



**City of Portage**  
**Building Department**  
6070 Central Avenue, Portage, Indiana 46368  
Telephone (219) 762-4204 Fax (219) 764-5749

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**Residential Decks**

1 & 2 Family Dwellings and Townhomes

A properly designed and constructed deck provides safe useful and enjoyable outdoor space for family activities while adding value to the property. This publication is intended to help residents understand the process of planning, permitting, building and inspecting a deck.

A free download of the Prescriptive Residential Wood Deck Construction Guide is made available by the American Wood Council on their website at [www.awc.org/codes-standards/publications/dca6](http://www.awc.org/codes-standards/publications/dca6). It is based on the 2015 International Residential Code and is an exceptional source of information required to design a code-compliant deck.

Free computer based deck design is available at any Menards location and online at various retailers' websites, including Menards.com, Lowes.com, HomeDepot.com and manufacturers' websites including Erectadeck.com, Fiberondecking.com, TimberTech.com, Trex.com, Mitek-us.com, and Versadeck.com among others.

**Residential Decks Building Permit Requirements:**

Building permits are required for the construction of all decks, whether by the homeowner or by a contractor. Deck construction shall meet the requirements of the 2020 Indiana Residential Code which adopts and amends the 2018 International Residential Code and is available for sale at the International Code Council's website [www.iccsafe.org](http://www.iccsafe.org).

**Zoning Requirements (Improvement Location Permit):**

Decks are also required to meet the land use and setback requirements of the City of Portage Zoning Ordinance located in Chapter 90 of the Portage Municipal Code which is available on the city's website at [www.portagein.gov](http://www.portagein.gov).

**Permit Fees:**

The combined fee for the required Improvement Location Permit and a Building Permit for a deck is \$75.00. No construction may begin until permits are obtained.

**Contractors:**

All contractors must be licensed by the City of Portage.

**Plan Review & Inspections:**

The plan review is done by the plans examiner prior to the issuance of a building permit in order to ensure adherence to the zoning ordinance and the building code. Foundation and framing inspections will be done during the project to ensure the construction is in compliance.

**Submittals for permit:**

The following information is necessary for the Building Department to do a proper plan review and to help the project go as smoothly as possible.

- A completed Accessory Structure building permit application form. The form is available at the Building Department and on the city website at [www.portagein.gov](http://www.portagein.gov).
- A copy of the site plan. The site plan should indicate the existing structures, existing paving, easements (if any), all setbacks, proposed deck location and lot dimensions.
- A copy of the construction plans showing the proposed design and materials. Plans shall be drawn to scale and indicate the following information:
  - A. A floor plan including the following:
    1. Proposed deck size with dimensions
    2. Size and spacing of floor joists
    3. Size and type of decking material
    4. Size, location and spacing of posts including post connection to footing
    5. Size of beams--also indicating post/beam connection
    6. Species and grade of lumber to be used
  - B. Elevations indicating the following:
    1. Height of structure from established grade
    2. Size and depth of footings
    3. Guard height and spacing of intermediates
    4. Stairway rise/run and handrail requirements
    5. Clearance to overhead wires, if applicable

**Building Code Requirements:**

- Footings shall be designed and constructed below the 36 inch frost depth.
- Decks exposed to the weather must be constructed with wood of natural resistance to decay or treated wood. This includes horizontal members such as beams, joists, ledger boards and decking; and vertical members such as posts, poles, guards, handrails and columns. Other man-made products are subject to approval by the Building Department before use. Requirements for installation of composite decking may differ based on the manufacturer's installation instructions or approved testing.
- Columns and posts supporting decks exposed to the weather or water splash must be supported and connected to concrete piers or metal pedestals. Columns and posts in contact with the ground or embedded in concrete must be of pressure treated wood approved for ground contact.
- Decks shall be designed and constructed to support a minimum live load of 40 pounds per square foot. The dead load is assumed to be a minimum of 10 pounds per square foot, although some composite decks may require additional dead loads. Additional loads shall be considered if a spa or other equipment is to be placed on the deck.
- Ledger boards shall be bolted or lagged to the existing building framing with a minimum of two ½" lag screws or bolts with washers and nuts spaced according to joist span. All connections between the deck and dwelling must be flashed with corrosion-resistive flashing.
- A ledger board may not be attached to brick/stone veneer or a cantilevered exterior wall. Neither may be used to support any portion of the deck.
- Fasteners and hangers are to be hot-dipped galvanized steel, stainless steel or copper. To meet load requirements the proper fasteners shall be provided, per the hanger manufacturer.

- As a “rule of thumb”, joists should not cantilever beams by more than 2’-0”, nor should beams cantilever posts by more than 1’-0” at each end. Depending on design, a greater cantilever may be allowed.
- Decks built to support a future porch or room addition should be constructed so that all potential imposed loads are taken into consideration; full porch plans should be submitted for future reference.
- When a deck is located adjacent to new or existing windows, safety glazing or permanently mounted guards for the windows shall be required for any window pane exceeding 9 square feet in area with a bottom edge less than 18” above the floor and the top edge greater than 36” above the floor. Windows within 60” of stairs, ramps and landings may also be designated as in hazardous locations. See the code official for your specific situation.
- All decks, balconies or porches which are more than 30” above grade or a floor below must be protected by a guard a minimum of 36” above the finished deck surface. Guards and stair railings shall have horizontal, vertical, diagonal or other ornamental intermediate rails through which a sphere 4” in diameter cannot pass through.
- All stairways having 4 or more risers must have at least one handrail which meets all code requirements. Reference the available handout, [Residential Handrail Grip Requirements](#).
- Emergency escape and rescue openings installed under decks and porches shall be fully openable and provide a path not less than 36 inches (914 mm) in height to a *yard* or court.
- The National Electric Code requires overhead power lines to be located a minimum of 10’0” above decks and platforms. Existing lines may need to be raised if a new deck is to be installed beneath them.
- If the deck will encroach on a gas or electrical meter, contact Nipsco for their current regulations on clear space requirements.

#### **Required Inspections:**

- Every effort is made to perform all inspections the next business day following the request. Same day requests are subject to scheduling and cannot be guaranteed. Call (219)762-4204 to schedule an inspection. Please have the site address available when you call.
- Footing inspection: To be made after the holes are dug to required depth and size, but prior to pouring of the concrete.
- Final inspection: To be made upon completion of the deck, but before skirting is applied.
- Other Inspections: In addition to the above inspections, the inspector may require other inspections to ensure compliance with the code.

#### **General Notes:**

- The building permit must be prominently displayed and the approved set of plans shall be kept on the job site until the final inspection has been made and approved.
- All contractors must be licensed by the City of Portage.
- Call 811 for utility location services before you dig.