City of Peterborough
Site Alteration

2026 Application Guide

City of Peterborough | 500 George St. N., Peterborough, ON K9H 3R9
Under Site Alteration By-law No. 25-108

peterborough

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1.0 Introduction

This guide explains how to apply for a Site Alteration Permit under the City of Peterborough Site Alteration By-law No. 25-108 (passed September 22, 2025). It is written for property owners, developers, contractors and consultants. The By-law regulates activities that change the physical characteristics of land, such as placing or removing fill, removing topsoil and changing existing grades.

This guide is a summary. If anything in this guide differs from By-law 25-108, the By-law governs. Read the full By-law before you start work: Site Alteration By-law No. 25-108.

Accessible formats: this guide is available in an alternate format or with communication supports on request. See Section 9.1.

1.1 What Is a Site Alteration By-law?

Section 142 of the Municipal Act, 2001 allows a municipality to prohibit or regulate the placing or dumping of fill, the removal of topsoil and the alteration of the grade of land, to require a permit for these activities, and to attach conditions to a permit.

Under By-law 25-108, a site alteration is any activity that:

- alters the existing grade of a property;
- involves placing or dumping fill; or
- involves removing topsoil.

Fill includes soil, stone, concrete, sod, turf or any other material, alone or in combination, used to raise, lower or change the contours of the ground. It counts whether it comes from your property or from somewhere else, so material you move from one part of your lot to another is fill.

Unmanaged site alteration can cause:

- disruption of natural and engineered drainage;
- flooding or water pooling, including on neighbouring properties;
- sediment running into storm sewers and watercourses;
- loss of trees and other ecological functions; and
- damage to neighbouring properties and City infrastructure.

1.2 Objectives of the By-law

The By-law's objective is to prohibit or regulate site alteration so that it does not impair drainage, water quality or the natural features of properties. In applying the By-law, the City aims to:

- protect woodlands, wetlands, watercourses and other natural features;
- preserve existing drainage patterns and limit erosion and sedimentation;
- prevent impacts to neighbouring properties and municipal infrastructure such as roads and storm sewers; and
- support responsible development, including earlier site preparation with proper controls in place.

1.3 Who Administers the By-law

The By-law is administered by the Manager, Water Resources Systems and the Manager, Development Engineering (each referred to in this guide as "the Manager"). Applications are received through the City's Online Application Portal. Contact information is in Section 9.0.

2.0 When Is a Site Alteration Permit Required?

2.1 General Rule

No person may undertake a site alteration, and no owner may allow a site alteration on their property, except under a permit and in accordance with applicable law. A permit is required unless the activity is exempt under Section 2.2 or the By-law does not apply to it under Section 2.3.

2.2 Small-Scale Exemption

You do **not** need a permit if your work meets **every** condition in Table 1. If any one condition is not met, a permit is required.

Table 1: Small-scale exemption conditions

Item	Condition (all must be met)	By-law reference
1	Less than 10 m^3 of fill is placed, or less than 10 m^3 of soil is removed	Sections 10(i) and 10(j)
2	Fill is placed less than 150 mm above existing grade, or soil is removed less than 150 mm below existing grade, at every point	Sections 10(i) and 10(j)
3	The work covers an area of less than 500 m^2	Sections 10(i) and 10(j)
4	No change to existing grade within 0.60 m of any property line	Section 11(a)
5	No significant change to the location, direction or elevation of any watercourse, swale, ditch, open channel or part of a stormwater system that drains your property or a neighbouring property	Section 11(b)
6	No significant change to the drainage of neighbouring properties	Section 11(c)
7	No sediment will move from your property to adjacent properties	Section 11(d)

Conditions 4 to 7 are determined by the Manager. If you are unsure whether your work meets them, contact City staff before you start (Section 9.0).

Example: spreading 25 m^3 of fill 100 mm deep over 250 m^2 needs a permit. The depth and area are under the limits, but the volume is not.

Work that commonly stays under these limits includes planting gardens, trees or shrubs, topdressing or reseeding a lawn, and building fences, sheds, decks, patios or walkways, provided all seven conditions are met. Because sod and concrete count as fill, larger sodding or patio projects can exceed 10 m^3.

2.3 Activities the By-law Does Not Apply To

By-law 25-108 does not apply to:

- activities undertaken by a municipality or a local board of a municipality;
- removal of topsoil as an incidental part of a normal agricultural practice, including sod farming, greenhouse operations and horticultural nurseries;
- site alteration imposed as a condition of approval of a site plan, plan of subdivision or consent under section 41, 51 or 53 of the Planning Act, or required by a site plan or subdivision agreement under those sections;
- site alteration imposed as a condition of a development permit under section 70.2 of the Planning Act, or required by an agreement under that regulation;
- work by an electricity transmitter or distributor (as defined in the Electricity Act, 1998) to build or maintain a transmission or distribution system;
- work on land described in a licence for a pit or quarry, or a permit for a wayside pit or quarry, under the Aggregate Resources Act;
- work to lawfully establish, operate or enlarge a pit or quarry on land not designated under the Aggregate Resources Act where a pit or quarry is a permitted use under the zoning by-law;
- work that is an incidental part of drain construction under the Drainage Act or the Tile Drainage Act;
- work done under an administrative order issued by the City, including an order under this By-law; and
- work done under an order or permit issued by the City's Chief Building Official.

