



**CITY OF LAGUNA NIGUEL**  
Community Development Department  
30111 Crown Valley Parkway  
Laguna Niguel, CA 92677  
949-362-4300  
[www.cityoflagunaniguel.org](http://www.cityoflagunaniguel.org)

## **GRADING PERMIT & INSPECTIONS GUIDE – FORM 302**

The following information is intended to provide a general summary of the City of Laguna Niguel (City) Grading Permit and subsequent inspection processes. Please contact the Planning Division to obtain any additional information and guidance as needed.

### **GRADING PERMIT REQUIREMENT:**

A grading permit is required for all earthwork performed within the City. Exceptions to this requirement are generally limited as follows, please contact City staff for additional details:

1. An excavation below finished grade for basement and footings for a building, retaining wall, swimming pool, or other structure authorized by a valid building permit. This shall not exempt any fill made with the material from such excavation nor exempt any excavation having an unsupported height greater than five feet after the completion of such structure. The City Building Official may require a Geotechnical/Soils Report for foundation design and inspections purposes.
2. Excavation and backfill for installation of underground utilities by public utilities or companies operating under the authority of a franchise or public property encroachment permit issued by the Laguna Niguel Public Works Department.
3. Exploratory excavations under the direction of Soils Engineers or Engineering Geologists, provided all excavations are properly backfilled. All such excavations and trenches are subject to the applicable sections of Cal/OSHA - Title 8 regulations.
4. An excavation which does not exceed 50 cubic yards on any one property and which is less than two feet (2') in vertical length, with a slope face no steeper than 2:1 (horizontal:vertical ratio).
5. A fill less than one foot (1') in depth placed on natural grade with a slope flatter than 5:1, which does not exceed 50 cubic yards on any one property and does not obstruct a drainage course.
6. A fill less than three feet (3') in depth and on flat ground, which does not exceed 50 cubic yards on any one property and does not obstruct a drainage course.
7. Pavement surfacing which does not exceed 3,000 square feet on natural or existing grade for the purpose of a private road or parking lot (commercial, industrial, or residential multi-family). Resurfacing or maintenance of existing paved surfaces are also exempt.



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## **GRADING PERMIT SUBMITTAL:**

### **Pre-Application Conference**

When requested by an Applicant (e.g., owner, grading contractor, or designee), a pre-submittal conference may be held with the City staff and/or the City's third-party geotechnical consultant to discuss the project prior to initial submittal. Requests for a pre-submittal conference may be made through the Planning Division. Prior to the conference, an engineering review deposit must be made with the Planning Division.

### **Grading Permit Submittal & Plan Check Review Process**

Please see Form 140 (Grading Permit Application and Instructions). Following submittal of a Grading Permit application, the required submittal items will be reviewed by the City's third-party geotechnical consultant and the Planning Division (as applicable).

## **GRADING INSPECTIONS:**

After issuance of a Grading Permit, several inspections are required by the City Grading Division (Grading Inspector) to ensure that all grading work is constructed as shown on the plans, with proper oversight from the Civil Engineer, Soils Engineer, and Geotechnical Engineer of record (as applicable).

The following are some typical required grading inspections. Please note that these are just some of the inspections that may be required, specific inspections are based on the scope of work and should be discussed with the Grading Inspector at the pre-grade meeting. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to contact the Grading Inspector to perform the required inspections.

### **1. INITIAL (PRE-GRADE MEETING)**

After obtaining a Grading Permit, a pre-grade meeting is required at the project site prior to commencing with any grading activity (including brush clearing in preparation for grading). To schedule a pre-grade meeting, please submit your request via email at [Grading@cityoflagunaniguel.org](mailto:Grading@cityoflagunaniguel.org). Please include in your email the Grading Permit number, address of the job, point of contact and their phone number, and a proposed pre-grade meeting date and time. A Grading Inspector will contact you to confirm the meeting date and time availability and any necessary or additional requirements within two business days.

