

Setbacks: Basic Facts

A setback is defined as the required minimum separation between a property line (and/or right-of-way line) and a building or structure.



The following Q&A has basic facts on what setbacks are, why they are important, and how to locate them. For setback requirements specific to Oshtemo Township, see the Q&A titled Setbacks: Oshtemo Township.

Q – What is a setback?

A – A setback is a building restriction that defines the distance from a property line wherein a structure is not allowed to be built. In essence, setbacks tell you where you can and can't build something. Required setbacks can vary based on a property's zoning district, the type of road a property is alongside, and the type of structure. Most properties have front yard setbacks, side yard setbacks, and rear yard setbacks.

Q – Why do setbacks matter?

A – Property setbacks help everyone live comfortably and can be considered the breathing space between properties. Not only do they help create the character of a built environment, but they also help ensure better services, ventilation, lighting, landscaping, provide a level of privacy, and a separation between uses. In essence, setbacks are implemented not only for aesthetics but also for the health, safety, and welfare of a community.

Q – How are setbacks measured?

A –Setbacks are measured from the property line to an established horizontal distance inward, toward the interior of a property. See setback illustration on the back of this page for more information.

Q – Where is my front property line?

A – It is common for curbs, sidewalks, and edge of roadways to be perceived as the front property line; however, the edge of the public right-of-way is the front property line.

Q – What is a public right-of-way?

A – A public right-of-way is an area which is owned or controlled by a governmental entity. Most public rights-of-way include roadways, mowed or gravel edge, sidewalks, drainage swales, utilities, etc. The location of public rights-of-way can differ. On most local two-lane roads in Kalamazoo County, the right-of-way is approximately 33' from the center of the road.

Q – Who is responsible for locating my property lines? How can I find them?

A – Homeowners are responsible for verifying the location of their property lines. Many properties have metal pins marking the corners. Oshtemo Township's website has an interactive map showing property lines on an aerial photo that may help you locate the metal pins. Here is a link to the interactive map: <https://oshtemotwp.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=4910d3f4a3e2424ba941101be7c48bb9>. Property dimensions in the legal description of your property may also be helpful in locating the metal pins. To ensure that property lines are accurately located, hire a land surveyor to locate and mark your property lines. There are many land surveyors in the area.

Q – Who can I contact with questions about setbacks?

A – Contact Oshtemo Township's Zoning Administrator, Colten Hutson. Colten can be reached by email at chutson@oshtemo.org or by phone at (269) 375-4260.

Check out our other fact sheets for Setbacks: Oshtemo Township, Pools, Accessory Buildings, and Fences.

Setback Diagram

