DECK BUILDERS OTTAWA

Zoning & Setbacks

How Ottawa's Zoning By-laws 2008-250 and 2026-50 treat decks: projections into yards, setbacks, privacy screens, and minor variances

4 Expert Answers from Deck IQ

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Q1

Deck in a shallow front yard in Vanier: height rules?

Front-yard decks in Vanier sit under two overlapping sets of rules: the City of Ottawa's permit triggers and the zoning projection limits in both By-law 2008-250 and By-law 2026-50, with the more restrictive provision from each applying to any permit application deemed complete on or after March 11, 2026.

Permit trigger first

The City of Ottawa says a permit is required if the deck is attached to or adjacent to the house and its walking surface is more than 600 mm (24 in.) above the adjacent grade. A permit is also required if the deck is an elevated deck providing principal access to the building, regardless of height. A deck at or below 600 mm above grade on a non-principal entrance is listed among projects not requiring a permit, but the City is clear that exempt projects must still comply with the Ontario Building Code and the Zoning By-law, and that heritage properties are not subject to the exemptions. Confirm whether your property carries a Heritage District Overlay with the City's Building Code Services before assuming the low-deck exemption applies.

Both by-laws set limits for decks projecting into a front yard. Under 2008-250 section 65 and 2026-50 section 204, an uncovered, unenclosed deck or platform with a walking surface not higher than 0.6 metres above adjacent grade may project into the front yard by the greater of 2 metres or 50 per cent of the required front yard, but no closer than 1 metre to the property line. In all other cases, meaning a covered deck or one whose walking surface is above 0.6 metres, the maximum projection is 2 metres and the minimum setback from any lot line is 1 metre. Under 2026-50, a deck may also have a maximum of two enclosed sides; sides covered by canopies or awnings are not counted toward that limit.

On a shallow front yard, measure the required front yard for your specific lot and zone, then apply the most restrictive provision from both by-laws. The City can confirm the required yard depth and zone for your address.

If the walking surface ends up more than 600 mm above the adjacent surface within 1.2 metres of any open edge, the 2024 Ontario Building Code requires a guard on that side. For an exterior deck serving one dwelling unit with a walking surface not more than 1 800 mm above finished ground, the guard must be at least 900 mm high. The guard's openings must not allow a 100 mm sphere to pass through, and no member or opening between 140 mm and 900 mm above the walking surface may facilitate climbing; horizontal rails between those heights can facilitate climbing, which is what that Ontario rule targets.

Anyone digging footing holes must submit a locate request through Ontario One Call at least 5 business days before starting; it is free and required by the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012.

When comparing quotes, ask each builder to spell out exactly which line items are included in the price, because railings, stairs, removal of an existing structure, permit drawings and the foundation type are the places a front-yard deck quote can look lower than it turns out to be.

Q2

How close to my side lot line can an Ottawa deck sit?

The answer depends on your deck's height above grade, which yard it sits in, and which of Ottawa's two active zoning by-laws is more restrictive for your lot. Both Zoning By-law 2008-250 and Zoning By-law 2026-50 apply to permit applications deemed complete on or after March 11, 2026, and the most restrictive provisions from each by-law govern.

What the zoning rules say

For a deck with a walking surface no higher than 0.6 metres above adjacent ground, both by-laws agree: in the interior side yard and rear yard there is no minimum setback and no maximum projection. In the front yard or exterior side yard, the deck may project the greater of 2 metres or 50 per cent of the required yard, but no closer than 1 metre to the property line.

For any other deck, meaning one whose walking surface is higher than 0.6 metres above grade, the rules are different. Zoning By-law 2026-50 section 204 sets a minimum setback of 1 metre from any lot line and a maximum projection of 2 metres into the yard. Zoning By-law 2008-250 section 65 Table 65 row (6) sets the same figures in that situation. Because both by-laws land on the same numbers here, the result is a 1 metre minimum setback from the lot line in the interior side yard.

Two additional provisions in 2026-50 are worth checking for your lot. First, for residential buildings, a deck projecting into the rear yard above the first floor is subject to restrictions based on lot depth: no projection at all on lots 23.5 metres deep or less, and a maximum projection of 1.2 metres on lots between 23.5 and 30.5 metres deep. Second, on lots zoned N1 to N6, a deck or balcony within 1.5 metres of an interior side lot line and above the first floor requires a 1.5 metre high opaque screen facing that lot line.

There is also a question of how a deck counts toward soft-landscaping minimums. Zoning By-law 2026-50 defines a deck as hard landscaping, so it does not count toward any soft-landscaped area your zone requires. Whether a standalone deck counts toward accessory-structure area limits is not settled in the by-law wording, so confirm that point with the City.

A few things to confirm before you finalise the design: the exact zone your lot sits in, the required yard depths in that zone, the lot depth, and whether any rear-yard setback provisions in 2026-50 are among the portions still under appeal at the Ontario Land Tribunal. The City can tell you which rules are in force for your specific address.

On the permit side, a deck attached to the house with a walking surface more than 600 mm (24 in.) above adjacent grade requires a building permit. The permit drawings must show the deck dimensioned to all property lines, so the setback is documented before a single post goes in.

