



# City of Palo Alto

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## **APPLYING FOR A HOME IMPROVEMENT EXCEPTION**

As a homeowner preparing to remodel your house in Palo Alto, you may be curious about the options you have to update your property. A Home Improvement Exception (or HIE) may be able to help. Are you maintaining at least 75% of the existing exterior walls? Are you proposing improvements on an existing single-family or two-family structure, or accessory structure? Are you limited in modifications because of a protected tree? If so, then you may qualify for an HIE. Please use this pamphlet as a guide, however, if you are attempting your first home improvements or first HIE application, please also visit the Development Center across the street from Palo Alto City Hall.

### **What benefits do I receive from an HIE?**

An HIE can grant you relief during the building process from the strict provisions of the Palo Alto zoning ordinance, which controls setbacks, daylight planes, height, lot coverage and incidental amounts of floor area. Home Improvement Exceptions are granted on the basis that the modifications will be more consistent with the existing architectural style of the house or neighborhood and are intended to promote the retention of existing structures.

If you do not fall into this category, you may still have options in gaining exceptions from the Municipal Code. Other permits exist to assist the property owner and encourage the retention of existing homes. Ask about Variance and Conditional Use Permits in the Development Center.

### **How can I get an HIE?**

Follow this step-by-step procedure to apply for an HIE.

**Step 1.** Visit the Development Center to get information about your property. A planner at the counter can help advise you through the process and provide you with a checklist to ensure that your application will be complete.

**Step 2.** Talk to your neighbors and listen to their concerns. This can help alleviate problems further in the application process.

**Step 3.** Schedule a submittal appointment and submit your application.

**Step 4.** Within three days of the submission, the City will send a notice of submittal to the owner and adjacent properties, which opens a twenty-one day comment period. During this time, comments can be added to consideration for the staff review.

**Step 5.** After this time, the Director will post the decision to approve, make conditions, or deny the request. The decision will become final after fourteen days, during which a hearing can be requested to review the decision.

**Note that if a hearing request is made, the process continues in fourteen day increments. Appeals that seek to overturn the Director's decision are reviewed by the city council, and their decision is absolute.**