Note: stripping or relocating topsoil for resale or for construction site preparation is not an incidental part of normal agricultural practice and requires a permit. A Planning Act application that has not yet been approved does not exempt early grading; a permit is needed for any earthworks done before approval.

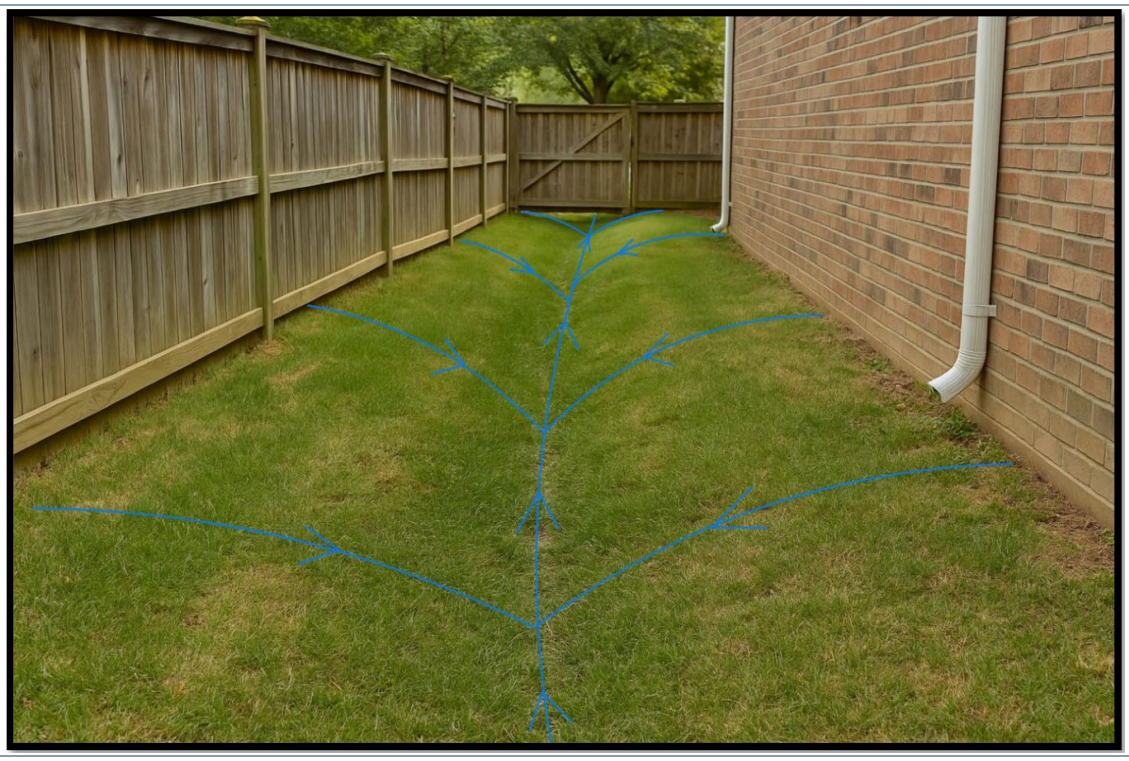
2.4 Key Considerations for Residential Properties

What is a swale?

A swale is a shallow, gently sloped channel that carries surface runoff. Most homes in Peterborough rely on rear and side yard swales, usually along property lines or fence lines, to:

- prevent water pooling and flooding;
- direct water to catch basins, storm sewers or natural features; and
- protect neighbouring properties from runoff.

Image 1: Side yard swale



Why you should not alter swales

Filling, blocking or regrading a swale, even by accident, can cause flooding of neighbouring yards, water entering basements, erosion and property damage, and can lead to enforcement action.

Swales must stay continuous, unobstructed and at their original or approved grade. Changes near a swale must maintain flow and may require a grading plan reviewed by the City.

Best practices when planning site work

- Keep all grade changes at least **0.60 m (2 feet)** from every property line and from all swales.
- If work must happen near a swale, hire a qualified professional to assess slope and flow.
- Never fill in a swale or reroute drainage without City approval.
- Remember that drainage is shared: water leaving your lot becomes your neighbour's water.

3.0 Permit Categories

Permits are grouped into three categories based on the volume of material moved and the area disturbed. City staff confirm the category when they review your application. Where the volume and the area point to different categories, the higher category applies.