Before work starts, have three things on paper: a complete set of scaled, dimensioned drawings that show the setbacks and the permit number issued by the City, and a written contract that sets out the full scope and the price.

Q3

Rear deck above the first floor on a narrow Glebe lot: allowed?

A rear deck above the first floor on a narrow Glebe lot is where zoning gets specific. For applications deemed complete on or after March 11, 2026, both By-law 2008-250 and By-law 2026-50 apply, with the more restrictive provision winning.

What the zoning rules say

Zoning By-law 2026-50 section 204 sets out the key limits for features projecting into rear yards above the first floor on residential buildings. On a lot 23.5 metres deep or less, no projection above the first floor is permitted into the rear yard at all. On a lot between 23.5 and 30.5 metres deep, a maximum projection of 1.2 metres is allowed. Measure your actual lot depth to know which case applies.

Section 204 also requires that if your deck or balcony is on a lot zoned N1 to N6 and projects into the rear yard, a 1.5 metre high opaque screen facing an interior side lot line must be in place within 1.5 metres of that lot line. Confirm your zone with the City.

On top of that, section 204 limits the feature to a maximum of two enclosed sides. By-law 2008-250 has its own version of the rear-projection rule for some zones, and the more restrictive result of the two applies.

A few other things to check for your specific lot:

- The exact zone designation and subzone (N1 through N6 each have their own provisions)
- Whether any part of 2026-50 affecting your lot's rear yard setback is still under appeal at the Ontario Land Tribunal, since some rear yard provisions in Neighbourhood subzones remain contested as of July 2026

- Whether your property is in a Heritage District Overlay, which is not subject to the permit exemptions

On the permit side, a deck attached to the house with a walking surface more than 600 mm (24 in.) above adjacent grade requires a building permit from the City of Ottawa regardless of size. Measure the walking surface against that 600 mm test. The City's first review target is 5 business days, and three inspections are required: excavation and foundations, framing, and final.

Because the lot is narrow, the interior side yard setbacks also matter. Section 204 sets a minimum 1 metre setback from a lot line and a maximum 2 metre projection in cases not covered by the lower-deck or uncovered-unenclosed rules. On a narrow lot, that 1 metre minimum can be a real constraint on deck width.

The most useful step before drawing anything is to call the City of Ottawa with your municipal address and ask them to confirm the applicable zone, lot depth, and which provisions of both by-laws apply to a rear deck above the first floor on your property.

If you want to hear from local Ottawa deck builders who know the Glebe, the request form on this site sends your details to builders listed in the Ottawa Construction Network directory.

Q4

Can my Westboro deck project into the side yard?

Whether your Westboro deck can project into the side yard depends on which side (interior or exterior), how high the walking surface sits above grade, and whether the deck is covered. For applications deemed complete on or after March 11, 2026, both Zoning By-law 2008-250 and By-law 2026-50 apply, and the more restrictive provision from each wins.

Here is how the rules break down.

For an uncovered, unenclosed deck with a walking surface no higher than 0.6 metres above adjacent grade, both by-laws agree: in the interior side yard there is no minimum setback and no maximum projection limit. That is the most permissive scenario. In the exterior side yard (the side facing a street on a corner lot), the deck may project the greater of 2 metres or 50 per cent of the required yard, but no closer than 1 metre to the property line.

Under both by-laws a deck may have a maximum of two enclosed sides. For any other deck, meaning one that is covered or has a walking surface higher than 0.6 metres above grade, Zoning By-law 2026-50 section 204 sets a minimum setback of 1 metre from any lot line and a maximum projection of 2 metres into the yard. For residential buildings, a deck projecting into the rear yard above the first floor has further limits that depend on lot depth. A 1.5 metre high opaque screen facing an interior side lot line may also be required within 1.5 metres of that line on those N1 to N6 lots.

A few things to confirm before you finalise your design:

- Which zoning subzone applies to your specific lot in Westboro, since N1 to N6 rules vary
- Whether your lot depth triggers the rear-yard projection limits in 2026-50 section 204
- Whether any part of 2026-50 affecting your lot is still under appeal at the Ontario Land Tribunal, since some rear yard setback provisions in certain Neighbourhood subzones remain unsettled
- Whether a building permit is required: if the walking surface will be more than 600 mm (24 in.) above adjacent grade and the deck is attached to the house, a permit is required under the City of Ottawa's rules

The City can confirm the exact zoning rules for your address. If the design does not fit within the permitted projections, a minor variance through the Committee of Adjustment is the formal route, though we cannot predict whether one would be granted.
Before work starts, make sure you have the dimensioned drawings showing the deck's position relative to all property lines, the building permit in hand if one is required, and a written contract that sets out the full scope and price. Those three documents together are what protect you if questions come up mid-project.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Deck Builders Ottawa. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified contractors and your local building authority (the City of Ottawa's Building Code Services) before starting any deck project. Decks in Ottawa are built under the 2024 Ontario Building Code (O. Reg. 163/24) and the City's permit and zoning rules. Information is current as of November 15, 2026 and may change. Visit **deckbuildersottawa.ca** for the latest answers.