

Hardscape Permit Guide for Lubbock and West Texas

What needs a permit, what does not, and who to call before you break ground. Written for homeowners and property managers in Lubbock, Wolfforth, and Shallowater.

Read this first

This guide explains permit rules in plain language. It is not legal advice. Codes change and every property is different. Always confirm your project with the City of Lubbock Building Safety Department before work begins.

Why permits matter on a hardscape project

Most people think of permits as paperwork. In Lubbock they protect your money. Work built without a required permit can be ordered to stop. It can also fail at resale, when a buyer's inspector finds an unpermitted structure and the lender asks questions.

The second reason is soil. Lubbock County sits on expansive clay with caliche below it. Structures that hold back soil carry real load here. The permit process forces an engineering review on the walls that need one, and that review is what keeps a wall standing.

The short version

Project	Permit in Lubbock?
Patio at grade	Generally no
Walkway or garden path	Generally no
Retaining wall 4 feet or less	No, unless it holds a surcharge
Retaining wall over 4 feet	Yes
Fence 7 feet or less	No
Driveway or sidewalk in the public right of way	Yes, separate permit
Outdoor kitchen with a gas line	Yes, gas permit
New landscape lighting circuit	Yes, electrical permit
Sprinkler system work	Licensed irrigator required by state law
Pergola or cabana over 200 square feet	Yes

Work that is exempt from a permit

Lubbock's building code lists specific work that does not need a permit. These are the items that come up on hardscape projects. The list comes from Chapter 28, Article 28.05, Division 2 of the Lubbock Code of Ordinances.

Exempt work	The limit that applies
Retaining walls	Not over 4 feet, measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall. The exemption is lost if the wall supports a surcharge.
Fences	Not over 7 feet high.
Sidewalks and driveways	Not more than 30 inches above grade, not over a basement or story below, and not part of an accessible route.
Detached accessory structures	One story, used as a shed or similar, floor area not over 200 square feet.
Playground equipment	Swings and similar equipment at detached one and two family homes.
Prefabricated pools	Less than 24 inches deep, not over 5,000 gallons, installed entirely above ground.

Important

An exemption is not permission to ignore the code. Lubbock's ordinance says so directly. Exempt work still has to meet every other rule that applies, including zoning, setbacks, drainage, and deed restrictions.

The surcharge trap on retaining walls

This is the rule most homeowners miss, and the one that causes the most trouble on Lubbock jobs.

A surcharge is any extra load sitting on the soil behind a wall. A driveway above the wall is a surcharge. So is a slope that keeps rising behind it, a parking area, a pool deck, or a structure footing nearby.

If your wall carries a surcharge, the height exemption no longer applies. A 3 foot wall holding back a driveway needs a permit. Many contractors quote that wall as exempt because they only check the height. That is how walls get built without the engineering they needed.

What triggers a permit

Trigger	What it means for your project
Height over 4 feet	Measured from the bottom of the footing, not from the ground you see. A wall that looks 3 feet tall can measure over 4 feet once the footing is included.
A surcharge behind the wall	Any load above or behind the wall removes the exemption at any height.

Trigger	What it means for your project
Work in the public right of way	Driveway approaches and street side sidewalks usually sit outside your property line.
New gas, electrical, or water lines	Outdoor kitchens, gas fire features, lighting circuits, and water lines each pull their own trade permit.
Structures over 200 square feet	Larger pergolas, cabanas, and pavilions pass the accessory structure exemption.

Driveways, approaches, and sidewalks

This is a separate permit from your building permit, and it catches people out. The strip of sidewalk running parallel to the street and the driveway approach at the curb are typically in the public right of way, not on your lot.

Lubbock's Chapter 36 rules require a construction permit from the building official before anyone constructs, reconstructs, repairs, alters, or replaces sidewalks, driveways, curbs, or gutters on a public street or alley. When that work happens separately from construction on the private property next to it, the applicant also has to post a performance bond with the city.

Practical effect: your backyard paver patio is usually exempt, but extending your driveway out to the street is not.