Table 2: Permit categories

Category	Volume of material	Area disturbed	Typical examples
Minor	30 m^3 or less	Less than 500 m^2	Backyard landscape retrofit, patio with grade change, regrading near a property line, filling in a pool
Intermediate	More than 30 m^3 up to 500 m^3	500 m^2 to 5,000 m^2	Parking lots, small commercial sites, site preparation for a single dwelling
Major	More than 500 m^3	More than 5,000 m^2	Subdivisions, large commercial or industrial sites, major cut and fill

Minor also covers smaller work that does not qualify for the exemption in Section 2.2, for example less than 10 m^3 of fill placed more than 150 mm deep, or any grade change within 0.60 m of a property line.

3.1 Minor Alteration

Minor alterations need a completed online application and a simple, scaled site sketch. Full engineered drawings are not usually required, but staff may ask for a grading plan if drainage is a concern.

How to prepare a site sketch

Your sketch should show:

- property lines and building footprints;
- the proposed work (for example a concrete patio or landscaped area);
- existing features such as swales, catch basins, retaining walls, decks and fences;
- proposed grade changes in metres where you are changing slope or adding or removing fill (for example +0.30 m or −0.30 m);
- distances in metres to property lines and buildings, including the 0.60 m setback; and
- the direction of surface water flow, a north arrow and a scale (for example 1:100).

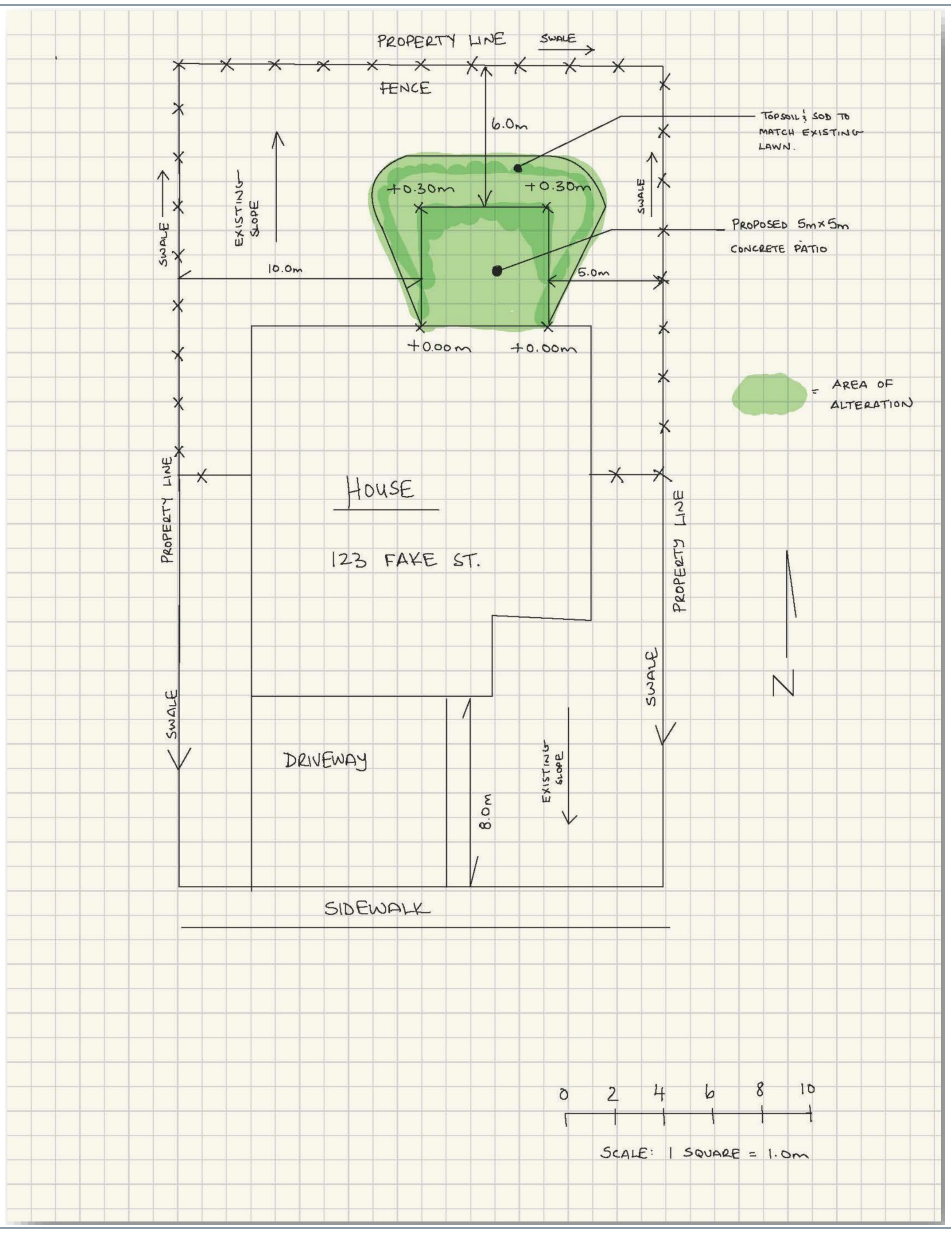
Tip: use graph paper or a digital drawing tool, and attach a recent survey or lot grading plan if you have one.

