

Knowledge Centre

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Building Lines Explained: How Close Can You Build to Your Boundary?

For many homeowners, one of the first questions that arises when planning an extension, garage, carport or other structure is:

"How close can I build to my boundary?"

It seems like a simple question.

Unfortunately, there is no universal distance that applies to every property.

The answer can depend on the property's zoning, applicable municipal planning scheme, title deed conditions, servitudes, existing approvals and the nature of the proposed structure.

Understanding these restrictions **before designing or building** can prevent expensive mistakes.

What Is a Building Line?

A building line is a prescribed distance from a property's boundary within which certain building work may be restricted.

Its purpose is to regulate where buildings and structures may be positioned on a property.

Building lines can help to:

- Maintain appropriate separation between buildings and boundaries;
 - Protect neighbouring properties;
 - Preserve access and service areas;
 - Maintain streetscape and neighbourhood character;
 - Provide space for services and infrastructure; and
 - Support orderly development.
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A building line should therefore not simply be viewed as unused space.

It can form part of the planning controls governing how a property may be developed.

Is There One Standard Building Line?

No.

This is one of the most important points for homeowners to understand.

The applicable building-line requirements can differ according to the circumstances of the property.

Factors may include:

- The municipality;
- The zoning of the property;
- The applicable development or planning scheme;
- The position of the property;
- The type of structure being proposed;
- Whether the structure is attached or detached;
- The property's title deed conditions;
- Existing servitudes; and
- Whether departures or other planning approvals are required.

Consequently, advice such as:

"You can always build 1 metre from the boundary"

should be treated with caution.

The correct answer must be established from the requirements applicable to **that particular property and proposed development**.

Front, Side and Rear Building Lines

Building restrictions may differ depending on which boundary is involved.

The street boundary

The building line facing a street can be subject to specific requirements designed to regulate the relationship between buildings and the public road.

Side boundaries

Restrictions along side boundaries can influence the position of extensions, garages, rooms and other structures.

Rear boundaries

Rear building lines can similarly affect proposed additions and outbuildings.

The distinction is important because a property may not have identical requirements on all boundaries.

"But There Is Already a Building There"

This is another common source of confusion.

An existing building does not automatically mean that a homeowner can extend it in any direction.

The existing structure may have:

- Been constructed under older regulations;
- Received a specific approval;
- Been authorised through a departure;
- Pre-dated the current planning controls; or
- Been constructed without the necessary approval.

Therefore, the fact that a wall already stands close to a boundary does not necessarily establish that a new extension can simply follow the same line.

What About a Garage or Carport?

Homeowners often assume that garages and carports are treated differently because they are secondary structures.

While different rules may apply to particular types of structures, this should not be interpreted as a blanket exemption.

A proposed garage or carport may still need to be assessed in relation to:

- Building lines;
- Coverage;
- Height;
- Site access;
- Parking requirements;
- Stormwater considerations;
- Municipal planning controls; and
- Building regulations.

The fact that a structure is described as a "carport" does not, by itself, determine whether it can be constructed where the homeowner wants it.

Can You Build Within the Building Line?

Sometimes a homeowner may wish to construct a structure within a prescribed building line.

This does not necessarily mean that the project is impossible.

Depending on the circumstances, a planning application, departure, consent or other form of municipal consideration may be necessary.

The important point is that **permission should be established before construction begins.**

A homeowner should not construct first and assume that the municipality will approve the deviation afterwards.

Why Professional Assessment Matters

Determining whether a proposed extension will fit on a property is more complicated than measuring the distance from the boundary.

A professional assessment may need to consider the relationship between:

Property → Zoning → Planning controls → Building lines → Servitudes → Existing structures → Proposed development

Only after these factors have been considered can the feasibility of the proposed development be properly evaluated.

This is particularly important where a homeowner is purchasing a property specifically because they intend to extend or alter it.

The Hidden Problem: Buying a Property With Future Plans

Imagine purchasing a property because you intend to:

"Build an extra bedroom at the back."

The property appears to have plenty of space.

But after the purchase, you discover that the proposed extension is affected by a building line, servitude or other planning restriction.

The available physical space and the **legally developable space** may therefore be two very different things.

For homeowners considering a property purchase, it can be extremely valuable to investigate development potential **before committing to the purchase**.

Building Lines Are Only One Part of the Equation

Even if a proposed structure complies with its building lines, other restrictions may still affect the development.

These could include:

- Zoning restrictions;
- Site coverage;
- Floor-area limitations;
- Height restrictions;
- Parking requirements;
- Servitudes;
- Heritage considerations;
- Environmental requirements; and
- Building-regulation requirements.

This is why simply asking:

"How far from the boundary can I build?"

may be the wrong starting point.

The better question is:

"What can I legally and practically develop on this property?"

The CRINNOV Approach

At CRINNOV, we believe that good residential architecture begins with understanding the property **before** drawing the solution.

A successful design must balance:

What the homeowner wants

+

What the property can accommodate

+

What the applicable regulations permit

+

What can realistically be built

This approach can identify potential problems at the beginning of a project rather than after substantial design work has already been undertaken.

Before You Call the Builder

If you are considering an extension, garage, carport, granny flat or other structure near a property boundary, don't start by asking:

"How much will it cost to build?"

Start by asking:

"Can I legally build what I am proposing?"

Once feasibility has been established, design and construction decisions become considerably more straightforward.

Planning an Extension or Alteration?

CRINNOV Architecture & Building Services assists homeowners with residential architectural design, building plans, municipal submissions and regulatory guidance.

If you are considering extending or altering your property, we can help you understand the planning considerations **before you commit to construction**.

CRINNOV Architecture & Building Services

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About CRINNOV

CRINNOV specialises in residential architectural design, building plans, municipal submission support and regulatory guidance.

By combining practical construction experience with architectural knowledge and modern digital technologies, CRINNOV helps homeowners transform ideas into **compliant, practical and buildable solutions**.

Disclaimer: This article is intended for general information only. Artificial Intelligence should be regarded as a professional support tool and not as a substitute for architectural or legal advice. Municipal by-laws, zoning schemes and technical requirements vary between municipalities and individual properties. Every project should be assessed on its own merits before construction or submission.