



**San Francisco  
Planning**

## GENERAL PLANNING INFORMATION

# Decks

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Subject:  
**Decks, Roof Decks, and Notification Requirements for Decks**

**Planning Code Section 136c24, 136c25, 311, 312,  
and related interpretations**

## Introduction

The addition of decks to existing buildings requires a building permit application with plans if any part of the walking surface is more than 30 inches above grade. (Roof decks also require a building permit). Some decks may be approved over the counter (OTC) by the Planning Department. Others require neighborhood notification as described below.

## Neighborhood Notification

Notification is required for any building expansion in an RH, RM, RTO, Neighborhood Commercial (NC), or Eastern Neighborhoods Mixed Use district per Section 311 of the Planning Code. If the proposed project meets certain thresholds, it will also require a mandatory Pre-Application Meeting. Please see our handout on Pre-Application Meetings.

Under the Planning Code, and associated Zoning Administrator interpretations, some minor projects have been deemed exempt from the notification requirement. Decks, in certain instances, are exempt from notification.

Decks that are cantilevered, i.e. entirely supported by the walls to which they are attached, without any additional posts or other external support, are exempt from notice. Decks that are supported by posts but no more than 10 feet above grade and within the "buildable area" of a lot are also exempt. Railings above these decks are allowed without triggering notice.

If a firewall is required for a proposed deck and the firewall exceeds 10' in height, both a Pre-Application Meeting and notice would be required. ('Buildable area of the lot' means the area that is not part of the required yards or set backs under the Planning Code and within the applicable height limit. See Zoning Administrator Bulletin No. 5.)

The Planning Code allows limited projections into yards and setbacks for specified extensions of buildings. These are known as 'permitted obstructions' and include certain decks. However, if your deck is allowed to extend into the yard as an exception under the Code, it will likely need neighborhood notification. Specifically, there is an allowable

projection into the rear yard for districts with a rear yard requirement of 45% of lot depth (typically RH-2, RH-3, RM-1 and RM-2, and RTO districts). One or two-story projections of up to 12 feet in depth into the rear yard are allowed by the Planning Code, subject to other limitations, per Section 136(c)(25). A deck that fits within the area allowed by this section is a 'permitted obstruction'. However, if you must utilize this section of the Code for your deck to be allowed, then both a Pre-Application Meeting and neighborhood notification will be required.

The Planning Code provides exceptions from rear yard restrictions for decks in certain situations. Decks that are 3 feet above grade or less are permitted anywhere in the required rear yard. If your yard has a slope greater than 15 %, decks higher than 3 feet may be permitted in the required rear yard and approvable over the counter, subject to limits described and illustrated in the Planning Code at § 136(c)(24). Please feel free to contact planners at the Planning counter via email at [pic@sfgov.org](mailto:pic@sfgov.org) for any questions you may have.

## Roof Decks

As noted, roof decks also require permits. A deck placed on a flat roof that is entirely within the buildable area of a lot, including any area needed to access the deck and related railings or parapets up to 4 feet tall, may be approved over the counter. (See discussion above regarding buildable area).

If the proposed roof deck or access to it is on a portion

of the structure that encroaches on a yard or setback, a 'non-complying' structure under the Planning Code, then all railings are limited to 42 inches tall and of an open design and a limited notice will be required. In these cases, the Planning Department will notify owners and occupants of all properties which border the subject property. Adjacent neighbors will be given a 10 day period to raise any concerns they might have regarding the project.

## Deck Replacement

If you are replacing a deck, do not assume that it may be fully replaced in-kind. Many decks that were legally constructed with a building permit now protrude into required yards. This is generally due to a change in yard setback requirements since the time the deck was constructed. These decks are now partly or wholly 'non-complying' under the Planning Code. If a non-complying feature is removed, it may only be re-constructed if it is in compliance with current Codes or if you seek and justify a Variance from the Code. A Variance requires a separate application and a hearing before the Zoning Administrator subject to public notification.

If a legal, complying deck is replaced in-kind or with a smaller deck within the same footprint and envelope as the original deck, it would not require notice.



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**FOR OTHER PLANNING INFORMATION:**  
**Call or visit the San Francisco Planning Department**

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