Trade permits on outdoor living builds

Hardscape projects stop being simple once utilities enter the picture. Lubbock's exemption lists are narrow here.

Feature	What it usually needs
Outdoor kitchen with a gas grill or burner	Gas permit. Only portable appliances and minor part replacement are exempt.
Gas fire pit or fire table, plumbed	Gas permit for the new line.
Wood burning fire pit, freestanding	No gas permit. Check your neighborhood rules and any burn restrictions.
Landscape lighting on a new circuit	Electrical permit. Only lamp replacement and plugging in approved portable equipment are exempt.
Outdoor sink or water line	Plumbing permit. New or rearranged water and drain lines are not ordinary repairs.
Sprinkler system moved for a patio	State law applies. See the next section.

Irrigation work is regulated by the state, not the city

Texas treats landscape irrigation as a licensed trade. Under state rules administered by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, a person may not sell, design, install, maintain, alter, repair, service, or inspect an irrigation system, or consult on those activities, unless they hold a TCEQ license.

This matters on hardscape jobs because patios and walkways regularly cut across existing sprinkler lines. Moving a single head or capping a zone is covered by the rule. Advertising irrigation services without a license is itself a violation.

Question to ask

Ask any hardscape contractor who will handle your sprinkler lines and for that person's TCEQ license number. If the answer is that a crew member will just move them, that is a problem worth knowing about before you sign.

Beyond the city code

A city permit is one layer. Three others catch Lubbock area projects.

Homeowners associations and deed restrictions

Many newer Lubbock subdivisions restrict materials, wall heights, structures, and colors. HOA approval is a separate process from the city and often takes longer. Start it first.

Floodplain and drainage

Hardscape adds impervious surface, which changes where water goes. If your lot sits in a mapped floodplain or drainage easement, expect additional review. Grading that pushes water onto a neighbor creates liability regardless of any permit.

Outside the city limits

Property in the county rather than inside Lubbock city limits falls under different authority, and rules vary. The same applies in Wolfforth and Shallowater, which run their own permitting. Confirm with the jurisdiction your address actually sits in, not the mailing city.

Before you break ground

Step	Why it matters
1. Call 811 for utility locates	Free, required, and it takes a few business days. Hitting a gas or fiber line is on whoever dug.
2. Confirm your property line	You need to know where your lot ends and the right of way begins before planning a driveway or front walkway.
3. Check your HOA rules	Approval here is often slower than the city.

Step	Why it matters
4. Confirm the permit scope with the city	Describe the full project, including any wall heights, structures, and utilities.
5. Get the wall height measured properly	From the bottom of the footing, and check for any surcharge.
6. Verify licensing for trade work	Gas, electrical, and plumbing permits generally have to be pulled by a licensed contractor. Irrigation requires a TCEQ license.
7. Keep the paperwork	Permits and final inspections become part of your resale file.

Where to confirm

Who	What they cover
City of Lubbock Building Safety Department	Building permits, retaining walls, structures, trade permits, inspections, and fee schedules.
City of Lubbock, right of way permitting	Driveway approaches, street side sidewalks, curbs, and gutters.
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality	Landscape irrigator licensing and irrigation system rules.
Texas 811	Utility locates before any excavation.
Your HOA or property management company	Deed restrictions, materials, and design approval.

Need help working out what your project needs?

Hubcity Landscaping builds hardscape across Lubbock, Wolfforth, and Shallowater. We will walk your property, tell you which parts of your project need a permit, and give you a written scope before any work starts. Call +1 (806) 705-8064 for a free property assessment.

Sources: City of Lubbock Code of Ordinances, Chapter 28 Article 28.05 Division 2 (work exempt from permit) and Chapter 36 Article 36.04 (sidewalks, curbing, driveways, and gutters); Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, landscape irrigator licensing requirements; Texas 811.

This document is general information for Lubbock area property owners and is current as of August 2026. It is not legal or engineering advice, and it does not replace confirmation from the City of Lubbock. Codes and fee schedules change. Verify every requirement with the relevant authority before starting work. Hubcity Landscaping accepts no liability for decisions made on the basis of this guide.

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