

# WOOD DECK GUIDELINES

## For One and Two Family Dwellings

### ANSWERS TO THE MOST COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PERMIT PROCESS

#### **Do I need a permit for building a deck?**

A building permit is required for decks which are attached to a house, serve an exterior door to a house, or are more than 2' above grade.

Decks which are not attached to a house, are not part of the exit path from the house, and are less than 2' above grade do not need a building permit, but still need to meet code minimum construction standards.

Note: Deck construction in a floodplain requires a floodplain permit even if a building permit is not required.

#### **How do I apply for a building permit?**

All permit applications are completed through Wauwatosa's self service portal online: [www.wauwatosa.net/permits](http://www.wauwatosa.net/permits).

#### **What needs to be included in the construction plans?**

A minimum set of plans will consist of elevations and cross section details (a sample deck plan is provided). All plans must be drawn to a scale not less than ¼ inch per foot.

#### **How can I obtain a survey?**

Surveys are required to ensure that your project complies with zoning codes and is the best way to avoid property boundary disputes with neighbors. If you don't have an accurate survey, check the Milwaukee County website to see available surveys:

<https://data-mclio.hub.arcgis.com/datasets/f339ebff4e7d460a9a48e002b85f5ce0/explore>.

Otherwise, the services of a qualified Land Surveyor should be obtained.

#### **Will I need to go through Design Review?**

Modifications to exterior decks may require design review. This review will happen as part of the permit application process.

The main purpose of the Design Review is to promote good design and continuity, which often impacts the overall appearance and property value of a neighborhood. Components such as clean and continuous lines in design, trim and skirting, and color will be considered during design review.

#### **How long does it take to get the permit?**

After submitting all required documents and information, anticipate two weeks for the City to provide a formal response on the plan review application.

For more information, visit our website at

[www.wauwatosa.net/government/departments/building-safety](http://www.wauwatosa.net/government/departments/building-safety)

Please email the Building and Safety Division at [tbuilding@wauwatosa.net](mailto:tbuilding@wauwatosa.net) or call (414) 479-8907 with questions or concerns. This informational guide was updated 11/2025.

