

# A GUIDE TO BUILDING IN BREMEN

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This guide provides a brief introduction to relevant ordinances, their applicable provisions, and permit filing requirements for those considering building in Bremen. Please use this guide as a starting point for all land use and building projects including, but not limited to: new construction, renovation, relocation, subdivisions, mobile homes, changes of use, driveways and landscaping (filling and grading, tree or brush removal) within the Shoreland Zone, and establishing or altering home-based, agriculture/aquaculture or other commercial operations.

For a prospective applicant who chooses to pursue a permit, reviewing this guide is only the first step. Anyone wishing to proceed with an application must review pertinent [ordinances](#) and consult responsible Town officials while gathering information, filing a permit application, and seeking Town approval for the project.

## The Town of Bremen, a Brief Overview

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Bremen is a small, rural, coastal town on the upper Pemaquid Peninsula, bounded by Waldoboro to the north, Bristol to the south, the Medomak River and Muscongus Bay to the east, and Pemaquid and Biscay Ponds to the west. Other prominent water bodies within the Town are McCurdy and Webber Ponds. Bremen has a year-round population of about 800, which increases considerably in the summer. Except for home occupations and low-impact businesses, Bremen's commercial base is largely limited to a small number of agricultural and fishing and maritime-related activities. The Town has no public water supply or public sewer system. The Town offers several attractive and diverse tracts of land for public recreation. To protect its considerable but fragile natural resources and maintain its quality of life, Bremen has enacted several [ordinances](#), such as the Shoreland Zoning Ordinance (SZO), the Land Use Ordinance (LUO), the Subdivision Ordinance, and the Residential Growth Cap Ordinance, that govern construction and activities in Bremen.

## Building Permits, a Quick Look

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A building permit is required for all new construction or placement of structures, including decks, sheds, greenhouses, etc., except for structures of 100 square feet or less outside Bremen's Shoreland Zone. Within the Shoreland Zone, all building activity requires Planning Board review and approval and most likely a Planning Board-issued permit (see [Land Use Ordinance](#) and [Shoreland Zoning Ordinance](#)). New residential dwelling units, including seasonal homes, mobile homes, the conversion of seasonal housing to year-round use, and changes of use of a structure, may also require a Residential Growth Permit, which are limited to eight per year (see [Residential Growth Cap Ordinance](#)). Other land use and building activities that require Planning Board approval and are governed by ordinances include subdivisions (see [Subdivision Ordinance](#)), certain roads and driveways, piers and docks, commercial and industrial activities, campgrounds, mobile homes, and transmission towers. The Code Enforcement Officer (CEO) is the permitting authority for most other planned activity outside of the Shoreland Zone and all plumbing and septic (Subsurface Wastewater

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Disposal System) permits. Full details are available in the SZO, LUO, and other ordinances applicable to specific activities. Copies of ordinances, permit applications, submission requirements, fee schedules, and other agencies' requirements are available at the Town Center and on the [Town website](#). Applicants should review the definitions within the ordinances to ensure that they understand what each category includes and does not include. For example, a "structure" is not just a building.

## The Shoreland Zone and the Shoreland Zoning Ordinance, What They Are All About

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The Shoreland Zone and its districts, depicted on the Official Shoreland Zoning Map located at the Town Center and on the [Town website](#), comprise land within 250 feet of water resources such as rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands, and tidal areas. Construction, uses, and clearing of vegetation in the Shoreland Zone are governed by the SZO. Nearly all construction activities proposed within the Town's Shoreland Zone require Planning Board or CEO review and approval. Each district within the Shoreland Zone has its own construction and use restrictions and allowances regarding setbacks, square footage, lot sizes, expansions, etc. Note that expansions of existing, legal non-conforming structures and uses are limited by the SZO. (See [Shoreland Zoning Ordinance](#) to review the definition of a legal non-conforming structure.)

