



# City of Santa Barbara Permeable Gravel Driveway Guidance



## BACKGROUND

In urban areas, impervious (hardscape) surfaces such as conventional driveways, roads, and pavement prevent storm water (rain) from soaking into the soil (infiltration). This causes storm water to quickly flow into storm drains, carrying pollution into our creeks and ocean untreated. This runoff can harm water quality and aquatic habitats.

## OBJECTIVE

Allowing storm water to infiltrate into the ground on-site will improve water quality in our creeks and ocean, recharge groundwater, and reduce urban flash flooding, while reducing gravel movement into the public right-of-way to minimize damage to roadways and protect public safety.

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Many common permeable surfaces are allowed and can be referenced in the City Stormwater BMP Guidance Manual. The City encourages the use of permeable surfaces (like gravel or specialized pavers) instead of traditional hardscape. This guidance outlines acceptable types of permeable driveways, including:

- Gravel driveways
- Ribbon driveways
- Unconventional permeable pavers
- Gravel block driveways

## APPROVAL

This document is for guidance only; final approval is at the City's discretion. A waiver from existing Transportation standards is required for permeable gravel driveways within 100 feet of the public right-of-way. Review fees\* for processing a waiver will be assessed during the building permit review as follows:

- Small projects (<30 minutes review) \$90.
- Medium projects (30 min–4 hours review) \$264.
- Large projects (>4 hours review) \$702.

*Typical residential permits are medium projects.*

*\* Fees subject to change every Fiscal Year.*

## PERMITTING

Permeable gravel driveways and other forms of partially paved driveways may be permissible under certain circumstances with approval from City staff across multiple departments/divisions, including:

- Planning
- Fire
- Transportation
- Creeks
- Engineering

## FACTORS CONSIDERED FOR WAIVER APPROVAL

City staff will consider:

- Fire Department access to nearby structures
- Slope of driveway
- Speed and volume of adjacent vehicle traffic (low volume and speed preferred)
- Adjacent bicycle and pedestrian use (low preferred)
- Type of land use (high vehicle trip demand or on-site loading may affect approval)
- Length of hard and stable surface into property from back-of-public sidewalk (not including sidewalk width or driveway apron)
- Compaction of gravel
- Permeability

*Updated November 2025*

CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS

GRAVEL DRIVEWAYS:

- Minimum 6-8 inches of compacted aggregate
- Washed open-graded angular (crushed) aggregate
- Minimum rock size 3/4 inch
- No binders or top layers
- Subgrade left uncompacted or not compacted >90%
- No filter fabrics under gravel

RIBBON DRIVEWAYS:

- Material between ribbons cannot be loose material that can enter the public right-of-way
- Permeable gravel between ribbons can qualify if it meets gravel driveway specifications

UNCONVENTIONAL PERMEABLE PAVER DRIVEWAYS\*:

- Large custom paver blocks with wider gaps
- Gaps can be filled with gravel, larger rock, or planted
- Base should meet gravel driveway specifications

\*See the City’s Stormwater BMP Guidance Manual Tables 6-28 (Permeable Pavement Design Criteria) and 6-29 (Permeable Paver Joint Sizing)

GRAVEL BLOCK DRIVEWAYS:

- Grid structure (hexagonal or waffle) to support gravel, improve lateral stability, and reduce off-tracking of gravel
- May allow shorter hardscape extension

**DRIVEWAY APRONS** are the end of the driveway between the street and public sidewalk.

**HARD AND STABLE SURFACES** may be required on private property from the property line into the property to reduce gravel movement into the public right-of-way. Hard and stable surfaces include concrete, asphalt, conventional permeable and non-permeable pavers, etc. See tables below for hard stable surface length requirements.

PERMEABLE GRAVEL DRIVEWAYS ON RESIDENTIAL STREETS [\(VIEW MAP\)](#)

Slope	0-5%	5-10%	10-20%	>20%
Hard & stable surface length into property	0 ft	5–10 ft	10–25 ft (requirements may apply)	Permeable gravel not recommended (100 ft of ROW)

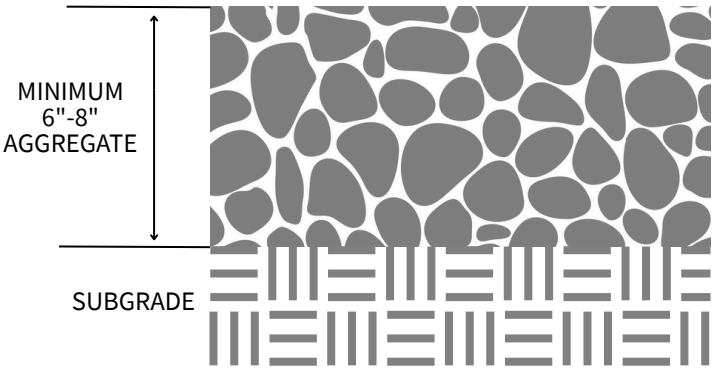
PERMEABLE GRAVEL DRIVEWAYS ON MAJOR AND MINOR COLLECTOR STREETS [\(VIEW MAP\)](#)

Slope	0-5%	3-6%	6-9%	7-10%	10-20%	>20%
Hard & stable surface length into property	3–6 ft	6–12 ft	12-18 ft	18-25 ft	25 ft (requirements may apply)	Gravel not recommended

RIBBON DRIVEWAYS IF GRAVEL IS USED BETWEEN RIBBONS

Slope	0-5%	3-6%	6-9%	7-10%	10-20%	>20%
Hard & stable surface length into property	0 ft	3 ft	6 ft	12 ft	18 ft (requirements may apply)	25 ft

SAMPLE GRAVEL DRIVEWAY CROSS-SECTION



SAMPLE DRIVEWAY LAYOUT

