



# INFORMATION BULLETIN / PUBLIC - ZONING CODE

REFERENCE NO.: LAMC Sec. 12.03

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## DETERMINATION OF THE ZONING “HEIGHT OF A BUILDING OR STRUCTURE”

(Not applicable for projects in R1, RS, RE, and RA zones subject to the Baseline Hillside Ordinance.  
See Section 12.21C.10 L.A.M.C. for height requirements)

The City of Los Angeles has many layers of regulation related to the permissible height of buildings and structures. The regulations may depend on the location of a project, the type of project, slope of the lot or proximity to residential zones. This bulletin provides the general approach that should be used in determining the permissible height of a building or structure as well as how to correctly establish what the height of a building or structure is. A complete set of all regulations on this subject is not feasible in one document. A careful review of the regulations must be done once the site and the type of project is known.

Height of Building or Structure defined here is not applicable to projects in R1, RS, RE, and RA zones subject to the Baseline Hillside Ordinance. For projects subject to the Baseline Hillside Ordinance, see LAMC Section 12.21C.10 of this Code for height requirements.

### I. General Approach to Establishing the Height of a Building or Structure

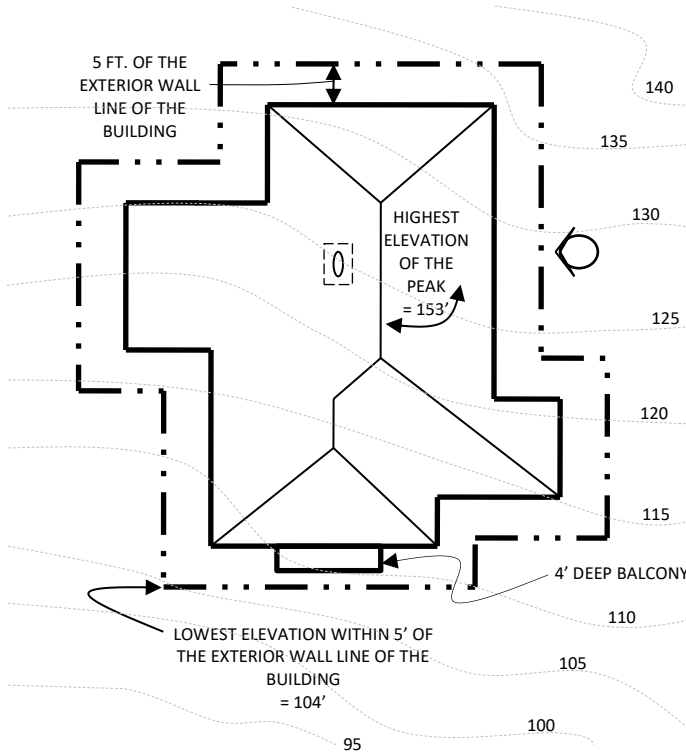
- a. Obtain a topographic map (not a cross-section or building elevation), signed by a licensed Civil Engineer or Licensed Surveyor, with the building or the structure outlined. The use of a topographic map will result in the most accurate determination of the height. An example of a correct and an incorrect method of establishing height is shown on page three.
- b. Determine the “Grade” which is defined as follows:  
**Grade (Adjacent Ground Level)** -- is the lowest point of elevation of the finished surface of the ground, paving or sidewalk within the area between the building and the property line, or when the property line is more than 5 feet from the building, between the building and a line 5 feet from the building. This definition does not apply to any building or structure located within the boundaries of the Century City North or Century City South Specific Plans and which is subject to LAMC Section 12.21.2.  
  
This definition does not apply to projects subject to the Hillside Regulations (LAMC Section 12.21A.17). See Section II.a. below for the definition of grade.
- c. Locate the highest point of elevation of the building or structure (including all roof structures such as chimneys, stairway towers, etc.). See item (e) of Section 2 (Special Provisions) below regarding allowable projections for roof structures such as fireplaces, antennas, etc. Allowable projections need not be included in the height calculation.
- d. The vertical distance between the “Grade” and the “highest point of elevation,” as described in steps b and c above is the “height of the building or structure.” Note that the Zoning Code definition differs from the Building Code definition and each must be applied independently for the corresponding code section under consideration.

