

**SANTA CRUZ COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT POLICY/ORDINANCE
INTERPRETATION**

Interpretation No.: BRIDGE-01 (Bridges and safety railings)

Effective Date: November 25, 2009

Revised:

Questions

1. Can bridges and parking platforms exceeding 18” in height extend to the property line without a Variance Approval?

2. Is a Level 3 Use Approval required for bridge and parking platform safety railings exceeding 3’ in height, when required by the California Building Code?

Applicable Ordinance Section(s)

13.10.323(d)5(A)

13.10.525(c)

INTERPRETATION:

1. A Variance Approval is not required for a bridge that extends to the property line, nor is a Variance Approval required for a parking platform that extends to the property line if on a steeply sloping lot as defined in 13.10.323(d)(5).

2. A separate Level 3 Use Approval is not required for bridge and parking platform safety railings exceeding 3 feet in height, if such railings are required by the Building Code, and the applicant can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Planning Department that the railings do not interfere with the required 250 foot sight distance.

Reason:

Bridges and parking platforms are sometimes required on properties with steep topography and/ or specific environmental features such as creeks and drainages. Bridges are frequently required to provide safe access to the site both for residents and for the Fire Department, and parking platforms are sometimes needed on steeply sloping lots to comply with County parking requirements. Frequently, the environmental features of the site dictate the specific location of the bridge or platform. Therefore, bridges are treated differently from other structures in that they are allowed within required front, side or rear yards without requiring a Variance Approval. Similarly, parking platforms, when constructed on steeply sloping lots meeting the criteria specified in 13.10.323(d)(5), are allowed within required front side or rear yards without requiring a Variance Approval.

Several sections of the County Code treat both bridges and parking structures differently than other structures, recognizing that specific environmental features sometimes dictate their construction and placement, and that regulations that may otherwise apply are therefore not appropriate. Chapter 9.70 includes bridges within the definition of “County-maintained road” rather than as a separate structure, considering bridges as incidental to

county road construction, improvement and maintenance. Similarly, Section 13.10.323(d) 5 allows carports on steeply sloping lots to be constructed to within 5 feet of the front property line without requiring a Variance Approval, and allows carport safety railings to extend to the property line. Allowing bridges and parking platforms to be placed within required setbacks without requiring a Variance Approval is consistent with the intent of these Sections of the County Code.

Although Variance Approvals are not required for bridges within required front, side or rear yards, or for parking platforms in front, side or rear yards on steeply sloping lots, such structures must comply with all applicable County Regulations. These include Public Works requirements specified in Chapter 9.70, including encroachment permits for bridges that abut County-maintained roads, and Fire Department requirements including bridge dimensions, surfacing, and load requirements in Chapter 7.92. Bridges and parking platforms are also subject to all local environmental regulations, including protection of riparian corridors (Chapter 16.30), Erosion control (Chapter 16.22), Geologic Hazard Ordinance (Chapter 16.10), Sensitive Habitat Protection (Chapter 16.32), and the County Native American Cultural Sites Ordinance (Chapter 16.40). Such regulations ensure that bridges continue to be constructed in a safe manner, with appropriate safeguards to protect riparian areas and other sensitive habitats.

Tom Burns, Planning Director

Date