

**SANTA CRUZ COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT POLICY/ORDINANCE  
INTERPRETATION**

Interpretation No.: HT-GPW-01 (Calculating grade inside perimeter walls of existing structure)  
Effective Date: 4/7/08  
Originally Issued: none

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**Question:**

*How is “existing” grade calculated inside the perimeter wall areas for existing structures?*

**Applicable Ordinance Section(s)  
And/or General Plan/LUP Policy(ies)**  
13.10.510(d)(1)

**INTERPRETATION:**

For determining existing grade inside the perimeter wall areas of existing structures, staff shall either:

1. Use the existing grade as was shown on the original building plans; or
2. In those cases where the original building plans are not available, project a plane inward measured from existing grade at the exterior foundation of the house (see attached illustration).

In either case, any existing or proposed excavations within the perimeter wall area below this “grade” will not be used for the purposes of calculating height.

**Reason:**

Height is measured above existing grade, except at perimeter walls where height is measured from existing or finished grade, whichever is lower. When a structure is first constructed, height measurements from the shown existing grade determine the allowable height within the perimeter walls. As stated in County Code Section 13.10.510(d)(1), excavations within the perimeter walls are permitted and do not change the height plane.

A problem arises when an addition is proposed. The new “existing” grade of the structure includes the previously allowed excavations and can make an existing structure appear to be nonconforming to allowed height limits. This is not the intent of the height regulations. Using the method described above for measuring height of existing structures will correct this problem.

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Tom Burns  
Planning Director

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Date

13.10.510(d)(1)