## II. Special Provisions / Exceptions

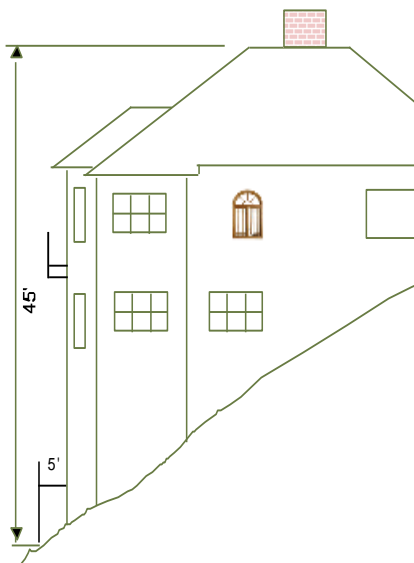
Following are some exceptions and special provisions that apply to commonly occurring situations. Since this is not a comprehensive list, consult with a plan check engineer at any of our public information counters for job specific applications.

- a. For projects subject to LAMC Section 12.21A.17, “Grade” is defined as the lower of the natural or finished grade. When a project is located in any special area (e.g., Specific Plan, Pedestrian Overlay District, Community Design Overlay District, etc.), the “Grade” definition, the height limitation, exceptions, etc. (if different from the general Code) must be applied appropriately as required by the applicable ordinance. It is always advisable to review the Specific Plans. Some Specific Plans establish height limits in reference to sea level, curb level, street level, or other points of reference.
- b. If grading is (was) done in conjunction with a Subdivision of five acres or more, then the resulting grade would be considered the “Natural Grade.”
- c. Retaining walls cannot be used to raise the “Grade” and increase the allowable height of the structure. See Information Bulletin P/ZC 2023-004 for additional requirements for attached decks.
- d. If the difference between the highest and the lowest grade elevation around the perimeter of the building exceeds 20 vertical feet, then the allowable height may be increased by 12 feet (provided the original height limit is not exceeded at any given “section” or “plumb line” of any part of the building). This exception is not allowed for buildings that are subject to LAMC Section 12.21A.17 of this Code.
- e. Certain roof top features & structures (e.g., antennas, chimneys, stairway towers, elevator tower, etc.) are allowed to exceed the height limit per LAMC Section 12.21.1B.3.  
LAMC Sec. 12.21A.17(c)3 provides applicable exceptions for projects subject to the requirements of LAMC Section 12.21A.17.
- f. Depressed driveways, stairwells, and light wells below grade can be exempt from building height determination. Two light wells are allowed to be maximum 3' clear from the exterior wall of the building and no more than 6' wide. This interpretation does not apply to any buildings or structures located within the boundaries of Specific Plans which specifically address height measurement, or buildings regulated by LAMC Section 12.21A.17 of this Code. Refer to the Zoning Manual for additional restrictions.
- g. Architectural projections which cantilever 5 feet or less from an exterior wall of a building are not included as part of the exterior wall line of the building when calculating height.
- h. Open rooftop guardrails on apartment buildings are not included in the height of a building when such guardrails are provided around the open space required by code. Refer to the Zoning Manual for additional restrictions.

**HEIGHT DETERMINATION EXAMPLE  
 (Except for projects subject to the Baseline  
 Hillside Ordinance)**



**TOPOGRAPHIC MAP**



**Method #1 (correct method using a  
 topographic map)**

- a. Use the topographic map provided.
- b. Determine Grade. From the topographic map prepared by a licensed CE or LS, the lowest elevation within 5' of the exterior wall line of the building is 104'. The balcony is an architectural projection that need not be considered since it projects less than 5' from the exterior wall.
- c. The highest elevation of the building is 155' measured to the top of the chimney. However, a chimney is allowed to project up to 5'. Therefore, the highest point of the building to be used is 153'.
- d. The height is calculated by subtracting 104' (the lowest grade within 5' of the exterior wall line of the building) from 153' (the highest elevation of the peak of the roof ridge). The height is therefore 49 feet.

**Method #2 (INCORRECT method using a  
 section or elevation)**

Looking only at a section or an elevation, for the same building, often results in an INCORRECT building height of 45 ft. Typically, these architectural elevations only show an approximation of the true grade contour and should not be relied upon for an accurate determination of height.

