



## Shire of Denmark

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# PLANNING INFORMATION SHEET: RETAINING WALLS

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## What is a Retaining Wall?

A retaining wall is a wall or structure designed to hold back earth at a slope steeper than can naturally be supported. Retaining walls are commonly used to produce a relatively flat surface for development on a sloping site, where the natural ground level has been altered by cutting (lowering) or filling (raising).

The weight and stress on a retaining wall can be significant, including earth pushing towards the wall as well as any buildings, structures, vehicle parking or within close proximity.



## Who is responsible for a retaining wall?

The land owner who alters the level of the land is responsible to retain soil where necessary by providing a suitable retaining wall or durable embankment. This needs to ensure the natural ground level and any existing surcharge loading at a lot boundary is maintained.

When two adjoining land owners have undertaken earthworks and alter the ground levels they are jointly responsible and may need to share the cost for the construction of a retaining wall.

## Do I need a building permit to build a retaining wall?

All retaining walls more than 500mm in height require a building permit prior to construction. Retaining walls less than 500mm in height may also require a permit where they:

- Works encroach beyond the boundary of the land;
- Reduce the bearing capacity of the adjoining lot;
- May impact on the structural adequacy of a building or structure on the land; or
- Change the natural site drainage in a way that reduces the effectiveness of the drainage of the land or existing or future buildings on the land.

Where works are proposed on a lot boundary or works will affect an adjoining lot permission from all of the adjoining land owners is required before applying for a building permit from the Shire.

You may require certification from an engineer to ensure that a proposed wall will be structurally sound.

## Do I need development (planning) approval to build a retaining wall?

Development approval is not required for the construction of retaining walls that are less than 500mm in height. Development approval is required for:

- All retaining walls over 500mm in height
- All retaining walls built on a lot boundary
- All retaining walls built in a heritage protected place

### Are there standards that apply?

Yes, depending on the zoning of your land.

On land included in the Residential Zone all retaining walls must be setback from a lot boundary as required by the Residential Design Codes (5.3.7 – Site Works C7.2):

Height of site works and/or retaining walls	Required minimum setback
0.5m or less	0m
1m	1m
1.5m	1.5m
2m	2m
2.5m	2.5m
3m	3m

On land in all other zones the general lot boundary setbacks will apply – please ask our Planning Services team for more information.

### Where can I get more advice?

If you would like more advice please speak with your builder and consider whether there is a need to seek the advice of a qualified structural engineer. Staff in the Shire's Planning and Building teams can provide general advice about approval requirements and compliance with relevant codes.

### How can I get approval for my retaining wall?

Visit the Shire's website for details of how to apply for development (planning) approval or a building permit. Before submitting your proposal, please contact our Planning Services team who can help you make sure your application is in order and avoid unnecessary delays.

### Are there alternatives?

One or more of the following options may better suit your needs:

- Battering – amending the natural slope of the site to provide flatter and steeper sections without the use of retaining walls. Earth is retained at a slope that can naturally be supported.
- Natural vegetation – using deep-rooted trees and shrubs can help to hold earth without the need for retaining walls.
- Multiple, small retaining walls – although assessed the same as one wall, terracing using multiple smaller walls may help you to avoid major earthworks, reduce costs, meet setback requirements and minimise visual impacts. As a general guide, walls should be separated by a distance twice their height to avoid accumulation of loading and allow for planting areas.

