

#D-108 RETAINING WALLS

General Description

City staff observed that Title IV does not have standards for retaining walls. This has allowed retaining walls to be constructed with virtually no regulation except Building Code; therefore, while the structural integrity of walls is regulated, the visual effects of retaining walls are unregulated. The Planning Division requested that regulations be created.

The following summarized key revisions to RMC 4-4-040, Fences and Hedges, RMC 4-11-060, Definitions F, and RMC 4-11-180, Definitions R, are proposed:

- Introduce a definition for “fence” to ensure regulations are applied appropriately.
- Introduce a definition of “retaining wall” and “rockery” to ensure regulations are applied appropriately.
- Introduce standards for retaining walls, such as:
 - Maximum height limitations in residential zoning districts
 - Allowed materials
 - Setbacks
 - Terracing design
 - Grading above retaining walls
 - Landscaping
 - Fences upon or adjacent to retaining walls
- Specified that height limitations for fences within residential properties also govern retaining wall height limitations in residential properties
- Clarified language related to height limitations for residential uses by making the language consistent
- Revised height limitations for fences, hedges and retaining walls within residential properties by specifying that the limitations are applied to these obstructions for the entire setback of the subject property line - current height limitations apply *if* the fence or hedge is located *on* the property line; this would allow a property owner to offset the location of a fence from the property line and construct a fence that exceeds six feet in height and only have oversight via the Building Code (fences over six feet in height require a building permit).

Impact Analysis

Effect on rate of growth, development, and conversion of land as envisioned in the Plan

None

Effect on the City’s capacity to provide adequate public facilities

Not applicable

Effect on the rate of population and employment growth

None

Whether Plan objectives are being met as specified or remain valid and desirable

The following Plan objective is being met:

Objective CD-M: Well-designed landscaping provides aesthetic appeal and makes an important contribution to the health, safety, economy, and general welfare of the community. The City of Renton should adopt regulations that further the aesthetic goals of the City.

Effect on general land values or housing costs

Because there are currently no standards for retaining walls, the proposed amendments might increase land value or housing costs for lots that require retaining walls to achieve a desired lot grade due. However, any increase in land value or housing cost would likely be insignificant.

Whether capital improvements or expenditures are being made or completed as expected

Not applicable

Consistency with GMA, the Plan, and Countywide Planning Policies

The proposed revisions are consistent with the GMA and multi-county planning policies of Vision 2040, specifically:

MPP-DP-37: Support urban design, historic preservation, and arts to enhance quality of life, improve the natural and human-made environments, promote health and well-being, contribute to a prosperous economy, and increase the region's resiliency in adapting to changes or adverse events.

MPP-DP-43: Design communities to provide an improved environment for walking and bicycling.

The proposed revisions are consistent with the Countywide Planning Policies, specifically:

DP-40. Promote a high quality of design and site planning in publicly-funded and private development throughout the Urban Growth Area.

The proposed revisions are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, specifically:

Policy CD-20. Orient site and building design primarily toward pedestrians through master planning, building location, and design guidelines.

Policy LU-219. Address the mix and compatibility of uses, residential density, conceptual building, site and landscape design, identification of gateway features, signs, circulation, transit opportunities, and phasing through master plan and site plan review process.

Effect on other considerations

None

Staff Recommendation

Amend Renton Municipal Code as described to minimize adverse impacts of retaining walls within the City.

Implementation Requirements

Adopt an ordinance amending RMC 4-4-040, Fences and Hedges, RMC 4-11-060, Definitions F, and RMC 4-11-180, Definitions R.