Example: backyard concrete patio

If you are installing a 5.0 m by 5.0 m concrete patio:

- show the patio dimensions and its location relative to the house and property lines;
- show nearby swales and keep at least 0.60 m from them and from every property line;
- note the finished elevation compared to existing (for example +0.30 m, or 0.00 m if matching existing grade); and
- show that water drains away from the house toward the designated drainage route.

Image 2: Example minor alteration sketch



3.2 Intermediate Alteration

Intermediate alterations move more than 30 m³ and up to 500 m³ of material, or disturb 500 m² to 5,000 m². Submissions include a grading plan, sediment and erosion control plan, soil characterization report and design brief prepared in accordance with the City's Engineering Design Standards, and a security deposit if required (see Table 3).

Note: some intermediate volumes, such as filling in a swimming pool, may be processed as a minor application. Contact staff to confirm.

3.3 Major Alteration

Major alterations move more than 500 m³ of material or disturb more than 5,000 m². Submissions are similar to site plan or subdivision approval and include geotechnical and hydrogeological studies, a grading plan, a

sediment and erosion control plan, a stormwater management report, a design brief, a haul route plan with mitigation measures, and an insurance certificate, prepared in accordance with the City's Engineering Design Standards.

Note: earthworks required as a condition of an approved site plan, plan of subdivision or consent, or by the related agreement, do not need a separate permit (Section 2.3). A permit is needed for earthworks done before that approval.

4.0 Application Process

4.1 Step 1: Pre-Consultation (Optional but Recommended)

Contact City staff (Section 9.0) to confirm whether your project needs a permit and which category applies.

4.2 Step 2: Prepare Your Application Package

The owner, or someone acting on behalf of all owners, prepares the package. The City may refuse to accept an application that is incomplete, is not made by or on behalf of all owners, is made by an individual who is a minor, or is made by a corporation that is not incorporated in Ontario and in good standing.

Table 3: Submission requirements

Submission item	Minor	Intermediate	Major
Completed online application	Required	Required	Required
Owner authorization (if the applicant is not the owner)	Required	Required	Required
Scaled site sketch (Minor) or grading plan	Required	Required	Required
Sediment and erosion control plan	Not required	Required	Required
Soil characterization report	Not required	Required	Required
Design brief	Not required	Required	Required
Geotechnical and hydrogeological studies	Not required	Not required	Required
Stormwater management report	Not required	Not required	Required
Haul route plan	Not required	Not required	*If applicable*
Security deposit	Not required	*If required*	*If required*
Insurance certificate	Not required	Not required	Required

The Manager may require additional information to suit site conditions, including proof of other permits or approvals. All submissions must meet or exceed the City's Engineering Design Standards.

Tip: combine your documents into a single PDF before you upload. Your attachment can include photos, your landscaper's contact information or map views if they help explain the work.

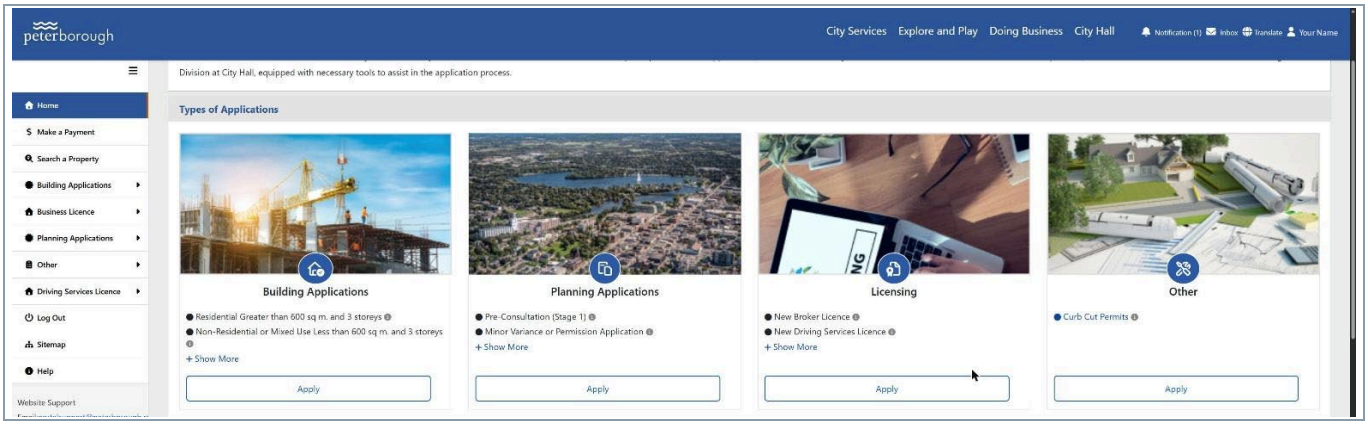
4.3 Step 3: Submit Your Application Online

Applications are submitted through the City of Peterborough Online Application Portal (onlineapplications.peterborough.ca). Use a desktop or laptop computer; the portal notes that mobile devices may have problems. If you do not have an account, select the Register link in the portal's top menu first.

