

Hazardous Visual Obstructions

Santa Monica Municipal Code Section 9.21.180

Frequently Asked Questions

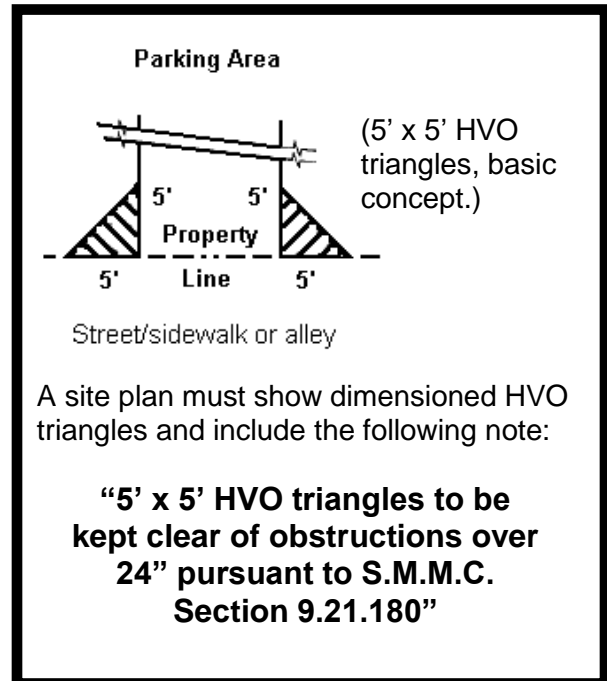
1. What is a Hazardous Visual Obstruction?

A Hazardous Visual Obstruction (HVO) is an object, such as a wall, fence, or landscaping that blocks the view of a motorist. The City requires a clear line of sight on private property where such an object might pose a danger to the public. This line of sight is usually described as a 5' x 5' HVO triangle. The exact shape and dimensions depend on the lot configuration and the angle at which a driveway meets a property line.

2. When and where is an HVO triangle required?

HVO triangles are required where a driveway, garage, parking space or loading zone intersects with the public right-of-way at the alley, sidewalk, street or parkway. HVO triangles for driveways, garages, parking spaces or loading zones within five feet of your property line must also be shown. Triangles are also required where an alley intersects a sidewalk, street or alley. Compliance with the City's HVO ordinance is determined during staff review of a site plan submitted by an applicant seeking a building permit, regardless of the amount of work proposed.

3. What if my property is not in compliance, and we're only undertaking a minor addition or renovation? The applicant should improve substandard conditions where possible, and definitely cannot make them worse. Existing obstructions will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis: generally, any landscaping may need to be removed but structures may remain.



4. Is landscaping or are short objects allowed in the HVO triangle? Any object, such as a wall, fence, or plant must not exceed 24" in height. All landscaping should be maintained so as not to exceed 24" in height.

5. Where exactly is the intersection between my driveway and the property line if I have a garage off the alley? The clearance can begin straight out from the inside of the garage door, at the intersection with the alley. It doesn't necessarily have to begin at the outside of the garage wall.

6. Can I draw an HVO triangle on my plans if it goes over the side property line into my neighbor's yard? Absolutely. The required sight distance can include clearance on the neighbor's property. However, if a neighbor's fence, landscaping, or other existing feature, such as a building wall constitutes an obstruction, you might have to shift your garage or driveway away from the obstruction.



Santa Monica's Hazardous Visual Obstruction Ordinance

A. Visibility. Notwithstanding the provisions of Section 9.21.050, Fences, Walls, and Hedges, no person shall permit any obstruction, including, but not limited to, any fence, wall, hedge, tree, or landscape planting to obscure or block the visibility of vehicles entering or exiting an alley, driveway, parking lot, street intersection, or other vehicle right-of-way or to constitute an unreasonable and unnecessary hazard to persons lawfully using an adjacent pedestrian or vehicle right-of-way. In addition, no obstruction shall be located less than 5 feet from the intersection of the street-facing parcel line with a driveway or garage door, or the intersection of parcel lines adjacent to street or alley intersections unless the obstruction is either less than 24 inches above the adjacent vehicle right-of-way or is authorized pursuant to subsection (B). In addition, unless authorized pursuant to subsection (B), no obstruction shall be located less than 5 feet from the intersection of the alley-facing parcel line with a driveway or garage door, and this area must be paved in accordance with Section 9.28.120(l).

B. No development shall be allowed if it would otherwise cause an existing obstruction to be in violation of this subsection unless:

1. The obstruction is less than 24 inches above the adjacent vehicle right-of-way; or
2. The obstruction or development is authorized pursuant to subsection (B) or (C) of this Section.

C. Allowable Encroachments. The Director may approve encroachments into the 5 foot hazardous visual area in addition to those specified in subsection (A) of this Section when the parcel owner submits a written request and satisfactory evidence that:

1. Characteristics applicable to the parcel, including size, shape, topography, location, or surroundings, that do not apply to other properties in the vicinity which unreasonably restricts an owner's ability to comply with subsection (A); and
2. The proposed encroachment will be designed to maintain adequate sight view and/or provide other design elements, such as the use of mirrors and will not constitute a hazard to persons lawfully using an adjacent sidewalk, alley, street or other right-of-way;
3. The strict application of the provisions of this Section would result in practical difficulties or unnecessary hardships, not including economic difficulties or economic hardships, or would result in unreasonable deprivation of the use or enjoyment of the parcel; and
4. The granting of the encroachment will not be contrary to or in conflict with the general purposes and intent of this Section, nor to the goals, objectives, and policies of the General Plan.

D. Detached Garages and Non-Required Parking in R1 Districts. The Director may approve a detached garage and non-required parking on a parcel in a R1 District with alley access even if the parking would cause an existing obstruction to be located in the hazardous visual obstruction area if the parking will be designed to maintain adequate sight view and/or provide other design elements, such as the use of mirrors, and will not constitute a hazard to persons lawfully using an adjacent sidewalk, alley, street, or other right-of-way. (Added by Ord. No. 2486CCS §§ 1, 2, adopted June 23, 2015; amended by Ord. No. 2536CCS § 7, adopted February 28, 2017)