The meeting provides an open forum for the discussion of the Grading Contractor's approved methods of construction, proposed erosion and sediment control measures, project entitlement conditions of approval (if applicable), and any other notable project aspects. During the meeting, the Grading Inspector will review the inspection request procedures, inspection sequence, and documentation required during the course of grading work.

The Applicant shall be responsible for providing the following at the pre-grade meeting:



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- a. City approved Grading Plan(s), Geotechnical/Soils Report(s), and Grading Permit (containing City stamps/signatures). Approved plans and reports are to be on the project site at all times and readily accessible to the Grading Inspector.
- b. City issued Encroachment Permit (if applicable) for any proposed grading activities or improvements within the public right-of-way (e.g., sidewalks, driveway approaches, curbs/gutters, utilities, etc.).
- c. City approved Shoring Plan (if applicable) for any vertical cuts over five feet (5').
- d. A list of 24-hour emergency phone numbers of responsible parties related to the project.
- e. Proposed grading schedule, including tentative milestone dates (e.g., phasing, rough grade completion, final grade completion).
- f. Prior to importing or exporting any material to or from the project site, the Grading Contractor or designee shall submit plans and obtain an encroachment permit for a haul route from the Laguna Niguel Public Works Department, and any other applicable permits required for hauling through other adjacent cities or jurisdictions.

\* **Required Attendees:** Property Owner, Grading Contractor, Civil Engineer, Soils Engineer, Geologist, Grading Inspector, and when required: Archaeologist, Biologist, Paleontologist, and Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA).

General Requirements:

- a. The City issued Grading Permit Number for this site shall be referred to in all reports, certifications, and correspondence.
- b. Revisions to the approved Grading Plan(s) and Geotechnical/Soils Report(s) - Prior to starting any revised work, plans must be submitted, reviewed, and approved by the City, including the City's third-party geotechnical consultant. To submit, please provide one electronic copy (PDF via USB flash drive or FileShare/Transfer to [grading@cityoflagunaniguel.org](mailto:grading@cityoflagunaniguel.org)) of the following:
  - Revised Grading Plan(s),
  - Existing approved Grading Plan(s), and
  - Geotechnical review (Memo or Report) addressing the revised plans and their effect on the geotechnical recommendations.

Plan check review will be required of all revisions. A review deposit will be required to be paid at the time of submittal based on the project scope.



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- c. Work covered by this permit must conform to the Laguna Niguel Grading and Excavation Code, approved Grading Plan(s), and Geotechnical/Soils Report(s). Changes or inconsistent conditions found during an inspection may result in a STOP WORK/NOTICE OF VIOLATION. The Grading Inspector may refuse to approve further work until applicable revisions are approved which reflect the current conditions, or the existing conditions are modified per the approved plan(s) and report(s).
- d. Approved shoring, drainage provisions, and protective measures must be used to protect adjoining properties during construction.
- e. Construction hours are limited to Monday-Saturday 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (work is not permitted on Sundays and federal holidays).
- f. Refer to the City's Standard Grading Notes (found on the City of Laguna Niguel Grading webpage) for additional requirements prior to and during the course of grading work.
- g. Location for stockpiling of excess material shall be approved by the Grading Inspector prior to the start of excavation. Stockpiling and/or vehicle staging areas shall be located as far as practical from sensitive noise receptors (e.g., residential areas).
- h. A Grading Permit is valid for a period of two years from the date of issuance. Every permit issued shall expire by limitation and become null and void if the work authorized by such permit is not commenced within 180 days from the date of such permit or if the work authorized by such permit is suspended or abandoned at any time after the work is commenced for a period of 180 days.
- i. A separate building permit and inspection is required for the construction of all structures, including retaining walls. Temporary excavations must comply with Soils Engineer's recommendations and Cal/OSHA requirements.
- j. Prior to the start of any grading work, the limits of grading must be staked and erosion and sediment control devices (i.e., sandbags, silt fences, etc.) must be installed and maintained during the duration of construction per the approved plan. Clearing, brushing, and/or grading activities that encroach beyond the approved limits shown on the Grading Plan(s) is strictly prohibited.