Step 1: Start a planning application

Sign in. On the home page, under Planning Applications, select Apply. You can also use the left menu: Planning Applications, then Submit New Application.

Image 3: Portal home page



Step 2: Choose the application type

Select Site Alteration By-Law Application.

Image 4: Choose the planning application type

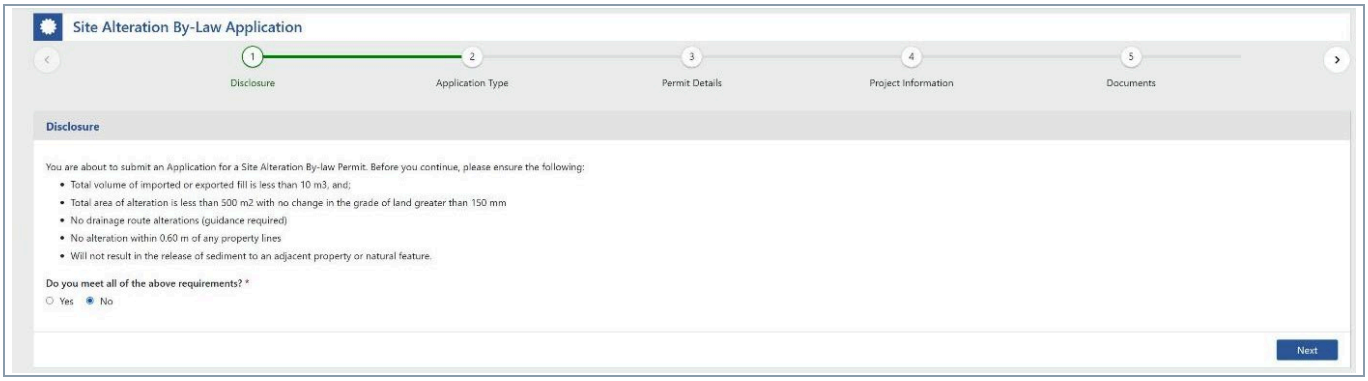


Step 3: Disclosure

Read the conditions listed and answer the question "Do you meet all of the above requirements?"

- **Yes:** the portal displays a message that no permit is required. Check Section 2.2 first: every condition must be met.
- **No:** select Next to continue with your application.

