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Information Bulletin Coastal Demolition

This information bulletin provides general information concerning San Diego Municipal Code Section 126.0704(a)(5) and the demolition or removal of fifty percent or more of the existing walls of existing structures within the Coastal Overlay Zone. This information bulletin describes requirements for conventional framing. Many existing structures do not consist of conventional framing and the information provided in this bulletin may not be entirely applicable for other construction methods, such as single wall construction or post and pier construction. Also, there are other regulations of the Coastal Overlay Zone that may require a Coastal Development Permit even if fifty percent or more of the existing exterior walls are not demolished or removed. Please review all of San Diego Municipal Code Section 126.0704 to determine if a Coastal Development Permit is required for your project if your project is located within the City of San Diego's coastal jurisdiction. For further information or clarification of Coastal Overlay Zone regulations, visit our web page at www.sandiego.gov/development-services or come see us at the Development and Permit Information counter at the Development Services Center at 1222 First Avenue, third floor. Appointments are recommended, phone (619) 446-5300.

What is an exterior wall?

An exterior wall consists of the structural elements or components of the exterior wall. This includes the top plate, the bottom plate, all studs, and the headers. If a structure consists of more than one story each story consists of separate exterior walls.

What is not considered an exterior wall?

Any siding, stucco, or similar covering that may surround an exterior wall is not considered to be a part of the exterior wall and may be removed and replaced without being included in coastal demolition calculations. Any insulation, plumbing or electrical line that may be within an exterior wall may be removed, replaced, or added without being included in coastal demolition calculations. The roof, including roof joists are not part of the exterior wall and can be removed and replaced without being included in coastal demolition calculations. Any interior wall is not an exterior wall and may be removed and reconfigured without being included in coastal demolition calculations. In order to be considered an exterior wall a wall must be exposed to outside air and enclose gross floor area. Walls that enclose basements, under floor area, or other similar spaces that are not considered gross floor area by San Diego Municipal Code Section 113.0234 are not exterior walls and are not included in coastal demolition calculations regardless of being partially exposed.

When are walls considered demolished or removed?

Generally, whenever any structural element of a wall is modified, moved, altered, enclosed, or removed that portion of the wall can be considered demolished and is required to be included in coastal demolition calculations. If an exterior wall is enclosed by a new wall or an addition is constructed to the outside of an exterior wall, then the

exterior wall is considered demolished as that exterior wall will no longer be exterior to the building. Walls that are to remain that are shifted or moved in any way, even temporarily to accommodate foundation or excavation, are considered demolished for coastal purposes.

DRAFT

How are the walls measured?

Exterior walls are measured in a linear fashion on a floor by floor basis. Walls are not measured using a wall area calculation. Any modification to a portion of an exterior wall can cause the exterior wall of that floor level to be considered demolished. For example, if a vertical stud is removed, then a linear wall length equivalent to the width of the stud is considered demolished even if the top plate and bottom plate are not altered. When coastal demolition is calculated each floor is calculated separately and then added together. When entire portions of a wall are removed the measurement is made to wherever the wall is removed and not to the nearest stud.

Can any minor changes be made to exterior walls that are to remain?

Reinforcement in the form of sistering members (studs and plates) is allowed. The reinforcement must be to the side or behind the members. If the reinforcement is in front of the walls to the outside exterior, then the walls are considered demolished. Penetration through the top plate is permitted and only the width of the actual cut will be included in the coastal demolition calculation. For example, only the width of a new "four by four" stud that extends through and above an existing top plate would be counted for coastal demolition purposes. This can be done to allow for new supports for a new top plate. Cripple walls are permitted to be placed on top of existing top plates. Placing a new bottom plate on an existing top plate together with new studs and a new top plate for the purpose of increasing floor to ceiling height is allowed. A new wall can be constructed inside and abutting the exterior walls. If the new wall is to the exterior of a wall that is to remain, then that wall that is to remain is considered demolished for coastal demolition purposes as that existing wall is no longer an exterior wall. New holes for plumbing or electrical lines can be cut into studs or plates without counting the width of the hole as demolition. Plywood for shear purposes may be placed on the exterior walls. If portions of exterior walls are replaced with a "Simpson Strong Wall" product or other similar solution, then those portions of an exterior wall are considered demolished.

Can major changes be made to a structure while still maintaining fifty percent of the walls?

It is permissible to replace foundations or add basements below walls that are to remain or replace entire roof structures if construction activities are able to accommodate that. Interior walls may be removed without any impact on coastal demolition. Second floor exterior walls or other exterior walls can be hung in place as a house is remodeled as long as a licensed surveyor can verify that the walls have not been shifted during construction.

Can windows be changed?

Many modifications to windows are allowed and are not considered to be coastal demolition. Windows that are changed-out with new windows of the same size does not

DRAFT

result in any demolition as long as the header and king studs are not impacted. A window sill may be removed to create a larger window or removed entirely without being included in demolition calculations as window sills are not normally structural. Windows can be widened and only the portion of the wall where the king stud previously existed to the end of the new window is included in the calculations. Please see the diagrams on page two and three of this bulletin for additional information.

How are fireplaces treated?

Fireplaces are not normally structural and can usually be treated similar to windows. However, there are some buildings that have large fireplaces that serve a structural purpose and are required to be included in demolition calculations. When fireplaces are included all three exterior sides must be included in calculations.

What is required to be included on plans?

A demolition floor plan is required to be submitted for any project within the Coastal Overlay Zone. Submit a clear, fully dimensioned demolition sheet for each floor that shows all walls, windows and door changes, exterior walls enclosed by new construction, areas where top and bottom plates, and studs have been removed, changed and/or modified. Include a wall matrix listing all walls in both linear feet and percentages removed and remaining. Please see the demolition sheet examples and wall matrix example on pages 3 and 4 of this bulletin.

What are the requirements for accessory structures?

Detached accessory structures may be demolished or constructed as allowed by San Diego Municipal Code Section 126.0704(i) and (a)(7). Detached accessory structures are not included in demolition calculations for the primary structure. Attached accessory structures are only required to be included in demolition calculations if they contain enclosed space. For example, an attached patio cover is not included in calculations.

What is a pre-demolition inspection?

If your project proposes to demolish over 40 percent of the existing exterior walls, then the City planner reviewing your project may require a pre-demolition inspection. This inspection will occur on the job site. City staff that will attend the inspection will include the planner, the senior combination inspector for the area, and the area combination inspector. The applicant's team at the inspection should include the architect, contractor and property owner. During this inspection the plans will be reviewed for consistency with on-site conditions, the walls will be measured, and the requirements as they relate to coastal demolition will be discussed.

What if during construction termite damage or dry rot is discovered?

If termite damage or dry rot is discovered in walls that are to remain, then those walls are still required to remain regardless. It is acceptable to chemically treat the walls in place and sister members for reinforcement. You do have the option to process a coastal permit to allow for total demolition or if the project has been designed with other walls that are to remain a plan change can be processed.

What if over 50 percent of the walls are accidently removed?

A coastal development permit is required regardless. Please make sure that all workers on the job site are aware of the requirement to maintain the walls and take steps to secure the site.

Can I do a phased remodel?

Once a 50 percent exemption project has been finalized by the City combination inspector, the completed project becomes the "existing" walls, and another project proposing up to 50 percent demolition of those walls may be approved.

DRAFT