



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ BROCHURES

PLANNING DEPARTMENT • 701 OCEAN STREET, 4TH FLOOR • SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060
ZONING INFORMATION: planning.zoninginfo@santacruzcounty.us • (831) 454-2130

DETERMINING PARCEL BUILDABILITY

Additional handouts are available for Pre-Development Site Reviews (PDSR) and Parcel Legality Determinations.

To determine if a parcel is potentially buildable, it is the responsibility of the property owner or applicant to provide the County with evidence of the following items:

1. **Water** The parcel must have a “Will Serve” letter from a water district or water mutual, or an Individual Water Service Permit issued by the County Environmental Health Department¹ for a well or other water source.
2. **Sewer/Septic** The parcel must have or qualify for a compliant sewage disposal system, either a septic system approved by the County Environmental Health Department¹ or a sewer connection issued by the County Public Works Department² or Salsipuedes Sanitation District³ as applicable. Septic systems are not allowed on slopes greater than 30 percent.
3. **Emergency Vehicle Access** The building site must be accessible to emergency vehicles such as fire trucks. Contact local fire district for access requirements, applicable to both new and existing driveways and roads.
4. **Site Safety** The building site must be free from geologic hazards to the extent that the safety of the structure can be ensured. A geological report and/or soils report (also called “geotechnical”) may be required to assess or address environmental/safety concerns. Environmental Planners are generally available to discuss environmental issues Monday through Thursday, 8:00 am to 11:30 am, in the Planning Department.
5. **Legal Access** A parcel may not be used as a building site unless its principal frontage and access is located on a public or private right-of-way*. The existence of a private right-of-way is typically found on the property deed, title report or recorded map.

A forty (40) foot minimum right-of-way width is required for new/proposed rights-of-way unless the parcel has an approved Residential Development Permit allowing access via a less-than-40-foot wide right-of-way*.

**A public or private right-of-way is a parcel or documented right that provides a location for a roadway, along with roadside improvements such as curbs, gutters, sidewalks, bike lanes, landscaping and parking. A right-of-way is the parcel where the road goes; like property lines, rights of way may be demarcated by a survey. Rights-of-ways are almost always wider in width than physical roadways.*

6. **Parcel Legality** Building permits will only be issued for parcels that were legally created. Do not assume that legal status is conferred because a parcel has an assessor’s parcel number, property taxes have been levied, a title report has been done, or the parcel is described on a deed or survey map. These items do not necessarily indicate legal status. The following is a brief overview of the criteria for determining if a parcel was created legally:
 - The parcel was created by a County-approved minor land division or a subdivision on file with the County Planning Department and Public Works Departments; or
 - An Unconditional Certificate of Compliance or a Conditional Certificate of Compliance (in which the conditions have been met) was issued and recorded, or
 - The parcel was “approved for development” by the issuance of a building, septic, well or similar permit, or
 - If the parcel was created prior to January 21, 1972 (deeds required to demonstrate this), then:
 - a) The parcel must have been created as part of a land division of four or fewer cumulative contiguous lots created at one time by the subdivider, and
 - b) The parcel must have been in compliance with the minimum parcel size, width, and frontage established by the zoning in effect at the time of parcel creation; or
 - The lot was created consistent with the State Map Act and applicable County ordinances at the time of creation. If more than four parcels were created after 1963, then a tentative map must have been approved and a final map must have been recorded.

Resources

Related studies available from the Planning Department to interested parties with written permission from the current property owner:

- **Pre-Development Site Review (PDSR)** is a useful (optional) tool offered by the County Planning Department for property owners, potential buyers, and other interested parties to obtain an understanding of the site standards, constraints, discretionary permit and technical requirements prior to investing in specific building plans and engineering studies.
A PDSR is completed by a planner utilizing in-house resources to obtain parcel information and/or by a resource planner who performs a site visit and evaluates the building site and access road to determine what technical reports (e.g. geotechnical/soils report, geologic hazards assessment, biotic assessment) may be required to develop the parcel. Although a PDSR provides valuable information, **it does not determine parcel buildability and may not always indicate if a geologic report is necessary. A Geologic Hazards Assessment (see below) should be applied for to determine if a geologic report will be required.** Written permission of the current property owner is required to apply for a PDSR. A list of required submittal materials can be obtained on our website or at the Planning Department. If a building permit is applied for within one year of the PDSR, a portion of the fee will be applied to Building Permit fees.
- **Geologic Hazards Assessment (GHA)** is a study addressing physical conditions /safety concerns of the parcel. Like a PDSR, a Geologic Hazards Assessment includes a site visit to evaluate the building site and access road and determine what technical reports (e.g. geotechnical/soils report, geologic report) will be required to develop the parcel. Written permission of the current property owner is required to apply for a GHA.
- **Parcel Legality Study/Certificate of Compliance** is sometimes necessary to determine if a parcel was created legally and if not, what conditions must be met to legalize the parcel. The resulting document, issued by the Planning Department, is called a conditional or unconditional Certificate of Compliance. A deposit is taken at the time of application and the actual cost is based on the number of hours spent processing the study.

Santa Cruz County Planning Department Resources:

Office Location: 701 Ocean Street (corner of Water St), 4th Floor, Santa Cruz, CA 95060.

Walk-in Hours for Planning/Zoning information: 8 to 11:30 am and 1 to 3:30 pm, Monday-Thursday.

Walk-in Hours, Environmental / Geologic information: 8 to 11:30 am, Monday-Thursday.

Please arrive early to complete transactions by closing hours.

The County Planning Dept. is closed to the public every Friday.

Website: <http://www.sccoplanning.com>. A variety of brochures and mapping resources (GIS) are available.

Planning/Zoning Information: planning.zoninginfo@santacruzcounty.us • (831) 454-2130. Please do not call if sending email.

Other County Offices referenced in this handout:

¹ **Santa Cruz County Environmental Health Department** 701 Ocean St, 3rd floor, Room 312, Santa Cruz. Environmental Health Specialists are available 8-9:30 am, M-F, to discuss septic feasibility and wells. (831) 454-2022.

² **Santa Cruz County Public Works Department** 701 Ocean St, 4th Floor, Room 410, Santa Cruz. (831) 454-2160. This department includes Roads, Driveways, Drainage, Sanitation and Survey. Staff are available to discuss County maintained rights-of-way, encroachment permits, stormwater management and sewer connections. Copies of recorded maps, Assessor's parcel maps and other map resources are sold by Survey. Hours: 8 am to 12:00 noon and 1 to 5 pm weekdays, except Survey, open Wednesday, 1:30-4:30 pm.

³ **Salsipuedes Sanitation District** 739 East Lake Ave. Watsonville (831) 722-7760