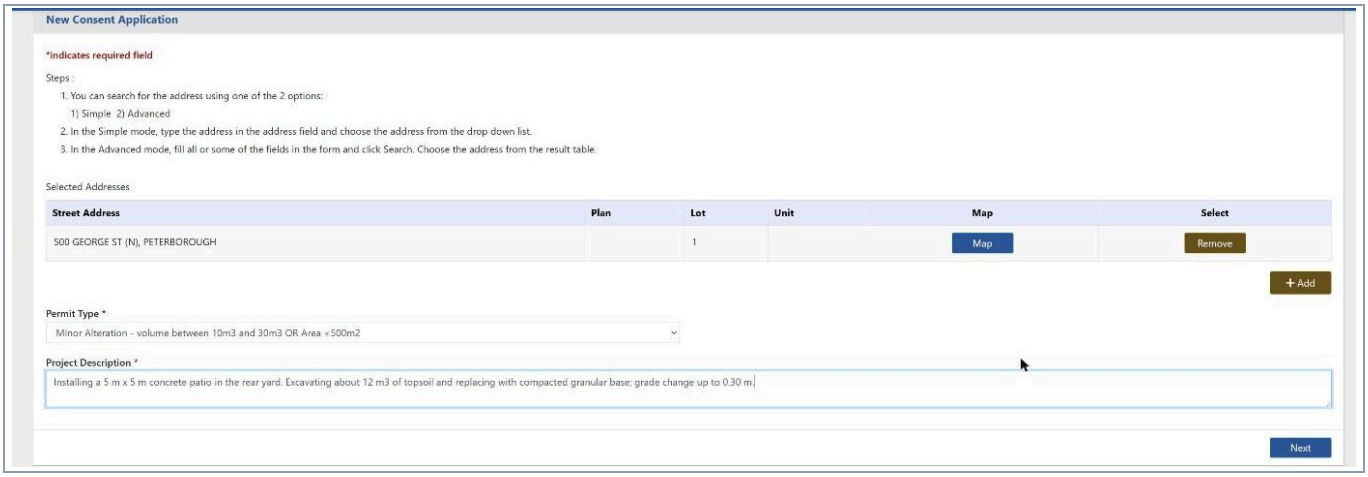
Image 5: Disclosure step



Step 4: Application Type

1. Find your address. In Simple mode, type the address and choose it from the list. In Advanced mode, fill in some or all of the fields, select Search and choose the address from the results. The address appears under Selected Addresses.
2. Choose the Permit Type: Minor, Intermediate or Major (see Section 3.0).
3. In Project Description, describe the work, where it is on the property, the approximate volume and grade change, and why you believe a permit is needed. Select Next.

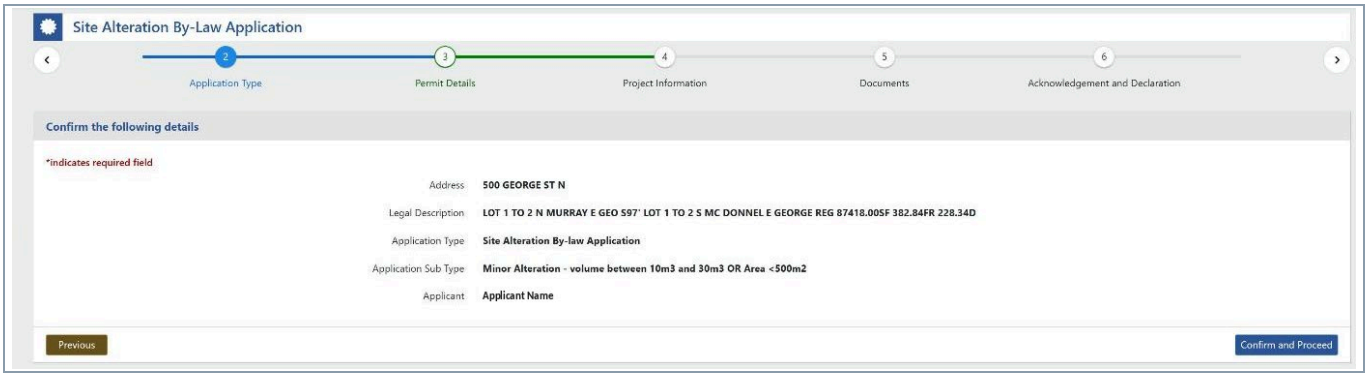
Image 6: Application Type step



Step 5: Permit Details

Check the address, legal description, application type, permit type and applicant name. Select Confirm and Proceed. This saves your application as a draft and assigns a file number. Nothing is sent to staff for review until you select Submit in Step 8.

Image 7: Permit Details step



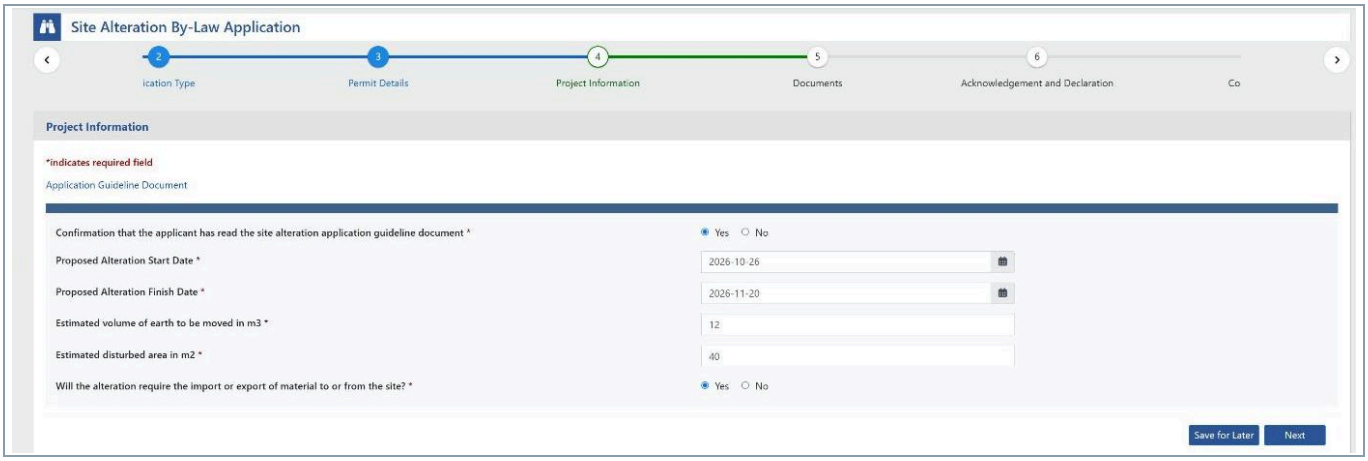
Step 6: Project Information

Confirm that you have read this guide, and enter:

- the proposed start and finish dates (the permit is valid for one year; see Section 6.2);
- the estimated volume of earth to be moved in m^3, including material imported, exported and moved around on the property;
- the estimated disturbed area in m^2; and
- whether material will be imported to or exported from the site.

