



## THE BASICS OF BUILDING IN WOODSIDE

Thinking about undertaking a building project in the Town of Woodside? There are some basics that may help demystify the process for you as you move forward. A familiarity of the rules, gained through some advance homework, will better prepare you and your paid professionals as you consider your building objectives. There are many useful handouts available at Town Hall or on the Town's website ([www.woodsidetown.org](http://www.woodsidetown.org)), as is the Woodside Municipal Code. Town staff is available for **pre-application meetings** during which you may consult with staff about your plans and objectives and seek information and/or advice about how to "perfect" your project and your application submission. The Town is working to make the building process more user friendly and customer-oriented by developing application submission checklists, standardizing review comments, improving communications, and shortening review turnaround time by bolstering staff resources. We are working to improve all of our handouts and to develop new handouts to enhance your understanding of what is involved with building in Woodside. This "primer" on the basics of building in Woodside is intended to provide an overview of what may be required of you as you begin the process.



### What Are the Rules and Why Do They Exist?

Building in the Town of Woodside is governed by a body of laws and regulations, as is the case in most, if not all, California cities. The Town has adopted the various Uniform Codes, including the Building, Electrical, Plumbing, and Mechanical Codes, among others. Chapter 150 of the Woodside Municipal Code includes the Town's specific regulations relating to the adoption of these Uniform Codes. Section 150.21 requires building permits to be obtained from the Town before activity is undertaken that will "erect, construct, enlarge, alter, repair, move, improve, remove, convert, or demolish any building or structure." As you begin to think about your specific building project, keep in mind that you may need more than just a building permit, however.

In addition to the various Uniform Codes, there are other regulations included in the Woodside Municipal Code that dictate aspects of the building process. These regulations were developed over the past several decades to guide the development of lands within the Town pursuant to the goals and policies included in the Woodside General Plan. The goals lay out the expectation that development of the lands within the Town is to be done in such a way that the natural environment of the Town is conserved, disturbance of natural terrain is minimized, and persons and properties are protected from unreasonable exposure to hazards, including fire, flood, unstable ground, erosion, and earthquakes. The policies lay out the general guidelines for development of land within the Town's planning area, including a guideline that "the magnitude and intensity of land use" should be "limited by natural and other planning constraints." The natural constraints most often found in the Town include steep slopes, geologic hazards, flooding, and proximity to stream corridors. Another constraint is the rural nature of the Town itself. This impacts how lands may be developed relative to the provision of certain basic infrastructure. For example, about 75% to 80% of all properties in Woodside are not served by a public sewer system and must provide adequate on-site private wastewater disposal systems. Similarly, there is not a formal storm drainage system in Woodside, making the management of drainage and water runoff caused by development a serious fundamental concern.

The regulations that were promulgated in keeping with the goals and policies of the Woodside General Plan are found in the Municipal Code and include:

**☑ Zoning (Chapter 153):** The zoning regulations cover many aspects of building in Woodside. Key among these are the designated **Zoning Districts** and the standards that regulate the uses of lands, density of population, size and location of structures, and area and dimensions of building sites, among other things. These standards vary for each of the Town's zoning districts. Prior to starting a building project, it is critical that the property owner/applicant

understand the specific restrictions that apply, based upon the zoning district of the involved property. A handout is available at Town Hall or on the Town's website that outlines the standards for each district.

The Zoning Code also includes specific regulations that may or may not apply to a particular property. If they apply, their requirements must be incorporated into the building plans at the outset of the project in order to avoid delays in the permit approval process. Included in the Zoning Code are the **Hillside Development Regulations** (starting at Section 153.135), regulations governing **Geologically Hazardous Areas** (starting at Section 153.150), **Stream Corridor Protection** regulations (starting at Section 153.205), and **Architectural and Site Review** regulations (starting at Section 153.220).



The Hillside Development Regulations...

apply to all undeveloped hillside lots where the average ground slope of the lot exceeds 12½% and those developed lots which exceed an acre in size with an average ground slope of more than 12½%. For such lots, the regulations restrict the activities that can take place upon "that portion of a lot or parcel which has a ground slope in excess of 35%." Such areas are not to be altered by grading, removing or altering natural features such as streams, rock outcrops, ridgelines, or drainage swales, removing natural vegetation, or by undertaking any activity related to the preparation of a site for development purposes. For those portions of a hillside lot with a ground slope less than 35%, the regulations provide a requirement that a minimum percent of this area is to remain in its natural state. The minimum percent increases on a sliding scale, depending upon the average ground slope of the entire lot.

The regulations governing **Geologically Hazardous Areas** require the evaluation and review of proposed building construction, site development, and land and subdivisions in specified geologically hazardous areas. These areas are defined in the Zoning Code as: (1) land located within the special studies zone established by the Alquist-Priolo Geologic Hazards Act (a State of California law); (2) land within 125 feet of inferred or known fault traces identified on the official Town fault map; (3) a portion of certain problem areas identified on the General Plan Diagram; (4) land identified as

having a moderate to high susceptibility to landslides (per the Basic Data Contribution No. 43, United States Geologic Survey); or (5) land identified as landslide on the official Town Geology and Geologic Hazards Map. The regulations incorporate State setback requirements for the special studies zone.

The **Stream Corridor Protection** regulations establish limitations on what activities can be done within a stream corridor. Certain uses can be permitted if a use permit is issued by the Planning Commission. In general, however, the Town's rules protect the stream corridors by prohibiting within the corridors: (1) removal of riparian vegetation; (2) filling or dumping of slash, debris, fertilizers, pesticides, liquid or solid waste, and agricultural waste, including manure; (3) channelization or damming of streams or creeks; and (4) the construction of any structure, including fences. The Stream Corridor is defined as a horizontal distance of 50 feet, measured from each side of the center line of the stream or a horizontal distance of 25 feet, measured from the top of the stream bank, whichever is greater.