## The Planning Board's Role as a Permitting Authority

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The Planning Board is the permitting authority for the Shoreland Zone, subdivisions and most industrial/commercial activity. The Board meets regularly, usually monthly, according to the Board's Bylaws and as posted on the [Town website](#). To be included on a meeting agenda, a complete permit [application](#) and all required attachments and fees must be submitted to the Town Clerk by noon, two Wednesdays before the next meeting date. In some cases the Planning Board may waive submission requirements upon written request of the applicant. Prospective applicants may also request a non-binding, pre-application consultation with the Planning Board by submitting a narrative describing the project and a draft site plan before the same deadline. An agenda, listing all applications and requests for consultation, is published in a local newspaper and posted at the Town Center. Applicants or their agents are advised to attend the Planning Board meetings at which their applications will be considered. Planning Board site visits, if appropriate, will be conducted on the Sunday before the meeting, and applicants or their agents should be present. Applicants should consult the Town staff for exact times of site visits. All Planning Board meetings and site visits are open to the public. The applicable ordinances explain the application process and the Board's responsibilities in reviewing applications. Please note that until the Board deems an application is complete, the Board's required review time does not actually begin. The more complete an application is upon submission, the more quickly a decision can be rendered. (See [ordinances](#) for Planning Board permitting procedures and timelines.)

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## Outside the Shoreland Zone and the Code Enforcement Officer's Role as a Permitting Authority

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In general, the Code Enforcement Officer is the permitting authority for non-commercial/industrial uses in areas outside the Shoreland Zone. The Town Center can provide contact information for the CEO. The ordinances provide submission requirements for applications requiring CEO approval. In some cases the CEO may waive submission requirements upon written request of the applicant. The applicable ordinances explain the application process and the CEO's responsibilities in reviewing applications. Please note that until the CEO deems an application is complete, the CEO's required review time does not actually begin. The CEO may conduct site visits for some properties before issuing permits. Plumbing and septic permits are also the responsibility of the CEO. (See [ordinances](#) for CEO permitting procedures and timelines.)

## Getting Help

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In summary, applicants should refer to the ordinances for all land use and building projects including, but not limited to: new construction, renovation, relocation, subdivisions, mobile homes, changes of use, driveways and landscaping (filling and grading, tree or brush removal) within the Shoreland Zone, and establishing or altering home-based, agriculture/aquaculture or commercial operations. When in doubt, applicants should speak with the CEO or request a non-binding, pre-application consultation with the Planning Board.

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

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**Q:** Do I need a permit to clear some vegetation, remove dead trees, and limb up others?

**A:** No, but you must adhere to the SZO requirements regarding clearing vegetation if any of this work is done within the Shoreland Zone. This requirement includes any land within 250 feet of waterbodies and certain wetlands, even if the land does not have water frontage.

**Q:** May I get a permit to add to a legal non-conforming structure in the Shoreland Zone that is less than the required setback from the water?

**A:** It depends. The SZO limits square footage for all structures within specific setbacks. In any case, no expansion may increase non-conformity by, for example, extending the structure closer to the water line.

**Q:** Part of my property is in the Shoreland Zone, but if I plan to build on a part outside the Shoreland Zone do I need a permit from the Planning Board?

**A:** No. As long as the building, driveway, tree cutting, and other improvements are not in the Shoreland Zone, the CEO may approve the permit.

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**Q:** Do I need a Residential Growth Permit to convert a seasonal home into year-round use, or to convert an existing garage into a rental apartment?

**A:** Yes, on both counts. A Growth Permit is required for any new dwelling unit, even if the building already exists.

**Q:** May I obtain a Residential Growth Permit now and use it for a property I buy later, or may I sell or give away a Residential Growth Permit with the sale of the property?

**A:** No on both counts. A Residential Growth Permit may be obtained only for a specific property, for a specific applicant and is not transferrable.

**Q:** May I obtain a Residential Growth Permit before I buy a piece of property in Bremen to build a home?

**A:** Yes, as long as you have a vested right to purchase the property, such as a signed sales contract or a contract with the sale contingent on obtaining a Residential Growth Permit, and you submit a Subsurface Wastewater Disposal System application.

**Q:** May I mail the completed Residential Growth Permit Application to the Town Center instead of applying in person?

**A:** No. Applications must be delivered in person because permits are issued on a “first come, first served” basis. If several applications arrived in one day’s mail, the Town staff would have no way of knowing which application came first. If you cannot file the application in person, you may have an authorized person file the signed application for you.

**Q:** Do I need to attend a Planning Board meeting at which my application will be considered?

**A:** No, you are not required to attend to have your application considered, but it is a very good idea. If the Board has questions or needs more information that cannot be resolved by the application alone, the application will be tabled until the issues can be resolved. If the applicant cannot attend, he or she may authorize another person to represent him or her.

**Q:** Do I need a separate site plan approval to open a business in my home?

**A:** No, not as long as your business meets the requirements for a “Home Occupation” or a “Low Impact Business” as defined in the LUO. Note that only certain commercial activity is allowed in the Shoreland Zone (see [Shoreland Zoning Ordinance](#) for details).