Select Next, or Save for Later to finish another time.

Image 8: Project Information step



Step 7: Documents

1. Under Optional Submission Documents, in the Additional Documents row, type a short description (for example "Site sketch and photos").
2. Drag your file into the upload box, or select Browse File(s).
3. **Select Upload All.** Your file is not attached until you do this. Select OK when the upload finishes.
4. Confirm your file appears under Current Attachments, then select Next.

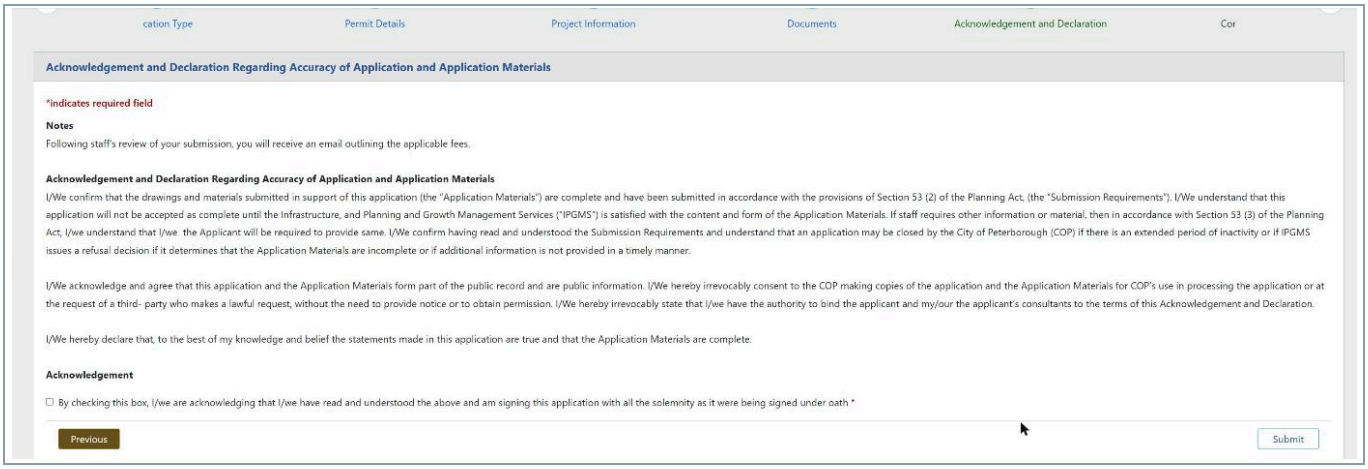
Image 9: Documents step after upload



Step 8: Acknowledgement and Declaration

Read the acknowledgement and declaration, check the box to confirm, and select Submit.

Image 10: Acknowledgement and Declaration step



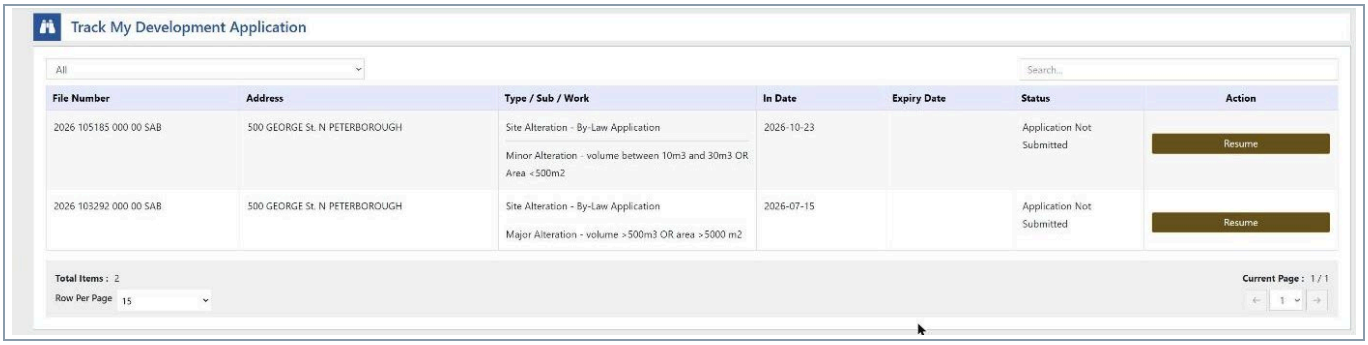
Step 9: Staff review and payment

Staff review your application, confirm the permit category, and email you a request for payment of the applicable fee along with any additional requirements. Processing times depend on the size of the project and how complete the application is. Simple minor permits can often be issued within a couple of weeks; larger projects take longer.