## **2. EXCAVATION AND FILL INSPECTION(S)**

- a. Site Clearing  
After all brush and unsuitable material has been removed and an acceptable base has been exposed, but prior to any fill placement.

### ***Required Documentation:***

- Memo from Soils Engineer/Geologist approving area for fill.



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b. Toe Bench and Key

After suitable natural ground or bedrock is exposed, the bench or key must be excavated to design specifications, survey stakes are required to locate the toe of slope.

***Required Documentation:***

- Memo from Soils Engineer/Geologist approving buttress key.
- Memo from Soils Technician approving fill slope bench.

c. Over-Excavation

After an area has been excavated to remove unsuitable material, and prior to any fill placement, any planned structures requiring over-excavation must be staked for location.

***Required Documentation:***

- Memo from Soils Engineer/Geologist approving areas for fill.

d. Cut and Fill

Each working day of cut and/or fill, field memos for cut slopes and fill placement must be made available by the Soils Engineer/Geologist to the Grading Inspector, along with adequate engineered staking for limits of grading. Importing/exporting of soil may require traffic controls, flagman, and/or haul route clearance and/or permitting from the Laguna Niguel Public Works Department or other cities. All exported soil must be taken to another site having a current Grading Permit, or to a County dump/landfill.

e. Canyon/Buttress Subdrain

After filter fabric, gravel bedding, and pipe placement, but prior to covering pipe with gravel.

***Required Documentation:***

- Memo from Soils Technician approving specifications and placement of filter fabric, subdrain pipe, and gravel.

**3. RETAINING WALLS INSPECTION(S)**

a. Wall Subgrade

Prior to placing any wall material, the bench or subgrade to the area receiving the wall members must be inspected. Wall materials (concrete members, fabric, gravel, geogrid) shall be on site for inspection and engineered stakes must be set for wall location(s).

***Required Documentation:***

- Line and grade certification from Civil Engineer.
- Memo from Geotechnical Engineer approving excavation and all materials on site.

b. Subdrain

Prior to covering with rock and fabric.



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***Required Documentation:***

- Memo from Geotechnical Engineer.
- c. Geogrid  
At initial placement, and thereafter during placement.
- d. Fill and Wall Member Placement  
Daily inspection calls must be made during routine construction of wall once initial work above is completed. Memos from both the Civil and Geotechnical Engineers may be required if work warrants clarification.

**NOTE:** Full-time inspection by the Geotechnical Engineer is required during placement of wall materials and fill during the above-noted stages of wall construction. The Civil Engineer must incorporate and show all geotechnical and manufacturer specifications on the plans.

**4. ROUGH AND PRECISE GRADING INSPECTION(S)**

Rough and precise grade inspection clearance and submittal and approval of required documentation is needed prior to building permit issuance of any structures. Under normal circumstances all subdrains shall be in place and approved as a condition for grading release. This inspection may be called for as a partial release when portions of the grading work is being accomplished in stages, but must follow the requirements as noted below:

- a. Building Pads (for release of building permits)

***Field Requirement:***

- Grading to approximate final elevation.
- Witness stake and blue-top for each pad elevation shown on plan.
- Property corners, building corners (condominiums and single lot only), and top and toe of slope in accordance with the Grading Inspector's requirements.
- Terrace/downdrains on slopes or any significant drainage structures must be completed.

***Required Documentation:***

- Line and grade certification from Civil Engineer at time of field inspection.
- Memo from Soils Engineer at time of field inspection.
- Statement of Compliance (Rough Grading) from Grading Contractor (City form, Attachment C) or Statement of Compliance (Precise Grading) from Grading Contractor (City form, Attachment F).
- Rough Grading Certification from Civil Engineer (City form, Attachment D).
- Rough Grading Certification from Geotechnical Firm (City form, Attachment E).
- Geotechnical/Soils Report - A compaction report for the completed grading work must be submitted for review and approval prior to granting rough grade release of pads.



