

The Waukesha County Pool Planning Checklist

What to settle about your lot before anyone walks it

Ordered the way a builder actually resolves a lot, not the way a brochure sells one. What your ground and your boundary lines will give you, how a machine reaches the back of the yard, what is already buried, who has to say yes, and what the barrier does to the layout. The shape of the pool comes last, because on a subdivision lot everything above decides it. Tick your way down it, print it, or carry the PDF into your first consult.

1. Establish what the lot will give you

Start with the buildable envelope, which is always smaller than the yard looks. A measured plan puts every line below on one sheet of paper, and until they are all on it nobody can honestly tell you what fits.

- ☐ Dig out the plat of survey from your closing file (the lines on it are the ones that count, and an existing fence is not evidence of where a boundary runs)
- ☐ Ask your municipality which setbacks apply to a POOL at your address (they are not always the ones that governed the house, and no two municipalities in this county write them alike)
- ☐ Mark every easement crossing the lot before you position anything (a pool is permanent in a way a lawn, a bed or a play set is not, so an easement rules ground out rather than complicating it)
- ☐ Name what the remaining lawn is for (a goal, a dog, a trampoline, a marquee once a year - decide it now or the pool will decide it for you)
- ☐ Walk from the back door to where the water would be (the route people take barefoot forty times a summer is worth more than the outline is)
- ☐ Find out whether any part of the parcel sits in the county shoreland zone (a pool gets no relief from the shore setback in Waukesha County, so on a waterfront parcel that line is fixed before design starts)

2. Work out how the machine gets in

Settle this second, because on a subdivision lot it is the constraint that can end the conversation. Something has to physically reach the back of the property, and the only way through is often a side yard nobody expected anyone to drive down.

- ☐ Walk the route from the street to the deep end and find its narrowest point (gate posts, a meter, a condenser unit, the gap between your wall and the neighbouring fence)
- ☐ Ask what happens if that narrow point is too narrow (a smaller machine, more passes and a longer schedule, or the pool moves - all three are answers, and you want the one for your lot)
- ☐ Settle who takes a fence panel out and who puts it back
- ☐ Ask where the spoil goes (the hole produces far more material than the yard suggests, and it either leaves on trucks or it stays with you)
- ☐ Ask what protects the drive and the turf on the way through

- ☐ Check whether the route crosses a septic field or a drainfield
- ☐ Find out whether the crew needs to cross a neighbouring property (a conversation to have early, in person, with the person whose grass it is)
- ☐ Ask what the yard looks like on the days between the dig and the deck

3. Find out what is already under the lawn

A pool is an open hole roughly the depth of a basement, and it stays open. That makes the ground a bigger question here than for anything else you would ever build behind a house, and almost none of it is knowable from a map or a neighbour.

- ☐ Book a test hole rather than trusting a published soil map (soil surveys describe map units measured in acres and describe nothing about your lot - opening the ground is the only thing that answers it)
- ☐ Ask what the plan is if the hole comes in wet (a high water table is the most common reason a layout moves after everyone thought it was settled)
- ☐ Ask how an empty shell is held in place before the water goes in (an empty vessel in wet ground behaves nothing like a full one, and that answer belongs to your builder)
- ☐ If the property is on a private on-site system, ask early whether the county has to review the pool (health and environmental sign-off sits outside the building permit, which makes it the easiest approval in the project to miss)
- ☐ If the property is on a private well, ask which office holds the separation distance (take it from the office that holds it, not from anybody reciting a number from memory)
- ☐ Ask who is responsible for finding the private lines (whatever a previous owner buried on your side of the meter is yours to locate, so name the party who does it before the machine arrives)
- ☐ Ask what happens to the schedule if the dig meets fill or buried debris

4. Line up everyone who has to say yes

A pool answers to more desks than most backyard projects, and two of them keep their own calendars. They only run in parallel with design if you start them in parallel. Our note on what a review committee is looking at goes further into the second row.