4.4 Finding or Resuming an Application

Select Planning Applications, then My Applications, to see your applications and their status. Applications you saved but did not submit show the status "Application Not Submitted". Select Resume to continue.

Image 11: My Applications page



5.0 Fees

5.1 Permit Fees

Fees are set by Council in the City's Fees and Charges By-law. The fees below are current at the time of writing; the Fees and Charges By-law governs.

Table 4: Site alteration permit fees

Category	Base fee	Additional fee	Maximum fee
Minor	$300	None	$300
Intermediate	$1,000	$1,000 per hectare of disturbed area	No maximum
Major	$1,500	$1,000 per hectare of disturbed area	$20,000

Major alteration example

Disturbed area: 1.5 ha (15,000 m²). Export volume: 100 m³.

$1,500 (base fee) + $1,000 × 1.5 ha = $3,000

Note: the permit process is not meant to duplicate development fees. If an owner moves earth before development approval, site alteration permit fees paid are deducted from the grading and erosion control fees charged at development approval, because that work was already done under the permit.

5.2 Security Deposit

The City may require a security deposit as a condition of a permit, based on site conditions. The amount is set after staff review the scope of work and reflects the cost of the grading and erosion control needed to stabilize the site if the work is abandoned. The deposit is returned once the City confirms the site is complete and stabilized.

6.0 Permit Conditions, Duration and Revocation

6.1 Conditions

Every permit holder must, as a condition of obtaining and keeping the permit:

- comply with the By-law and all other applicable law;
- notify the Manager in writing within three (3) days of any change to the information in the application;
- comply with all conditions attached to the permit;
- provide any information the Manager requires under the By-law; and
- not owe the City any fee, fine or penalty.

The Manager may attach site-specific conditions at any time, such as erosion and sediment control in accordance with Peterborough Standard Specification CP805.01. If a permit is issued with conditions or refused, the applicant receives a Permit Decision Notice explaining why and how to appeal.

6.2 Duration

A permit expires on the first anniversary of the day it was issued, or on the day it is revoked, whichever is earlier. Permit conditions remain in effect after the permit expires. If your work will continue past expiry, apply for a new permit before your current permit expires.

6.3 Revocation

If the Manager has reason to believe a permit holder has not complied with the By-law, the Manager may revoke the permit by giving a Permit Revocation Notice. A revoked permit can only be reinstated by a Hearing Officer on appeal (Section 8.0).

7.0 Enforcement and Penalties

The property owner is responsible for meeting the By-law and permit requirements.

If an Officer is satisfied the By-law has been contravened, the Officer may:

- order the person to stop the contravening activity;
- order the person to do work to correct the contravention at their own expense; and
- if a corrective order is not complied with and is not appealed, or is upheld on appeal, have the work done at the person's expense.

Officers include the Manager, municipal law enforcement officers, assistants to the Fire Marshal employed by the City, and police officers.

Penalties and fines: administrative penalties may also be issued for contraventions of this By-law. Refer to the City's Administrative Monetary Penalty (AMP) System By-law 20-073 for more information. Fines on conviction are set out in Sections 37 and 38 of Site Alteration By-law No. 25-108.

8.0 Appeals

8.1 What Can Be Appealed

You may appeal the following to a Hearing Officer:

- **Permit refusal or permit conditions** (Permit Decision Notice)
- **Permit revocation** (Permit Revocation Notice)

- **Administrative orders** (orders to stop work or to correct a contravention)

8.2 How to Appeal

1. **Deadline:** your appeal must be received before 4:30 p.m. on the tenth (10th) day after the notice or order was given to you. After that, the right to appeal expires.
2. **Notice:** give the Manager written notice of the appeal that includes every ground you are appealing on. You can only be heard on the grounds in your notice.
3. **Fee:** pay the appeal fee set by Council.
4. **Hearing:** the City gives you at least seven (7) days' notice of the hearing date, time and place. If you do not attend, your appeal is dismissed and you must pay an administrative fee.
5. **Decision:** the Hearing Officer can make any decision the Manager could have made. The decision is final and not subject to review by any court.

Written notices to the City may be emailed to by-laws@peterborough.ca or mailed to Municipal Law Enforcement Services Division, City of Peterborough, 500 George St. N., Peterborough, ON K9H 3R9. A notice, decision or order that is not appealed on time is final.

Note: administrative penalty notices are disputed through the process in the AMP System By-law 20-073, not through this appeal.

9.0 Contacts

For questions about whether you need a permit, or about an application in progress, contact Planning, Development and Urban Design:

- Mail or in person: City Hall, 500 George St. N., Peterborough, ON K9H 3R9
- Phone: 705-742-7777 ext. 1880
- Email: planning@peterborough.ca
- Help with the online portal: portalsupport@peterborough.ca