

RETAINING WALLS

Information Sheet 4

What is a retaining wall?

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 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.

Areas within the City have reactive clay soils and 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 is City approval required?

Development approval is required when:

- Retaining wall exceeds 500mm in height from natural ground level and does not meet the requirement of Part 5 clause 5.3.7 of the Residential Design Codes or
- Retaining wall exceeds 500mm in height from the natural ground level and is within the front setback area.

Please contact the Planning department on 9257 9999 to discuss if development approval is required before submitting a building application.

A Building Permit is required when:

- Retaining wall is 500mm and over in height
- Is added to an existing retaining wall
- Tiered retaining walls are 500mm and over in total height
- Retaining walls 500mm or more in height require sign off from a structural engineer

[Building](#) and [Development](#) 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

A fence must not be used to retain soil unless it is designed to do so.

Retaining walls are to be constructed entirely within one property. Although they may be permitted to straddle the boundary, with both owners' agreement, this may cause future issues with new owners, no maintenance agreement and/or disputes. An encroachment easement may need to be registered on the title of the affected property/s.

The information contained herein is generic in nature, should you require more detailed information contact Building Services on (08) 9257 9999.