The **Architectural and Site Review** regulations spell out which proposed building projects must be publicly reviewed and approved by the Architectural and Site Review Board (ASRB). Generally, a project will be subject to ASRB review if the building location is: (1) within the Skyline or Interstate 280 State Scenic Corridors; (2) within 1,000 feet, measured from the edge of the right-of-way, of Kings Mountain Road, Mountain Home Road, Woodside Road, Whiskey Hill Road, La Honda Road, Portola Road, Cañada Road, or Sand Hill Road, provided the building is visible from the driving surface; (3) within the "Western Hills" comprised of all lands west of Kings Mountain Road, Woodside Road, and Portola Road; and/or (4) located on a ridge line visible from the roads and highways set forth in the preceding three points. The regulations include the specific application materials to be submitted for ASRB review and the factors that are to be considered by the ASRB in reviewing project applications. The Town has adopted a set of **Residential Design Guidelines** and, although they are not a part of the Municipal Code, they are a valuable tool for use in designing your building project.

There are other sections of the **Zoning Code** that may be applicable to your project. These sections regulate signs, parking, and fences, among other things. A review of the Municipal Code or a consultation with staff will assist you in

determining the extent to which you may need to take these regulations into account.

☑ **Site Development (Chapter 151):** The rules for site development were enacted to “protect public and private lands from erosion, earth movement, flooding, and degradation of water quality and ensure the maximum preservation of the natural and scenic character of the Town” and to “ensure that the site development work on each site harmoniously relates to adjacent lands and minimizes physical problems which could result in safety hazards and increased maintenance costs.” Site development means “any alteration of terrain or removal of vegetation for the purpose of preparing land for any land use.” The circumstances under which a site development permit is required are included in Municipal Code Section 151.20. A handout that specifically addresses the Town’s Site Development regulations is available at Town Hall and on the Town’s website.



☑ **Other Pertinent Town Regulations:** There are several chapters of the Town’s Municipal Code that are relevant to a discussion of the basics of building in Woodside. Chapter 51 includes the Town’s rules and regulations governing **public sewers and on-site private wastewater disposal systems**. Chapter 54 lays out the Town’s **water supply standards**. Chapter 55 includes rules for managing properties within the **floodplain**. Chapter 95 governs **encroachments into the public right-of-way**. A review of these sections and a consultation with staff, as needed, will provide a better understanding of the Town’s development standards at the early stages of a building project.

You may need only a building permit to undertake your building project. You may, however, need to go to the ASRB, or apply for a Site Development Permit, depending upon the specific circumstances of your property and your project. You may need to develop your project in a certain manner to be consistent with the Town’s zoning regulations. Understanding the foregoing rules and seeking consultation with Town staff will help you in preparing a complete application submittal.

## The Building/Development Process

Once you have determined the scope of your project and have assessed what permits and approvals you will need, you are ready to develop an application submittal package. The contents of the package will vary, depending upon what specific permits and approvals you need to secure. Handouts are available for all the major applications discussed in the previous section and application submission checklists are being developed to facilitate putting the package together.

Once your application package is accepted at the counter, the plans and any related studies or reports will be routed to Town staff members who are responsible for reviewing and checking your plans according to their areas of expertise. Plan sets are routed to a planner, a deputy building official, an engineer, the Town Geologist, the Woodside Fire Protection District, and the San Mateo County Health Department (which acts as the Town’s Health Officer concerning wastewater disposal and water standards). Each reviewer checks to ascertain whether your plans adhere to the regulations for which he or she is responsible for ensuring compliance. For example, the deputy building official, or an outside consultant designated to do so, checks for compliance with various Uniform Codes. The planner looks at zoning compliance. The engineer looks at all Site Development issues, as well as issues related to sewers, private on-site wastewater disposal systems, encroachments, and the floodplain. Plan check comments are prepared by each reviewer and all comments are forwarded to the person designated as the applicant for your project, with a copy to the property owner (sometimes the property owner is also the applicant, but often the applicant is a paid professional, such as a contractor or architect). Responses to the comments are prepared and revised plans developed, as needed, and these are submitted for a second review. Once the plans are found to demonstrate compliance with the applicable codes, the permit(s) can be issued.

The Town is working to truncate its review process and is developing a standardized format for review comments that will make it easier to track the progress of a project through the plan check process. The Town is also developing checklists for development application submissions. The more complete the initial submission and the more responsive it is to meeting the Town’s regulations, the less likely it will be the subject of extensive plan check/review comments and subsequent

resubmissions and checks. Staff is available to meet with you if there are questions concerning any comments generated during the review process. It is advisable that you call to schedule a meeting in advance so that the member(s) of the staff most knowledgeable about your project can be in attendance.

### Conclusion

Undertaking a building project represents a major commitment of time, money, and other resources on your part. Understanding what is involved in the process will help you in the early stages of the genesis of your project. There is much information available to guide you in your design and planning stages. Availing yourself of a pre-application meeting and consultation with the Town's staff should be a step that you seriously think about taking early in the process. The staff can't change the regulations, but we can try and make the process as painless as is possible. Arming you and your building professionals with the right information is a critical first step. Please contact Town Hall for additional information or to be directed to the

most appropriate member of the staff to assist you with this major undertaking.



Woodside Town Hall  
2955 Woodside Road  
P.O. Box 620005  
Woodside, CA 94062  
(650) 851-6790  
[www.woodsidetown.org](http://www.woodsidetown.org)