



Neighbors and Boundaries: Setbacks and Easements

Setbacks and easements decide how close you can build to your neighbour and where services may pass. Knowing them early avoids disputes and redesign.

Rules vary by city and by lot. Ask your local building official and your surveyor for the exact figures that apply to you.

01 What a setback is

A setback is the distance a building must keep from the boundary of the lot. It exists for light, air, fire safety and access.

The required distance can differ for the front, the sides and the rear. A setback keeps space around the building. Example: a house built close to the boundary may block a neighbour's light and air. Why this works: knowing the rule early lets the design fit the lot.

02 What an easement is

An easement is a right that others have over part of your land, such as a passage or a utility line. It may limit where you can build.

Check the title and the survey for easements before you design. An easement can limit where you build. Example: a passage right on one side of your lot may keep that strip free of structures. Why this works: you find the limit on paper, not after the foundation.

03 Shared walls and neighbours

A wall on the boundary may need agreement from the neighbour and must follow the code. Ask your architect whether a shared wall is allowed on your lot.

Talk to your neighbours early. It helps avoid misunderstandings. Neighbours are part of the project. Example: talk to the neighbour before planning a wall on the boundary. Why this works: early agreement prevents a stop at the last minute.

04 Confirm on the ground

Check the line: Fences are not always on the true boundary. Have it surveyed.

Ask a licensed surveyor to mark your boundary before you design, since fences are not always on the true line. Mark the building footprint on the lot.

Check your plan against the setbacks before the permit is filed. A survey replaces assumptions with facts. Example: the surveyor may show the true line is half a meter inside the fence. Why this works:

you design on the real boundary.

05 Keep the peace

Tell your neighbours before work begins, and agree on how to handle noise, dust and access. A friendly word helps.

Keep a record of any agreements. Courtesy before construction eases the work. Example: tell neighbours the start date and give them a contact number. Why this works: concerns are raised with you, not at the site.

06 Ask for it in writing

If you reach an agreement with a neighbour, such as about a shared wall or access, put it in writing and keep a copy.

If a disagreement arises, speak calmly and bring the survey and drawings. Many problems are solved by looking at the same facts together.

Some of these rules come from the Civil Code and some from local ordinances, so ask the local office to confirm the ones that apply to you.

07 Ask your team

- 1. What setbacks apply to my lot?**
- 2. Are there any easements on the title?**
- 3. Has the boundary been surveyed?**

Have a project in mind? Book a free 15-minute consultation.

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