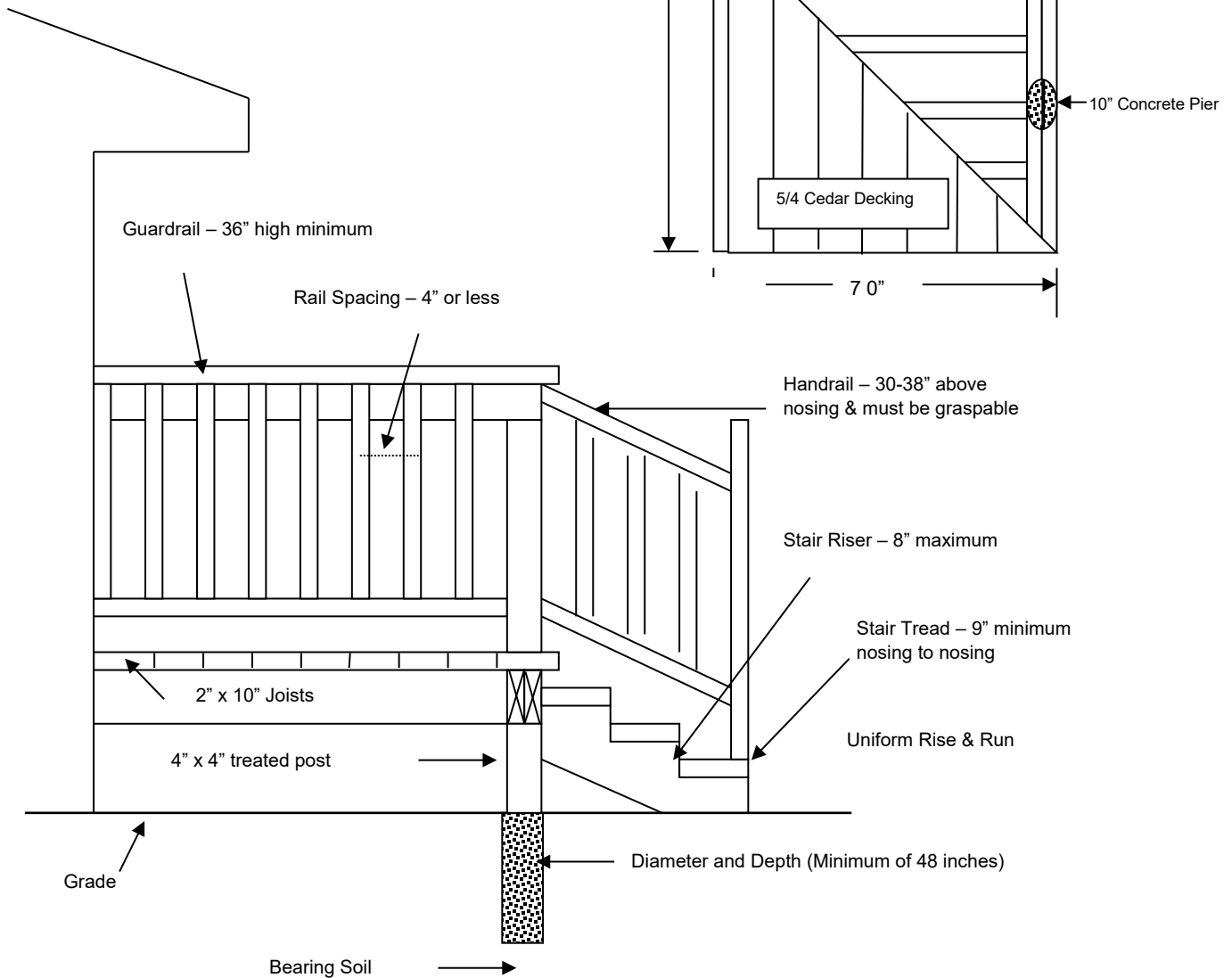
## How much will a building permit cost?

Wauwatosa's self service portal online includes a permit fee estimator.

## SAMPLE DECK PLAN

### Design Criteria:

- Ledger Board Attachment
- Footing Size
- Post Size and Spacing
- Beam Size and Spans
- Floor Joist Size
- Stair Rise and Run
- Guardrail/Handrail Height



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## Deck Code Discussion:

SPS 320 to 325 Appendix B is an outstanding reference for building a code complaint deck: [https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin\\_code/sps/safety\\_and\\_buildings\\_and\\_environment/320\\_325/325\\_b.pdf](https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin_code/sps/safety_and_buildings_and_environment/320_325/325_b.pdf)

- Stairs must be 36" wide minimum
- Riser height cannot be more than 8" tall, tread must be at least 9" deep, riser heights cannot differ by more than 3/8"
- Guards are needed where the deck is more than 24" above adjacent grade. Guards need to be a minimum of 36" tall, be able to resist a 200-pound force in any direction, and prevent a 4" ball from passing through per SPS 321.04(3).
- A 36" x 36" minimum landing may be required at the house.
- More than 3 risers require a graspable hand rail on one side. Handrails need to be able to resist a 200 pound force applied in any direction.

Handrails and guards need to be able to resist a 200 pound force applied in any direction per SPS 321.04(3)4.

