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Residential Garages and Storage Buildings

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Revised February 2016

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Keyword: Assistance Bulletins

Q: Are there special zoning code requirements for detached garages and storage buildings?

A: The Snohomish County urban, rural and resource zone classifications allow private residential garages and storage buildings to be constructed on legal lots. There are some restrictions and this bulletin will illustrate some of the most common regulations. Generally there are four common situations:

1. A garage incidental to an existing single family dwelling (Garage-detached private accessory).
2. A storage building incidental to an existing single family dwelling (Storage structure-accessory).
3. A garage on a vacant lot (Garage-detached non-accessory).
4. A storage building on a vacant lot (Storage structure-non-accessory).

Q: How are the four types of structures defined?

A: The following are definitions of the four types of structures as defined by the Snohomish County Unified Development Code, Title 30.

30.91G.010 “Garage, detached private accessory” (“Detached private accessory garage”) means a building designed or used primarily for shelter or storage of vehicles or boats, but not airplanes, located on the same building site as a single family or duplex residence. This definition shall also include carports used primarily for the storage of vehicles or boats, but not airplanes. Where any vehicles or boats are equipped for operation, repaired or kept for remuneration, hire or sale, the term “private garage” does not apply. The term garage shall not include agricultural buildings.

30.91G.015 “garage, detached private non-accessory” (“Detached private non-accessory garage”) means a stand-alone building designed or used primarily for the shelter or storage of vehicles or boats, but not airplanes, that is not accessory to a single-family or duplex residence on the same building site. Where any vehicles or boats are equipped for operation, repaired or kept for remuneration, hire or sale, the term “private garage” does not apply. This term shall not include agricultural buildings. **30.91S.590 “Storage structure, accessory”** (“Accessory storage structure”) means a structure accessory to a single-family or duplex residence located on the same building site, used for storage of belongings, not designed for human habitation, and not used for remunerative purposes. This term shall not include agricultural buildings.

This bulletin is intended only as an information guide. The information may not be complete and is subject to change. For complete legal information, refer to Snohomish County Code.

30.91S.595 “Storage structure, non-accessory” (“Non-accessory storage structure”) means a structure used for storage of belongings, not accessory to a single-family or duplex residence located on the same building site, not designed for human habitation, and not used for remunerative purposes. This term shall not include agricultural buildings.

Q: What types of permits are required?

A: In general, a building permit will be required along with approval of a stormwater pollution prevention plan (SWPPP). Additional permits and review may be required for land disturbing activity, retaining walls, forest practices, flood hazard areas, shorelines, critical areas and drainage. Structures over 2,400 square feet may also require a conditional use permit.

Q: Under what conditions is a conditional use permit required?

A: Generally, all storage buildings and garages that do not exceed 2,400 square feet in footprint area are permitted in all zone classifications with the typical zoning code setback requirements. However, on lots less than 5 acres, detached accessory and non-accessory garages and storage buildings shall not exceed 6,000 square feet cumulative square feet. On vacant lots, all garages-detached non-accessory and storage structures non-accessory 2,401 square feet or greater will require a conditional use permit. See Bulletin #39 for information on the conditional use permit process. Additional performance standards, which are listed as Footnote #59 in the zoning use matrix, are also required. Footnote #59 is described later in this bulletin.

On lots less than 3 acres with a residence, garages-detached private accessory and storage structures-accessory between 2,401 and 4,000 square feet in footprint size will require an administrative conditional use permit with special performance standards as described in Footnote #59. See Bulletin #38 for the Administrative Conditional Use permit process.

On lots more than 3 acres in size, occupied by a residence, Garages-Detached Private Accessory and Storage Structures-accessory are permitted outright with special performance standards listed by Footnote #59.

On lots occupied by a dwelling, all garages-detached private accessory and storage structures-accessory 4,001 square feet in footprint size or greater will require a conditional use permit.

All garages and storage buildings between 2,401 and 4,000 square feet in size must maintain a setback of 15 feet from all side and rear property lines. Garages and storage structures exceeding 4,001 square feet must maintain a structure setback of 20 feet from all side and rear property lines. However, please be advised that there are some exceptions to these requirements should the lot abut recorded open space tracts or lots adjacent to shoreline or resource zone requirements.