## Height Limitations

- a. Determine the allowable height limit according to the Height District or applicable regulation (e.g., Specific Plan, Section 12.21A.17 of this Code, etc.). Chart No. 1 represents the general code limitations based only on the Height District and zone designation. This chart can be used to determine the height limit when the site is not subject to any Specific Plan or any other Ordinance specific to the site.

Some projects are affected by more than one layer of regulations pertaining to allowable height. In addition, there are specific regulations depending on the type of development (e.g., Mini-Shopping Center Development), location (e.g., Section 12.21A.17 of this Code, Specific Plan, etc.), and/or other site-specific limitations (“Q” or “D” conditions, transitional height, etc.). Due to all these variables, it is suggested that once you have selected a site for development, you seek the assistance of a plan check engineer at any of the Department’s public information counters.

Specific Plans are land use ordinances applicable in designated parts of the City. They frequently consist of regulations that prescribe permissible uses, parking requirements, setbacks, allowable height and many other requirements that are different from the general regulations of the Planning and Zoning Code. Construction projects in these areas frequently require a discretionary approval by the Director of Planning after scrutiny by a Design Review Board. These ordinances, when applicable, need to be reviewed in detail prior to designing a project.

- b. If a project is subject to more than one layer of regulations, the most restrictive will be the governing height limit.

<b>CHART No. 1 HEIGHT DISTRICTS LIMITATIONS</b>							
<b>ZONE</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1L</b>	<b>1VL</b>	<b>1XL</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
A1, A2, RZ, RMP, RW2	45' (a)	45' (a)	45' (a)	30' (a)	No Limit (in feet)	No Limit (in feet)	No Limit (in feet)
RD & R3	45' (a)	45' (a)	45' (a)	30' (a)	75'	75'	75'
RE11, RE15, RE20, RE40, RA	36' 30' (c) 45' (d)	36' 30' (c) 45' (d)	36' 30' (c) 45' (d)	30'	N/A	N/A	N/A
R1 <sup>(f)(g)</sup> , RS, RE9	33' 28' (c) 45' (d)	33' 28' (c) 45' (d)	33' 28' (c) 45' (d)	30' 28' (c)	N/A	N/A	N/A
R2 <sup>(e)</sup>	33' 45' (d)	33' 45' (d)	33' 45' (d)	30'	N/A	N/A	N/A
RU, RW1	30'	30'	30'	30'	N/A	N/A	N/A
PB	No Limit (in feet)	75'	45'	30'	No Limit (in feet)	No Limit (in feet)	No Limit (in feet)
R4, R5	No Limit (in feet)	75'	45'	30'	No Limit (in feet)	No Limit (in feet)	No Limit (in feet)
C <sup>(b)</sup> , M <sup>(b)</sup>	No Limit (in feet)	75'	45'	30'	No Limit (in feet)	No Limit (in feet)	No Limit (in feet)
CR <sup>(b)</sup>	75'	75'	45'	30'	75'	75'	75'

Note: Height limits shown above are measured in feet. See code for other limitations (e.g., number of stories and/or floor area limits based on the buildable area of the lot, aka "Floor Area Ratio").

- (a) Requirements for Single Family Dwelling projects may be more restrictive as required by Section 12.21A.17 of this Code.
- (b) Portions of buildings on a C or M zoned lot shall not exceed the heights limits set forth below when located within the distances specified from a lot classified in the RW1 Zone or more restrictive zone.
 

DISTANCE (ft)	HEIGHT (ft)
0 to 49	25
50 to 99	33
100 to 199	61
- (c) Height Limit applies to R1, RS, RE, and RA zones where a roof has a slope less than 25 percent, except within the Coastal Zone.
- (d) Height Limit applies to R1, RS, RE, RA, and R2 Zones located within the Coastal Zone. See Coastal Project Permit for further limitations.
- (e) Height Limit applies to R2 Zone located within the Hillside Area and non-Hillside Area, except within the Coastal Zone.
- (f) In the R1 Zone, height limits are as stated in the Chart No.1 above. In the R1 variation zones (R1V, R1F and R1R) the height limits shall comply with Section 12.08C.5(b)-(d).
- (g) In the R1 and R1 variation zones (R1V, R1F and R1R) Encroachment Plane Height limits apply. Each with varying Encroachment Plane Origin heights. See Section 12.08C.5.