



PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAY

What is it and what are the rules?

What is the Right-of-Way?

Think of it as your property with a permanent Town easement (in most cases). Right-of-way (ROW) is needed for the Town, and others, to provide you with many important services. Town ROW may accommodate water lines, water meters, sewer lines, storm water lines, storm water ditches, culverts, catch basins, manholes, sewer lift stations, street signs, power poles, streetlights, sidewalks, paths, trails, and public and private property access.

Because the ROW can contain so many important pieces of infrastructure, there are restrictions on what may be within the ROW. First, no structure or landscaping should be constructed or placed within the ROW that is inconsistent with its basic purposes as a place for utilities and for vehicular and pedestrian circulation. Second, there should not be anything in the ROW that would prevent town staff from access for routine maintenance and emergency repairs. There are also restrictions on what work a homeowner can perform within the ROW. This is for the safety of the homeowner and the public and for the protection of the infrastructure.

How big is the ROW in front of my house?

Portions of the Town of Coupeville were platted well over 100 years ago, and the ROWs are of differing widths, although generally 60 or 66 feet wide. If you don't have a survey of your property handy, the best way to get an idea about the size of your ROW would be to look at Island County's online GIS maps. While not as exact as a survey, the ROW's shown are fairly accurate and measurable through the County's application.

<https://islandcountygis.maps.arcgis.com/home/index.html>

What am I allowed to put in the ROW?

An approved driveway with culvert if needed, a mailbox, grass, gravel and asphalt for a driveway.

What is not allowed in a ROW?

Some, but not all, things prohibited in the ROW are fences, landscape, large landscape rocks, walls, concrete driveways, abandoned vehicles, commercial vehicles, recreation vehicles, boats, vegetation that hangs over into the ROW, construction supplies, landscape supplies, commercial signs, and any type of building. Also, the stormwater ditch that may be located along the edge of the street is part of the Town's overall stormwater utility conveyance and treatment network. Filling in or culverting the stormwater ditch is not allowed without prior review and approval by the Town.

Why does my neighbor have a fence, tree, boat...(insert complaint here) in their ROW and I can't have the same in mine?

We don't know why it's there. It was not authorized to be there. If there is an emergency the fence, tree, boat...(insert unauthorized item here) will be removed, probably damaged or destroyed, and not replaced or restored by the town. We stop unauthorized activity in the ROW when we see it. If you see unauthorized activity or items in the ROW, please report to Town Hall. It's cheaper and easier for the homeowner to stop the unauthorized installation of a fence, tree...(you know the drill) than to remove it after the fact. We will also require removal of items if they become a safety issue, are in the way of town maintenance, create sight obstruction for drivers and pedestrians or we get complaints from neighbors.

If I'm planning to work in the ROW, when do I need a work in ROW permit?

Almost always. The point of a ROW permit is to ensure that public safety is maintained, investments in infrastructure are not harmed, and that the ROW is ultimately restored to its pre-construction condition or better without cost to taxpayers.

How much does a work in ROW permit cost and how long does it take to get one?

There is a \$100 base fee and \$50 per inspection during the work. When constructing a new building, the ROW permit should be turned in with the building permit. Permits for simple work in the ROW are usually approved within a day or two. You may be required to call for utility locates before you begin work, for your safety and the safety of the infrastructure. It is your responsibility to repair any damage caused by you or your contractor and this type of repair is costly. It's easier and safer to know before you dig. The town staff will help you out whenever possible. If you're just installing a new mailbox, a permit may not be required. Same for spreading new gravel on your driveway. Public Works staff almost always make same day inspections when called so as not to hold your work up. But please, always ask about a permit first before starting the work.

What's the deal with those water meter boxes in the ROW?

The water meter box, the water meter and the shut off valve are the property of the town. They are expensive, please don't touch them. This means do not turn your own water off at the meter, don't remove the radio cap, don't cut the wires because you think there is something wrong with it, don't try to "turn the numbers back because you couldn't pay your water bill" and all the many other things people have tried to do to their water meter. If you break it, you will pay to repair or replace it. If you need your water turned off because of a leak or want it turned off when you go on vacation, the Public Works staff is happy to do it for you, the same day if necessary. If you want to be able to turn the water off to your home, you must install your own shut off valve on your side of the meter.

Why does my neighbor mow his ROW?

Because your neighbor is a great guy/gal and we appreciate their help! It takes three full-time Public Works employees, running three mowers and weed eaters, THREE WEEKS to make the complete rotation of all parks, open spaces, and ROW's. As soon as they finish a rotation, they start all over again. This goes on for about four months or until the grass stops growing. If the ROW mowing and weed eating were done by each homeowner, it would take town staff only ONE week to mow and trim all of the town owned land. Mowing and trimming ROW is not good use of taxpayer money, keeps staff from doing other important work, and is not typically done by other municipalities. In fact, other cities require the homeowner to take care of everything in the ROW "from yard to street edge" including sidewalks, street trees, and ditches. We don't plan to go that far but we will be updating our code and holding public meetings this winter to make the change to require all homeowners to mow the ROW on their own property. Anyone who wants to get an early start and help us by mowing and trimming their ROW this spring will be our heroes!

What else can we do to help?

So wonderful of you to ask! Please don't block lift stations and generators by parking in areas clearly marked 'no parking'. Don't park on top of meter boxes, paths and sidewalks...yes, people really do this. Don't leave abandoned vehicles in ROW. Don't store boats and RV's in the ROW. Keep your ROW clear so town staff can mow, read meters, and easily access utility lines for repair and maintenance. Thank you for taking the time to learn about right-of-ways and for taking good care of yours!

Molly Hughes

Molly Hughes
Mayor, Town of Coupeville