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- If required, pad elevation certification from Civil Engineer, Licensed Land Surveyor, or architect authorized by law to certify elevation information.

b. Retaining Wall Excavation (for release to Building Inspector)

The Building Inspector will not inspect and approve the steel in the foundation excavation until the Grading Inspector signs off the excavation for the wall on the approved plans.

***Field Requirement:***

- Off-set stakes set by Surveyor locating face of wall or foundation.
- The backcut for the wall and the foundation excavation must be made.

***Required Documentation:***

- Civil Engineer's certification for footing excavation location.
- Memo from Soils Engineer, include referenced reports and state if recommendations remain unchanged.

c. Foundation/Caisson Excavation

If conditions warrant, excavation work may be needed to extend foundations of planned structures into specific geologic strata, as required in the Geotechnical/Soils Report(s). This is not an inspection of any structural steel (required as a part of building permit).

At the time of this inspection, the excavations must be made and survey control stakes must be provided along with the following required paperwork.

***Required Documentation:***

- Memo from the Soils Engineer/Geologist.
- Line and grade certification from the Civil Engineer may be required for location of excavations.

**5. CONCRETE OR GUNITE DRAINAGE DEVICES INSPECTION(S)**

a. Terrace Drains, Downdrains, Brow Ditches, and Ribbon Gutters

Reinforcement and thickness control-wires must be in place at the time of inspection. For concrete or gunite placement, a minimum 2,500 P.S.I. required, load tickets from delivery truck must be available. Soil subgrade must be moistened prior to concrete placement, and reinforcement steel must be centered within concrete during placement of concrete.

***Required Documentation:***

- Memo from Soils Engineer approving area to receive concrete and if Type V concrete is needed.
- Line and grade certification from Civil Engineer.

b. Curb and Gutter

Required reinforcement (if any) must be in place with form-work in place. Off-set staking must be set by the Surveyor for location of curb face. Inspection(s) to be made prior to placement of concrete.





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***Required Documentation:***

- Memo from Soils Engineer approving area to receive concrete.
- Line and grade certification from Civil Engineer.

c. **Storm/Area Drains and Inlet Structures**

Only the drainage devices shown on the approved Grading Plan(s), not those shown on street or tract improvement plans approved with the Public Works Department. Reinforced Concrete Pipe (RCP) Delivery (if used) - Provide certificate of "D" load from manufacture. Prior to covering pipe placement with backfill, pipe must be staked by Civil Engineer for location. All pipe bells or connections shall be glued and face upstream.

***Required Documentation:***

- Line and grade certification from Civil Engineer.

*Pipe Collar/Anchor Forms:* Prior to concrete, with required reinforcement in place.

*Inlet/Junction Structure Forms:* With required reinforcement in place.

*Outlet Structure/Riprap:* Prior to placing concrete or gunite, with the required reinforcement in place.

***Required Documentation:***

- Line and grade certification from Civil Engineer.

**6. SLAB PAVEMENT INSPECTION(S)**

Portland cement concrete (PCC) slab pavements for driveways used as drainage devices and parking lots).

a. **Forms**

Required reinforcement and forms be in place at the time of inspection.

***Required Documentation:***

- Memo from Soils Engineer approving area to receive concrete and if Type V concrete is needed.
- Line and grade certification from Civil Engineer.

b. **Concrete Placement**

Minimum 2,500 P.S.I. required. Load tickets from delivery truck must be available. Soil subgrade must be moistened prior to concrete placement and reinforcement steel must be centered within concrete during placement of concrete.