- ☐ Ask your municipality for the pool requirements in writing (a phone answer nobody wrote down is not something you can hand to a builder)
- ☐ Get the review committee meeting calendar before you need it (a committee sitting once a month can cost you a month you never budgeted for)
- ☐ Read what the covenants themselves say about a pool, a fence and screening
- ☐ Ask whether the committee wants elevations or only a site plan
- ☐ Settle who submits what (builders differ on this, and the gap between two assumptions is exactly where a project stalls)
- ☐ Ask which edition of the national electrical code your inspection will be held to (the edition Wisconsin has adopted changes on September 1, 2026, so a pool designed under one can be inspected under the other)

- ☐ Ignore anyone who tells you state pool code applies because you live in an association (the state code reaches a shared community pool serving several residences - the pool in your own back yard is private, and your municipality writes its rules)

5. Let the barrier set the layout

The enclosure is not an accessory bought at the end. It takes clearance out of the deck, it fixes where gates land, and it is the single most common reason a layout changes after everyone believed it was finished. Wisconsin sets no statewide residential pool barrier rule at all, which is why the answer is written by your own municipality and why every neighbour you ask gives you a different one.

- ☐ Get YOUR municipality barrier requirement in writing before deck width is fixed (a rule from the next town over is not a rule at your address, and this county has a lot of next towns)
- ☐ Ask whether an existing subdivision fence can serve as the enclosure (sometimes it can, sometimes the enclosure has to be its own line, and the two answers produce different yards)
- ☐ Ask what the ordinance says about gates and latches at your address (which way a gate swings, where the latch sits, and where that gate lands on the route you actually walk)
- ☐ Ask whether the house wall and its doors may form part of the enclosure
- ☐ Draw the barrier line before the deck outline (the clearance it needs comes out of the deck, and the deck is where people stand)
- ☐ Decide about an automatic cover now rather than later (a cover is a geometry decision - it constrains the outline instead of following it)
- ☐ Name who is responsible for the barrier passing inspection (the builder, a separate fencing contractor or you - agree it before anyone digs)
- ☐ Judge the gate as something operated daily, not as a code item (a gate on the wrong side of the yard gets propped open once and then stays that way)

6. Fix these before anyone fixes the shape

The outline is the last decision, not the first. Every item here constrains it, and every one is far cheaper to argue about on paper than to revisit once the shell is in the ground.

- ☐ Say who the pool is for in five years, not this year (the child who cannot swim yet and the one diving in four years are two different briefs)
- ☐ Settle the deep end before the outline (depth decides how the pool swims, and it is the one dimension nobody adjusts afterwards)
- ☐ Decide whether the water is heated before the plumbing is laid out
- ☐ Choose where the equipment pad sits, and who will hear it (distance from the pool sets the plumbing run, and on a subdivision lot the sound lands in a yard that may not be yours)
- ☐ Settle where the water goes when the pool is drained or backwashed (this is decided at plumbing rough-in, long before anybody needs the answer, and it is the question this trade skips most often)
- ☐ Set the deck width at its narrowest point, not its widest
- ☐ Work out where the cover reel, the ladder, the cleaner and the towels live
- ☐ Go and stand where the water will be, at the hour you would use it (shade arriving at four in the afternoon is invisible on a drawing and obvious from a lawn chair)

- ☐ Name what gets removed to make room, and who replaces it (a tree, a shed, a play set and a planting bed each belong to somebody in the household)
- ☐ Ask to see the buildable envelope drawn as a shape on your own lot

7. What this checklist deliberately leaves out

Three things are missing on purpose, and each of them is a decision rather than an oversight.

- ☐ Take every number from the office that holds it (a setback, a barrier height or a permit fee printed on a web page is a number that is wrong for somebody in this county, and you would be the one quoting it)
- ☐ Ask every builder to quote the same drawn plan (we publish no prices at all, because a figure attached to no drawing describes no scope - two quotes only become comparable when they describe one document)
- ☐ Line up who services the pool before the water goes in (we build pools and take no service enquiries at all - a company doing only weekly care will give the job more attention than a build crew ever can)