PURPOSE: This policy clarifies when an engineered design is required for retaining wall building permits. The City does not have a “pre-approved” typical retaining wall design for retaining walls required to have permits. The policy identifies situations where a pre-approved design from an adjacent jurisdiction may be used for a retaining wall building permit issued by the City of Santa Rosa.

Background: Santa Rosa City Code Section 18-16.A105.2, exempts retaining walls from permit requirements under the following conditions: Retaining walls that are not over 4 feet in height measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall, unless supporting a surcharge or impounding Class I, II, or IIIA liquids, and retaining walls with a height from bottom of footing to the top of the retaining wall that does not exceed the distance from property line to the face of the retaining wall.

POLICY:

For the purpose of this policy the height of any retaining wall shall be measured from the bottom of the footing for a continuous footing to the top of the wall. For this policy a retaining wall with a pier/post design footing, the bottom of footing shall be 1 ft below grade for pier/posts placed 4ft. on center or less. The bottom of footing shall be 2 ft. below finish grade for pier/posts at more than 4 ft. on center. The actual required depth of the pier/post will be much greater than the bottom of footing height criteria of this policy.

Any retaining wall required to have a building permit is required to have an engineered design. A retaining wall’s engineered design may utilize another jurisdiction’s pre-approved design if the retaining wall does not support a structure, is not within soil bearing location of a structure, does not have a surcharge from a slope above, does not support Class I, II, or IIIA liquids, or is not adjacent to a public way. If an applicant chooses to use an adjacent jurisdiction’s pre-approved design, the construction must comply with all of the criteria of that design.

Michael K. Whitaker, Chief Building Official