**7. PAVING INSPECTION(S)**

PRE-PAVING MEETING REQUIRED (for all commercial sites, and for driveways or asphalt placement exceeding 3,000 square feet)





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A pre-paving meeting shall be held prior to the establishment of subgrade when required by the Grading Inspector. The project coordinator must contact the Inspector at least four working days in advance and must also contact the following principals to be represented at the meeting: Paving Contractor, Civil Engineer, Owner, and Soils Engineer. The required inspections for paving shall be discussed at that meeting.

## **8. FINAL GRADING INSPECTION(S)**

A final (precise) grading inspection may be requested when all work shown on the approved Grading Plan(s) is complete, including drainage device installation, swales, driveways, monumentation, and slope planting. All excess dirt, trash and construction debris is required to be removed from the site.

### ***Required Documentation:***

- Statement of Compliance (Final Grading) from Grading Contractor (City form, Attachment F).
- Final Grading Certification from Civil Engineer (City form, Attachment G).
- Complete record of all field and laboratory tests including location and elevation of all field tests.
- Final line and grade certification from the Civil Engineer.
- Final Geotechnical/Soils Report from the Geotechnical Engineer summarizing all work after the rough grade report. Final reports must include interior and exterior utility trench backfill testing, retaining wall backfill testing, subgrade/base/asphalt testing and inspection, a slope stability statement, and any other geotechnical observation, testing, or condition that may have arisen. The final Geotechnical/Soils Report must also state the following: "Based upon our observations and tests, the project has been completed in conformance with our geotechnical recommendations, applicable provisions of the California Building Code and the Laguna Niguel Grading and Excavation Code." Report must be reviewed and approved by the City's third-party geotechnical consultant before any final can be given.
- If the site and/or grading work deviate from the approved Grading Plan(s), submittal and approval of As-Built Grading Plan(s) from the Civil Engineer is required. Timely submittal of As-Built Plan(s) in advance of requesting final grading inspection is strongly recommended (formal plan check review may be required depending on the scope and extent of revisions, which could delay final approval/occupancy).

### ***Other Requirements (as applicable):***

Slope Planting and Irrigation - All slopes and areas disturbed by grading, which are not covered by surface improvements, shall be planted in accordance with landscaping and irrigation plans approved by the City. Landscaping and irrigation of slopes shall be completed prior to approval of finish grading. A certification of completeness from the Landscape Architect is required.

Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) Clearance - Contact OCFA to meet any fuel modification requirements and have them notify the Grading Inspector when clearance is met.



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Planning Division Clearance - Approved discretionary permits (Site Development Permits, Coastal Development Permits, Minor Adjustments, Variances, etc.) and subdivisions (tract and parcel maps) that include conditions of approval related to earthwork or the Grading Permit are subject to inspection and clearance by the Laguna Niguel Planning Division. Review all related documents and condition to ensure they are met. Contact the Planning Division (Case Planner) ahead of time when such inspection requests or releases are needed.

Completion of Water Quality BMPs - Final inspection shall be made to verify completion and functionality of water quality BMPs per the approved Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP).

Recorded Tract and Parcel Maps - Lot and Tract corner monuments required of the recorded tract map must be inspected as a condition of finaling this permit, releasing the grading bond, and releasing all monumentation bonds. Prior to calling for this inspection, the monuments that are designated on the tract map as "to be set" must be located and flagged for inspection. A copy of the recorded tract map and a letter from the Civil Engineer, certifying the setting of the monuments, is required at time of inspection. Record of Survey: The Surveyor shall file a Record of Survey with the Orange County Surveyor's Office within 90 days after the setting of the required property corner monuments. The Applicant shall provide the City a mylar and a PDF copy of the Record Survey prior to issuance of building occupancy permit.

**Note:** A Grading Permit shall not be finalized and a grading bond shall not be released until all outstanding issues are complete. It is responsibility of the Applicant to maintain an active permit until requirements are met. Grading Permits that lapse and expire require a new Grading Permit submittal by the Applicant.