



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ BROCHURES

PLANNING DEPARTMENT • 701 OCEAN STREET, 4TH FLOOR • SANTA CRUZ,
CA 95060

FIRE REBUILD INFO: FireRebuild@santacruzcounty.us • (831) 454-2130

Recovery and Rebuilding: ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING FAQ

Environmental Planning is a division of the Planning Department that implements County Codes related to environmental resource protection, geologic hazards, grading and erosion control.

This document reflects the best available information as of 9/25/20 and will be revised as we receive further guidance where noted below.

Geotechnical (Soils) and Geologic Reports

1. Do I need a soils report for my home rebuild?

Yes. New residences will require a geotechnical report prepared by a licensed Civil Engineer per California Building Code (CBC). Please note: The geotechnical investigation must reflect post debris removal site conditions.

2. Can I reuse my existing foundation?

A serious wildfire can generate enough heat to damage and weaken the concrete and steel reinforcement bars in footings, slabs, and footing stem walls rendering them unsafe for reuse. Applicants who wish to use the existing foundation system must provide: (a) a “suitability analysis” of the existing foundation performed by a civil or structural engineer; (b) concrete and steel test results to confirm they have retained their material properties, and (c) original building plans used to construct the preexisting building to determine depth and dimensions of the footings. Recognize that the vast majority of foundations are not able to be re-used, when weighing whether to perform this testing.

3. If I already had a soils report prepared for my house prior to the fire do I need another report?

No. An update to your geotechnical report will be accepted if the update a) addresses any changes to site conditions, including disturbed soils created by removal of foundations and debris removal b) is prepared by the same engineer that prepared the original report or a new engineer that submits a transfer of responsibility form, and c) includes recommendations to meet current California Building Code.

4. Do I need a geology report for my home rebuild?

Possibly. The County Geologist is currently assessing areas of potential geologic hazards with respect to fire-damaged or destroyed homes within the burn area.

Damaged or destroyed structures in potential geologic hazard areas will require geologic assessment by a private consulting geologist to determine if the site is safe for rebuilding. If mitigation of geologic hazards is necessary, a full geologic investigation will be required.

5. Do I need a soils report to repair my bridge?

Possibly. The project engineer will provide an assessment of the existing bridge foundations, and whether retrofitting is required to support the intended loading. The engineer should also provide observations on protection and/or susceptibility of foundation from erosion, scour, etc. If foundation retrofit is needed then a geotechnical report is required.

Emergency bridge permits may be granted at the discretion of the Building Official. Emergency work requires special inspections and is considered to be temporary until “as built” plans and engineering documentation are approved.

Riparian Corridors

6. My home is within a Riparian Corridor. Can I rebuild my home on its original footprint?

Yes. Your replacement home may be constructed on the same footprint as the original house, provided the home was legally constructed before the Riparian Corridor regulations went into effect or constructed with a Riparian Exception permit. However, you are encouraged to locate your replacement home further away from the river or stream if feasible. Only a building permit is required as long as the replacement home is not any larger than the original house (within 10%).

7. I need to rebuild my stream crossing to access my home. What permits are required?

Riparian corridors are protected by County, State and Federal agency ordinances. Conditions will be attached to your permit and tti bridge and culvert repairs to protect riparian resources.

Emergency notification to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for work within the riparian corridor may be required. Check with the following agencies for additional permitting requirements: California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Army Corps of Engineers and California Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Biotic Resources and Trees

8. How do I know if my parcel is in a biotic resource area?

You can find out if your parcel is located in a biotic resource area subject to the County Sensitive Habitat Ordinance by checking the County GIS site: <https://gis.santacruzcounty.us/gisweb/> and entering your parcel number in the field in the upper left corner of the screen. Click on the “Tables” tab at the bottom of the screen to see your parcel information. Select the “Biotic and Water Resources” tab, and look in the

“Biotic Resources” field – this will say ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Be sure to scroll down to check the Sandhill Habitat tab – this will either say ‘Sandhill Habitat’ or ‘n/a’.

