

Retaining Walls

Building Services Information Sheet

September 2024

This information sheet clarifies requirements for retaining walls that are considered designated structures under the Building Code, and provides guidance when guards are required on these structures.

Definitions:

“Adjacent to” means within a distance horizontally that is equal to or less than the *height* of the retaining wall, at any point from the finished grade to top of the wall, not including the guard.

“Height” means the vertical distance between the finished grade at the base of the wall to the top of the wall, not including the guard.

“Public Property” means land owned by the municipality, province, or federal government.

Building Permit Requirements:

A building permit is required for Retaining Walls exceeding 1 000 mm in exposed *height* adjacent to,

- a) Public property,
- b) Access to a building, or
- c) Private property to which the public is admitted,



Building Services Guidelines

“Private property to which public is admitted” includes the front or side yard (including residential properties) where delivery personal (i.e., mail, couriers, parcels, etc.), emergency services, or any other member of the public may approach the principal entrance of the dwelling and/or building.

“Guards are required” when the public has access to the top of the retaining wall. Where access is restricted by other means, guards may not be required.

Design and Construction:

- A professional engineer licensed in Ontario is required to provide design confirming compliance with Part 4 of the Ontario Building Code for retaining wall and guard.
- Where a retaining wall is constructed in *angle of repose* of another structure, additional details are required showing imposed loads.
- For a retaining wall that is part of an elevated walkway, a guard is required where the height is more than 600 mm.
- For all other retaining walls, a guard is required on portions of the wall where the height exceeds 1.0 m.
- Guards are to be constructed in accordance with provisions in 3.3.1.17, 9.8.8. and structural requirements of Part 4 of the Ontario Building Code.

