

RETAINING WALLS

Building Information Sheet #3

What is a Retaining Wall?

A retaining wall is a wall or structure designed and constructed to support soil at a slope steeper than can naturally be supported.

Whilst retaining walls are primarily designed to support soil, they may also be placed under a stress from other factors such as buildings, footings, vehicle loads, driveways, water, and wind loads on dividing fences.

Most walls are designed to support soil only, and these walls are termed “non-surcharged”. It is very important to ensure the wall you intend to construct is designed to support any surcharge that may be placed upon it.

Many areas within the City have reactive clay soils and will require sub soil drains to be constructed along with the retaining wall.

Who is Responsible for a Retaining Wall?

The natural ground level at the boundary of a lot must be maintained. If a person excavates below the natural ground level or fills above the natural ground level, then that person has an obligation to provide a suitable retaining wall or durable embankment, to ensure the natural ground level and any existing surcharge load at the boundary is maintained.

In some instances adjacent owners sharing a common boundary may need to proportionately contribute to the construction of a retaining wall(s) or durable embankment(s).



When Do I need City Approval?

A Building Permit is required where –

- retaining exceeds 500mm in height or
- is added to an existing retaining wall and/or
- in the case of tiered retaining walls - exceeds 500mm in total height.

Where the height of the wall exceeds 1m the application is to be accompanied by signed Structural Engineer's drawings.

Planning approval is required when –

- a retaining wall exceeds 500mm in height from natural ground level and does not meet the requirement of Part 6 of the Residential Design Codes OR
- a retaining wall exceeds 500mm in height from the natural ground level and is within the front setback area.
- [Building Licence and Planning Approval application forms](#) can be downloaded from the City's website.

Associated Costs

The cost for any retaining works is a civil matter. Each landowner has an obligation to retain soil where necessary resulting from earthworks on their own property at their own cost. Where works are required to a common boundary and each owner has changed the natural contour at the boundary; the owners are encouraged to negotiate a proportional agreement. If both parties cannot reach an agreement as to who is responsible for retaining the difference in ground levels it may be necessary to seek legal advice.

PLEASE NOTE:

- The information contained herein is generic in nature, should you require more detailed information contact Building Services on (08) 9257 9942.
- A fence must not be used to retain soil unless it is designed to do so.
- Retaining walls should ideally be constructed entirely within one property, although they are permitted to straddle the boundary, with both owners agreement, however this can cause issues later on with new owners, no maintenance agreement and/or disputes. An easement may need to be registered on the title.

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