight planes:

- Chimneys up to 20 square feet in horizontal area. Chimneys may project up to 10 feet beyond the maximum height limit.
- Dormers, provided that they are no more than 15 feet in width and do not occupy more than 20 percent of the total roof area.
- Bay windows, not exceeding eight feet in length, up to a maximum of two feet of projection past the main envelope.
- Cornices, eaves, canopies, up to a maximum of two feet projection past the building envelope.
- Other minor projections up to two feet that collectively do not extend more than 50% of the length of one side of the building.
- Skylights, up to one and one half foot above the level of the roof.

The horizontal area of these projections is calculated looking down on the roof from the sky.

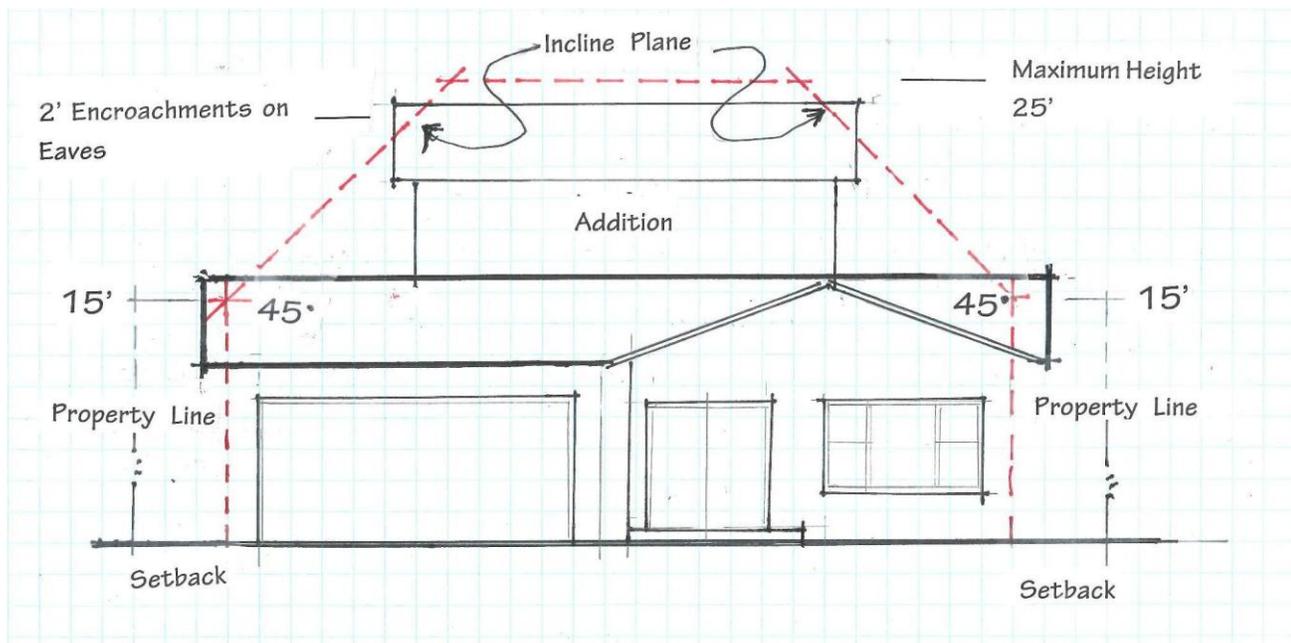
For projections of decks, patios, and stairs into required setbacks, see Section 19.06.030(F) of the Zoning Ordinance.

The RAD Review Process

Application

An application for RAD Review requires plans/drawings, an application form, and a fee. See the RAD submittal checklist and current City fee schedule for details.

The application for a RAD review must show the proposed building as it sits within the allowable building envelope. All four elevations, or sides of the building, must be shown in relation to the building envelope. If the lot is completely flat, or work is only being done on one side of the building, Planning Division staff may allow the applicant to submit only the affected elevations. See also "RAD Submittal Checklist."



Staff Review

Planning Division Staff will review the submitted plans for compliance with the setbacks, height limits, daylight planes, and all other applicable standards of the Zoning Ordinance. If the proposed project meets all standards, no special planning permit or public hearing is required. As part of the RAD Review process, the City does not have the authority to prohibit the proposed construction or require that the applicant change the design.

Courtesy Notice to Neighbors

Once the Planning Division has determined that the project meets all development standards, it will mail a Courtesy Notice to all property owners within 300 feet. For a two-week period, the plans will be made available at City Hall for any member of the public to review before any action/approval is taken on the application. The purpose of the Courtesy Notice is to inform nearby property owners of any two-story construction, provide them an opportunity to review the plans, and encourage a dialogue between the applicant and neighbors regarding any concerns about the construction. However, as long as the proposed project meets the building envelope and all other zoning standards, neighbors cannot block the project or compel design modifications. Two weeks after the date of the Courtesy Notice, the review period ends, and the applicant may submit the plans to the Building Department for a building permit.

Other Procedures for Projects that Exceed the Building Envelope

Certain exceptions to the building envelope standards may be allowed with a Conditional Use Permit or an Administrative Use Permit. Unlike the RAD Review, which is based only on quantitative/objective standards, these are discretionary processes that require the decision-making authority to consider qualitative criteria.

Height Limit and Daylight Plane

If a new house or addition cannot be designed to meet the height limit or daylight plane, the applicant may request an exception by applying for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) from the Planning Commission. This CUP process is for heights that exceed the base height limit stated in Table 19.06-B of the Zoning Ordinance but are under the maximum height limit. (Height increases beyond the maximum height are subject to a Variance.)

The Planning Commission may consider exceptions to the vertical and inclined setbacks and height limits for single-family dwellings. In order to approve a CUP for such a project, the Planning Commission must be able to make the following findings:

- The proposal when viewed in its entirety represents a superior design solution to that which would be possible if the project were built in full compliance with the required standards for the main building envelope, and will not cause a significant adverse impact on residences to the side, rear or directly across the street with respect to solar access, view blockage and privacy.
- For Conditional Use Permits that allow height increases, the proposal causes the least practicable impact on neighbors in terms of views, privacy, and solar access; and provides detailing, articulation, and other design treatments that mitigate any bulk created by the additional height.

Rear Setback

The minimum rear yard dimension may be reduced to ten feet for single-story portions of single family dwellings, subject to an Administrative Use Permit. In order to approve such a project, the Zoning Administrator must be able to make the following findings:

- A usable yard area (determined by multiplying the minimum rear setback requirement with the actual width of the lot) is maintained permanently in the rear half of the lot.
- The minimum rear yard dimension reduction will avoid or reduce an upper-story addition, and there will be no adverse impact on adjacent properties.