Q: What requirements are included in Footnote #59?

A: Detached accessory or non-accessory private garages and storage structures are subject to the following requirements:

- a) Special setback requirements for these uses are contained in SCC 30.23.110(20);
- b) Artificial lighting shall be hooded or shaded so that direct outside lighting, if any, will not result in glare when viewed from the surrounding property or rights-of-way;
- c) The following compatibility standards shall apply:
 - i) proposals for development in existing neighborhoods with a well-defined character should be compatible with or complement the highest quality features, architectural character and sitting pattern of neighboring buildings. Where there is no discernible pattern, the buildings shall complement the neighborhood. Development of detached private garages and storage structures shall not interrupt the

streetscape or dwarf the scale of existing buildings of existing neighborhoods. Applicants may refer to the Residential Development Handbook for Snohomish County Communities to review techniques recommended to achieve neighborhood compatibility;

- ii) building plans for all proposals larger than 2,400 square feet in the Waterfront Beach, R 7,200, R 8,400, R 9,600 and R 12,500 zones and rural cluster subdivisions shall document the use of building materials compatible and consistent with existing on-site residential development exterior finishes;
 - iii) in the Waterfront Beach, R 7,200, R 8,400, R 9,600 and R 12,500 zones and rural cluster subdivisions, no portion of a detached accessory private garage or storage structure shall extend beyond the building front of the existing single family dwelling, unless screening, landscaping, or other measures are provided to ensure compatibility with adjacent properties; and
 - iv) in the Waterfront Beach, R 7,200, R 8,400, R 9,600 and R 12,500 zones and rural cluster subdivisions, no portion of a detached non-accessory private garage or storage structure shall extend beyond the building front of existing single family dwellings on adjacent lots where the adjacent dwellings are located within 10 feet of the subject property line. When a detached non-accessory private garage or storage structure is proposed, the location of existing dwellings on adjacent properties located within 10 feet of the subject site property lines shall be shown on the site plan;
- d) All detached accessory or non-accessory private garages and storage structures proposed with building footprints larger than 2,400 square feet shall provide screening or landscaping from adjacent properties as follows;
- i) the permit application site plan shall depict existing and proposed screening, landscaping or other measures that ensure visual compatibility with adjacent properties;
 - ii) the site plan shall show the amount, type and spacing of proposed planting materials. Plant materials, species and design shall be approved by the department. Landscaping modifications, installation and maintenance requirements are regulated by SCC 30.25.040, SCC 30.25.043 and SCC 30.25.045. The minimum planting standards set forth at SCC 30.25.015(5) and (6) shall apply;
 - iii) at the director's discretion, existing natural vegetation or other adequate visual screening located on the subject site may be approved in lieu of the requirements of SCC 30.22.130(59)(d)(ii) if it is determined that the existing screening or landscaping meets the intent of SCC 30.22.130(59)(d). Photographs shall be submitted with the permit application and the existing features shall be shown to scale on the site plan;
 - iv) approval of other screening measures that ensure visual compatibility shall be determined on a case by case basis at the discretion of the director; and
 - v) after a site visit, the director may determine that screening or landscaping is not warranted due to existing circumstances on the site or adjacent properties and may waive the screening or landscaping requirements of SCC 30.22.130(d);
- e) On lots less than ten acres in size having no established residential use, only one non-accessory private garage and one storage structure shall be allowed. On lots 10 acres or larger without a residence where the cumulative square footage of all existing and proposed non-accessory private garages and storage structures is 6,000 square feet or larger, a conditional use permit shall be required.

Q: What are the drainage requirements?

A: Construction of garages and storage structures will likely require a stormwater pollution prevention plan (SWPPP) and may also require a stormwater site plan. To manage stormwater, use of low impact development (LID) best management practices (BMPs) is required whenever feasible. County drainage requirements are contained in chapter 30.63A.SCC. Requirements vary depending on project size and the amount of site disturbance. Assistance Bulletins [#22](#) and [#89](#) may be helpful in determining applicable drainage requirements.