9. I checked, and I am in a biotic resource area (other than Sandhill Habitat). How will this affect my design?

No biotic approval is required as long as you are reconstructing the destroyed structure in substantially the same location with less than 10% increase in footprint. If the proposal includes relocation or expansion of the structure beyond 10%, the project will be subject to normal Sensitive Habitat regulations according to the Sensitive Habitat Ordinance.

Dangerous trees within biotic resource areas may be removed on an emergency basis, provided the stumps are left in-tact without further ground disturbance.

10. My parcel is located in an area mapped as Sandhills, what should I know about rebuilding my home?

In one rare habitat, known as Sand Hills, disturbance of the sandy soil other than in the footprint of the destroyed house, road and other previously disturbed areas, must be avoided. You may rebuild the home in the same footprint without further mitigation. If the replacement home will be larger than the preexisting home, or located outside of the existing footprint, purchase of mitigation credits from the Zayante Sandhills Conservation Bank will be required. Please note that if you are required to expand your septic leaching system, you will be required to purchase mitigation credits for any expansion area for the new system. The cost of the mitigation credits is \$7.00 per square foot of new ground disturbance. We expect this to apply to a very limited number of parcels.

11. There are burnt trees on my property that are leaning. Can I remove them?

Yes, with notification and some conditions. Burned trees that are on parcels outside the Coastal Zone and are not located within a biotic resource area (see #4, above) are not protected and may be removed.

In the Coastal Zone, trees exceeding 40” in diameter, sprout clumps of 5 or more stems (each 20” or greater in diameter) or 10 trees on a parcel (each greater than 20” in diameter) are considered “significant” and are regulated under the County Significant Tree Removal Ordinance. Significant trees may only be removed on an emergency basis with notification via email with photo sent to EnvironmentalPlanningInfo@santacruzcounty.us.

Archaeology

12. How do I know if my parcel is in an archaeological resource area?

You can find out if your parcel is located in an archaeological resource area by checking the County GIS site: <https://gis.santacruzcounty.us/gisweb/> and entering your parcel number in the field in the upper left corner of the screen. Click on the “Tables” tab at the bottom of the screen to see your parcel information. Select the “Land Use” tab, and look in the “Archaeological Resources” field on the bottom left column– this will say ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

13. My house is located in an Archaeological Resource area, will I need an archaeological report to rebuild?

Possibly. An archaeological report is required if you are expanding or relocating the home outside the original footprint and you also need a discretionary approval (i.e. Coastal Permit, Variance etc.). An archaeological report will not be required if you are rebuilding the structure within the same footprint, or if you only need a ministerial building permit.

Floodplains

14. How do I know if my parcel is in a FEMA designated floodplain?

You can find out if your parcel is in a FEMA designated floodplain by checking the County GIS site: <https://gis.santacruzcounty.us/gisweb/> and entering your parcel number in the field in the upper left corner of the screen. Click on the “Tables” tab at the bottom of the screen to see your parcel information. Select the “Hazards and GeoPhysical” tab, and look in the “Flood Zone” field – this will provide a ‘flood zone number’ or say ‘n/a’.

15. My house was located in the FEMA designated floodplain. Will I be allowed to rebuild?

Yes. Houses in the floodplain may be rebuilt, provided they are relocated to an area of the parcel that is outside of the floodplain if one exists. This determination can be made by a Civil Engineer who will calculate the “base flood elevation” for the watercourse. If a buildable location outside the floodplain does not exist, you may rebuild within the floodplain provided that the lowest floor of the house is elevated one foot above the base flood elevation, adequate venting is provided beneath the residence, and flood resistant construction methods are adhered to in the design.

General

16. Will an Environmental Planning representative physically visit my property during the permit application review process?

Not necessarily. Staff may need to visit your property to clarify plan details, including location of slopes in proximity to the residence and nearby watercourses. However, in many cases staff will be relying on private technical professionals to establish buildability and safety requirements. Clear, complete plans prepared by licensed professionals will facilitate staff review and shorten review times by reducing the need for site visits.