

REAL ESTATE VIEWS[®]

By Gloria Kurz, REALTOR[®]

Coastal Buffer Zones, A Primer: What Are They? (Part 2)

The sizes of coastal buffer zones are dictated by two factors: the “type” of water on which a home is located and the lot size of the property itself. There are six types of water, all of which are designated by number as follows:

- Type 1 Coastal Beaches & Dunes
- Type 2 Barrier Beaches
- Type 3 Coastal Wetlands
- Type 4 Coastal Cliffs Bluffs & Banks
- Type 5 Rocky Shores
- Type 6 Manmade Shorelines

In general, the larger the lot size, the bigger the buffer zone. There is a certain arbitrariness involved with the relationship of lot size to buffer zone as is demonstrated in the following table excerpted from The Red Book. When a new threshold lot size level is reached, a one square foot difference in lot size results in a 25 ft. wider buffer. So, if you have a property that has 200 ft. of frontage, a one sq. ft. difference in lot size results in a buffer that is 5000 sq. ft. more than it would have been (200 ft. x 25 ft.).

Larger buffers are normal in Type 1 waters, i.e. Mackerel Cove;



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and, Type 2 waters, i.e., East Passage, to “enhance conservation, protect water quality, and maintain the low intensity use characteristic” of the waters. Coastal buffer zones are measured from the “inland edge of the most inland Shoreline (Coastal) feature”. Under certain circumstances, variances may be granted either by the Executive Director (an administrative variance) or, by the full Council.

One of the most common questions we are asked by waterfront owners interested in renovating a home or expanding it, is what are the implications of any such work with respect to the buffer zone? The answer depends on the extent of the alterations to a building’s footprint

(structural foundation).

If an existing footprint is not expanded more than 50%, no new coastal buffer zone is required. However, if the existing footprint is expanded 50% or more, than a formula exists to either establish a coastal buffer zone or, increase the size of an existing buffer zone. Coastal buffer zones are not required when a building is demolished and rebuilt on the same footprint (without any expansion).

Coastal regulations are very complex. The Red Book is available on-line at <http://www.crmc.ri.gov/> or you may pick up a copy CRMC’s Wakefield office, located at the Oliver Stedman Center in Wakefield on Route 1. If you’re considering renovations, are interested in expanding the size of a waterfront home or want to “raze, remove and rebuild” a home on the water, you may want to first consult with staff at CRMC or other professionals with experience in the coastal regulatory process (attorneys, architects) so you’re prepared for both the regulatory process and the length of time involved.

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COASTAL BUFFER ZONE SIZES FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Residential Lot Size (Sq. Ft.)	Type 1 & Type 2 Waters	Type 3,4,5, & 6 Waters
	Required Buffer (Ft)	Required Buffer (Ft)
Under 10,000	25	15
10,000-20,000	50	25
20,001-40,000	75	50
40,001-60,000	100	75
60,001-80,000	125	100
80,001-200,000	150	125
Over 200,000	200	150