

City of Santa Barbara Building Height Fact Sheet

Charter of the City of Santa Barbara - Section 1506 – Building Heights. Limitations

It is hereby declared the policy of the City that high buildings are inimical to the basic residential and historical character of the City. Building heights are limited to 30 feet in areas zoned for single-family and two-family residences; are limited to 45 feet in areas zoned for residences for three (3) or more families, for hotel, motel and office use; are limited to 60 feet in areas zoned for industrial, manufacturing and other commercial uses; and 30 feet for all other zones. The Council may, by ordinance, set limits of heights less than these maximums. The Council may, by ordinance, set up reasonable methods of measuring the heights set forth in this section. (Approved by election held November 7, 1992)

Santa Barbara Municipal Code

Chapter 28, The Zoning Ordinance, establishes building height regulations for zones and uses within the City of Santa Barbara as shown on the following table. Please refer to the attached color coded map for location of zones throughout the City.

Map Color	Zone	Height	Stories	Notes
	A-1, A-2, E-1, E-2, E-3, and R-1, One-Family Residence Zones	30 feet		Cannot exceed the height limitations imposed for the protection and enhancement of solar access by Chapter 28.11 of the Municipal Code.*(see below) Detached accessory buildings may not exceed two (2) stories or thirty (30') in height. For homes over 17 feet or two stories in height, size regulations may apply dependent on lot size.
	R-2, Two-Family Zone	30 feet		Cannot exceed the height limitations imposed for the protection and enhancement of solar access by Chapter 28.11 of the Municipal Code. Detached accessory buildings may not exceed two (2) stories or thirty (30') in height.
	R-3, Limited Multiple Family; R-4, Hotel-Motel-Multiple Residence Zones	45 feet	3	Cannot exceed the height limitations imposed for the protection and enhancement of solar access by Chapter 28.11 of the Municipal Code. Detached accessory buildings may not exceed two (2) stories or thirty (30') in height.

	HRC-1 and HRC-2, Hotel and Related Commerce; P-D, Planned Development; O-C, Ocean-Oriented Commercial Zones	45 feet	3	Andre Clark Bird Refuge area – 2 stories, 30 feet maximum allowed.
	R-H, Resort-Residential Hotel Zone			Main building shall comply with height limitation of underlying zone. All other buildings shall not exceed two (2) stories.
	PUD, Planned Unit Development Zone		2	In hillside development multi-level buildings may be constructed to follow the natural topography as long as no vertical section contains more than 2 stories.
	S-D-2, Special District Zone	45 feet	3	Three story building shall not exceed the total floor area of a two (2) story 30 foot high building.
	R-O, Restricted Office; C-O, Medical Office; C-P, Restricted Commercial; C-L, Limited Commercial; C-1, Limited Commercial, Zones	45 feet	3	Building height immediately adjacent to residential zones(s) shall not exceed that allowed in the most restrictive adjacent residential zone for that part of the structure constructed within a distance of twenty-three (23) feet or one-half (1/2) the height of the proposed structure, whichever is less.
	C-2, Commercial; C-M, Commercial Manufacturing; M-1, Light Manufacturing; OM-1, Ocean-Oriented Light Manufacturing Zones	60 feet	4	Building height immediately adjacent to residential zones(s) shall not exceed that allowed in the most restrictive adjacent residential zone for that part of the structure constructed within a distance of thirty (30) feet or one-half (1/2) the height of the proposed structure, whichever is less.
	C-X, Research and Development and Administrative Office Zone	20 feet	1	
	H-C, Harbor Commercial Zone	30 feet	2	
	Specific Plan	Varies	Varies	Specific Plans can have their own height limits consistent with the charter. The following are examples of building heights for some specific plans. SP-5 – Westmont College – 30 feet or height limitation imposed for the protection and enhancement of solar access by Chapter 28.11. SP-7 – Riviera Campus – 35 feet with some specific exceptions for certain buildings. SP-8 – Hospital Zone – Land Use Area A – 60 feet; Land Use B and C – 45 feet.
	A-F, A-C, A-I-1, A-I-2, C-R, Airport Zones	45 feet	3	Aircraft hangars may not exceed sixty feet (60') in height, as defined by Section 29.04.150 (Hangar Height). The height limits are modified by the approach, transitional and horizontal surfaces, the dimensions of which are determined by the FAA in the Federal Aviation Regulations Part 77, or their successors. No structure shall be erected, moved, altered or reconstructed, nor shall any plant or tree be allowed to grow in such a manner that the height thereof, including all superstructures and appurtenances, will exceed the height limits imposed in this Section. The Airport Director shall verify compliance with this requirement. These height limits are declared necessary in order to reduce to a minimum the hazard to safe landing and take-off of aircraft using the Airport.

Relevant Municipal Code Sections

Definition of Building Height – 28.04.120

The maximum vertical height of a building or structure at all points measured from natural or finished grade, whichever is lower. Architectural elements that do not add floor area to a building, such as chimneys, vents, antennae, and towers, are not considered a part of the height of a building, but all portions of the roof are included. (Ord. 5416, 2007; Ord. 4641, 1990; Ord. 3710, 1974; Ord. 3540, 1972.)

Definition of Hangar Height – 29.04.150

The intent of a hangar height definition is to allow for the security, storage and maintenance of aircraft. The calculation of the height of a hangar shall be as provided in Section 28.04.120 of the Santa Barbara Municipal Code provided that those portions of a hangar utilized exclusively for the purposes of enclosing portions of an aircraft in accordance with federal regulations shall be considered an architectural element. (Ord. 5025, 1997.)

