

Whether we've been in Westmoreland all our lives, thirty years, or three years, one of the main attractions of the town, and the state, is the idea that living here, owning property here, lets us live free. New Hampshire has a reputation as a place where you can pretty much do as you like with your own property. Mostly this is true. But there are some hoops you have to jump through, even here, in order to do as you like with your property.

Many of these strictures are encoded in state law. The town, and the planning board which is charged with managing these situations, does not actually have leeway in agreeing or not agreeing to these actions. Some are town ordinances, which the townspeople have voted into existence. So when you set out to build or add to your house, place something right at the edge of your property, and many other changes one considers making to an existing piece of land, it is a useful first step to inform yourself about existing laws and procedures for doing that thing.

The first step is knowing where your parcel is. Not just the address but the town zone it is located in. This is noted on your tax bill under property description on your paper copy or on the town website under the tax cards tab. Under searches (top left corner) choose Owner name, scroll to the initial and click on your name. Choose the land tab and your Zone is listed.

Once you know your property zone, you will want to know what is allowed in that zone. You'll find all the town ordinances under <boards and Departments-planning and zoning> on the [Town of Westmoreland](#) website. Once you have opened the ordinances, go to Article V which has the tables for each zone which lists all things that are permitted with your property. It also lists additional things you may be able to do if you get a special exception from the Zoning Board.

At the bottom of your zone table are the requirements that must be followed for your lot. For example, minimum yard setback means no structures can be placed on your property within the setback area.

The front section of the Ordinance Book defines common land terms and lists specific rules which apply in specific circumstances. The easiest way to find something that applies to your project would be to do a word search. When viewing online, click on the "magnifying glass" icon at the top of the page and enter a for a key word related to your project. For example, setback. This brings you to ordinances that show you can have a shared driveway cross a setback but a portable shed must be 20' from side and back yards and honor front setback. This would include the fabric covered storage units that are becoming so popular.

Of course first, before any project you will likely need a zoning permit. This comes from the Zoning Administrator, Laurie Burt who will be glad to discuss your plans and let you know if there are any issues or additional steps you need to take.

The creation of any of the ordinances that Westmoreland crafted - remember, many of these laws originate with the state - is guided by the citizens' own wishes and intension as expressed in the Master Plan (also available under the Planning and Zoning section of the website). They are voted on by the citizens via ballot during the annual town election in March.

Over and over again the vision of the town as an essentially rural place, and a beautiful, natural place comes through loud and clear. So when you read through the regulations for adding to your building or putting up another building on your site you see some rules that come from the state (Septic system requirements, for example) and some that the town has voted into law. For example: "In granting a Special Exception, the Board of Adjustment must find that the ADU is developed in a manner which does not alter the character or appearance of the lot as a one family residential lot."

In conclusion: the rules by which the town permits development or changes to an existing property are governed either by state law or ordinances which the citizens of the town have voted into existence. The Planning Board works to make these ordinances clear and readily available. You have the opportunity to weigh in and contribute to these laws by participating in town affairs. Other than that, we all are responsible to observe the rules we ourselves have made.

The Westmoreland Planning Board