### ATTACHMENT OF LEDGER BOARD TO BAND BOARD OR BAND JOIST

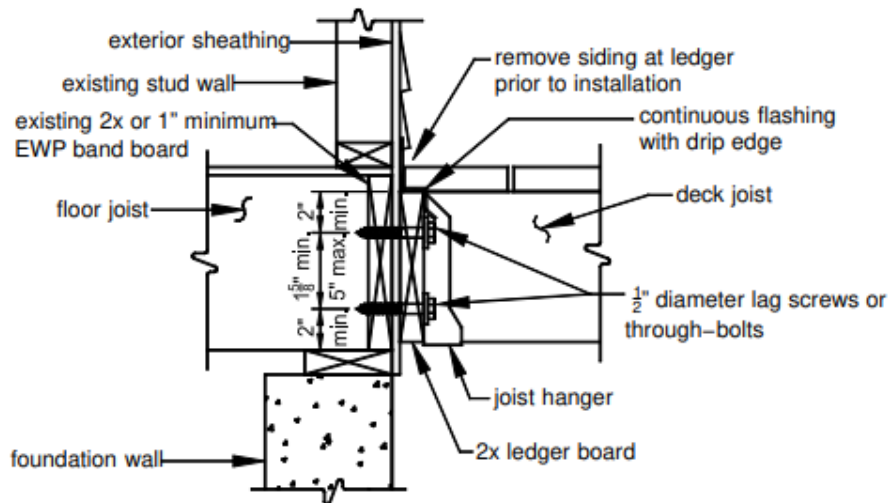
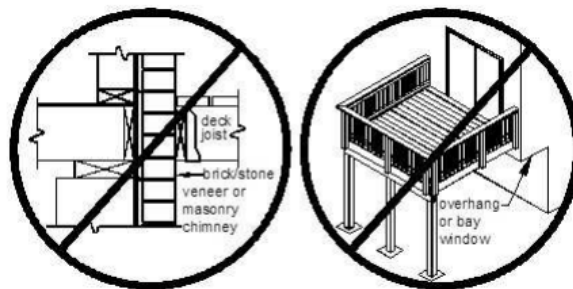


Figure 14  
PROHIBITED LEDGER ATTACHMENTS

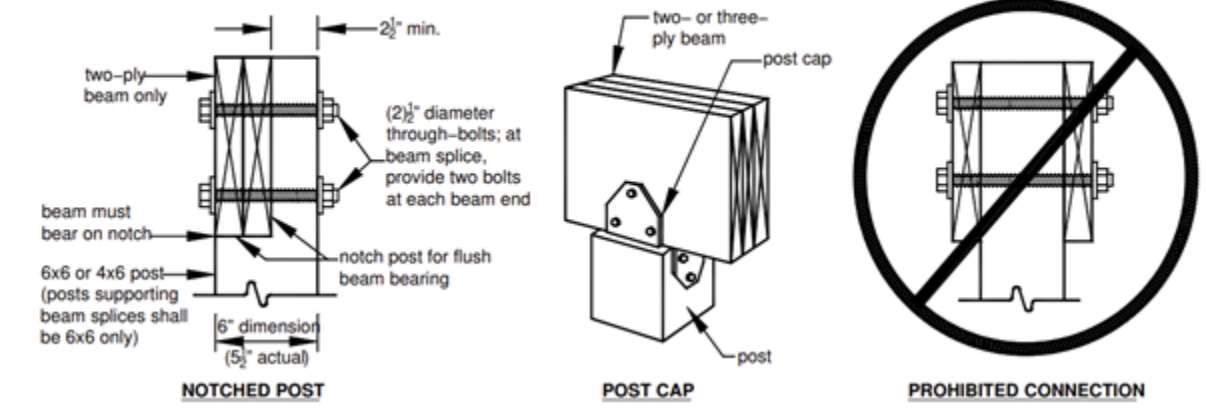


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## POST-TO-BEAM CONNECTIONS



## QUESTIONS?

**Planning:** 414-479-8957

### **Building Inspection:**

West of 92nd Street:

Mike Niedermann 414-479-8909

[mniedermann@wauwatosa.net](mailto:mniedermann@wauwatosa.net)

East of 92<sup>nd</sup> Street:

Kurt McMahon 414-479-8908

[kcmahon@wauwatosa.net](mailto:kcmahon@wauwatosa.net)

Permit application questions: 414-479-8907

**Safety Tip: Call Diggers Hotline prior to excavation (800)242-8511**

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