*Chapter 28.11 Protection and Enhancement of Solar Access

28.11.020 Height Limitation.

The maximum elevation of each point on a structure in a residential zone as measured from the base elevation shall not exceed the sum of (i) eighteen (18) feet in an R-3 or R-4 zone or twelve (12) feet in all other residential zones and (ii) fifty-eight percent (58%) of the shortest distance from that point to the nearest northerly lot line as measured horizontally on the plan view of the structure. Any height limitation imposed by this Section shall be in addition to any other height limitation imposed in the Charter or this Code, such that the more restrictive height limitation shall apply. (Ord. 4426, 1986.)

28.11.030 Exemptions.

The following shall be exempt from the height limitations of Section 28.11.020:

- A. Any portion of a structure in existence, or for which a valid building permit was issued, prior to the effective date of the ordinance first enacting this Chapter.
- B. Any portion of a structure which received Preliminary Approval by the Architectural Board of Review prior to the effective date of the ordinance first enacting this Chapter.
- C. Any flagpole, antenna, ornamental spire, chimney, or other building element less than four (4) feet along each horizontal dimension.
- D. A utility pole and line.
- E. Any portion of a structure for which a shadow plan is prepared and submitted by the applicant demonstrating that shadows cast by that portion of the structure at 9:00 a.m., noon, and 3:00 p.m., Pacific Standard Time on December 21 will:
 1. Not exceed the boundaries of a simultaneous shadow cast by a legally existing structure, or by a hill or other topographical feature other than trees or other vegetation; or
 2. Not shade that portion of any adjacent residentially zoned lot which is occupied by a dwelling or which could legally and without modification of required yards be occupied in the future by a dwelling; or
 3. Fall entirely within the boundaries of an existing covered or uncovered paved off street parking area, or paved driveway leading thereto. (Ord. 4426, 1986.)

Chapter 28.87 General Provisions

28.87.030 Uses Permitted

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 D. NONCONFORMING BUILDINGS. The following provisions shall apply to all nonconforming buildings and structures or parts thereof legally existing at the effective date of this title.

1. Any nonconforming building or structure may be maintained, improved, or altered only as follows:

a. Improvements that do not change the use or the basic, exterior characteristics or appearance of the building or structure are allowed.

Such improvements include but are not limited to the following:

(1) Interior alterations or upgrades to any portion of the nonconforming building or structure, including portions that exceed the current height limitation, such as:

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 (5) The demolition and replacement of the nonconforming building or structure, provided that the following conditions are met:

(a) The basic, exterior characteristics of the replacement building or structure is not changed, except as allowed in this Section;

(b) The new structure complies with all applicable height and building story limitations; and

(c) The demolition and replacement of the nonconforming building or structure does not continue or perpetuate a nonconforming use.

(6) Additions that conform to the current Zoning standards for the zone.

(7) Solar energy systems, as defined in subdivision (a) of Civil Code section 801.5, that are installed roughly parallel to, and protrude no higher than ten inches (10") above (measured from the top of the roof or other structure perpendicularly to the highest point of the solar energy system), a roof or other similar structure that is legally nonconforming as to the required yard, may extend into a required yard to the extent of the legal nonconforming roof or other similar.....

28.87.260 Antenna Height Limitation.

A. Basic Height Limitation. Except as otherwise conditionally permitted herein, no radio, television or other antenna or mast or related screening shall be permitted if at the highest point the height above grade is more than forty-five (45) feet in any one-family or two-family residence zone, fifty-five (55) feet in any multiple-family residence, office, restricted or limited commercial zone or seventy (70) feet in any other commercial, commercial-manufacturing or limited manufacturing zone.

B. Exceptions. Permitted exceptions to height limits:

1. Amateur or Citizen's Band Antennas. Amateur or Citizen's Band transmitting or receiving antennas used in the Amateur Radio Service or the Citizen's Radio Service by licensed amateur or citizen's band radio operators may exceed the basic height limitation provided that:

a. No antenna tower shall extend to a height above grade of more than sixty-five (65) feet in any residential, office, restricted or limited commercial zone or one hundred (100) feet in any other commercial or manufacturing zone.

b. No antenna support which is not a tower or part of a tower shall be installed and thereafter maintained whose height above grade is more than forty-five (45) feet unless such support is a part of an approved structure or a naturally existing object.

2. Cellular Telephone and Emergency Service Antennas. A Cellular Telephone or Emergency Service Antenna and related screening may exceed the basic height limitation provided that it is placed on an existing building and the top of the antenna is no more than fifteen (15) feet above the highest point of the building. (Ord. 4891, 1994; Ord. 4851, 1994; Ord. 4147, 1982.)

Chapter 28.92 Variances, Modifications and Zone Changes

Modifications may be granted by the Planning Commission or Staff Hearing Officer as follows:

A. BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION. The Planning Commission may permit the following:

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4. Solar Access. A modification of height limitations imposed by Section 28.11.020 to protect and enhance solar access where the modification is necessary to prevent an unreasonable restriction. The Rules and Regulations approved pursuant to Section 28.11.040 shall contain criteria for use in making a finding of unreasonable restriction.

5. Building Height. A modification of building height limitations for existing buildings or structures that exceed the current building height limit, to allow the exterior of the portion of the building or structure that exceeds the building height limit to be improved or upgraded, provided that the improvements increase neither the height nor the floor area of any portion of the building or structure that exceeds the building height limit, except as otherwise allowed in the Code.

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B. BY THE STAFF HEARING OFFICER. The Staff Hearing Officer may permit modifications in accordance with subsections 1., 2., 3., 4., and 5. above, if the Staff Hearing Officer finds that:

1. The requested modification is not part of the approval of a tentative subdivision map, conditional use permit, development plan, site plan, plot plan, or any other matter which requires approval of the Planning Commission; and

2. If granted, the modification would not significantly affect persons or property owners other than those entitled to notice. (Ord. 5416, 2007; Ord. 5380, 2005.)