City of
WILSONVILLE
in OREGON

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Converting Attics, Basements and Garages to Living Space

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Finishing an attic, basement or garage is a great way to create more living space in your home. It is important to know that most existing basements, attics and garages were built to be used for storage rather than living space, so each conversion project is unique and the conditions of your site and dwelling will determine the scope and feasibility of the project.

Our knowledgeable staff is available to evaluate your proposal, answer your questions and provide you with information you will want to have before deciding whether or not increasing the livable space in your home by converting an attic, basement or garage is the right option for you.

Livable space or accessory dwelling unit

This publication is for homeowners who want to increase livable space in their single family homes by converting an attic, basement or garage or legalize existing space that was converted without permits. If your goal is to add a complete dwelling unit or *mother-in-law* quarters to your home, please request an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Information Packet from the Development Services Center (DSC).

Permit requirements

A building permit is required to convert attics, basements or garages to living space. Depending on the scope of work, your project may also require electrical, plumbing or mechanical permits. Meeting with DSC staff about zoning and building issues early in the planning of your project is recommended.

Evaluating your existing space

In unfinished areas, existing features such as ceiling heights, windows, stairs and insulation may not meet current building code requirements for finished space. These conditions could make it expensive, difficult or even impossible for you to change your attic, basement or garage into living space.

Examples of other conditions that you want to know about right away include:

Garage conversions

- If you plan to convert your garage to living space, you may need to show how you will provide a required on-site parking space. Parking in your driveway alone may not meet this requirement.
- If your garage is detached and you want to convert it to living space, it may not meet setback requirements since the zoning code allows some garages to be placed in the setback areas.
- A detached garage may have structural deficiencies that would need to meet building code standards.
- If the exterior wall is less than three feet to a property line, a fire wall with no openings will be required.

Attic conversions

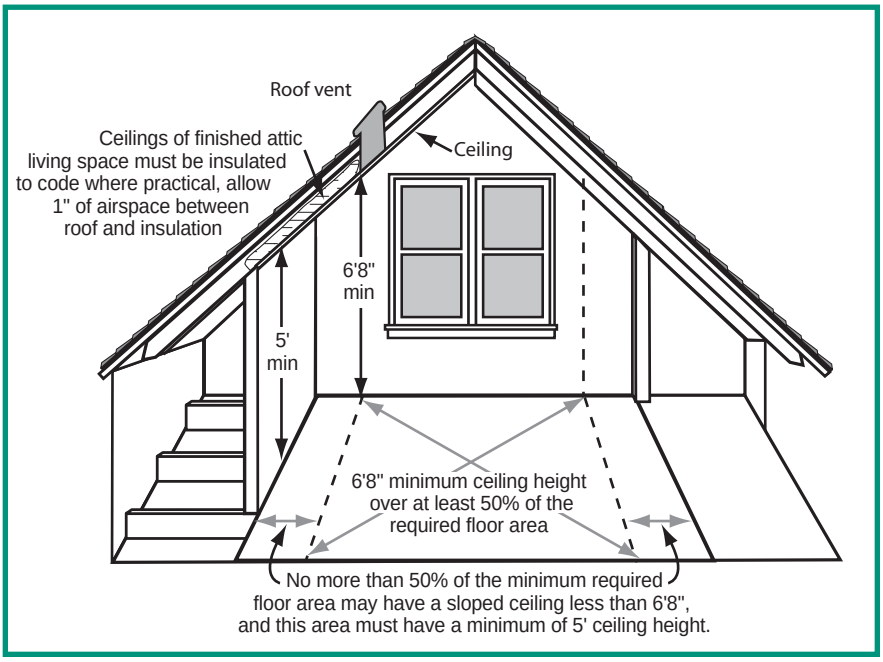
- Determine if the existing attic floor structure is strong enough to carry the weight of people and furniture.
- If converting attic space to living space would mean raising the roof, the height regulations may affect your project.
- Adding a new dormer or enlarging an existing dormer may trigger additional structural improvements to the existing structure for the purpose of resisting wind or earthquake loads, unless the addition is defined as *minor* by DSC staff.

Standards for existing situations

To make conversions easier, the Bureau of Development Services has set the following special standards for existing situations. These standards apply only to conversions that would increase livable space in the existing dwelling, not those that would add a dwelling unit on the property.

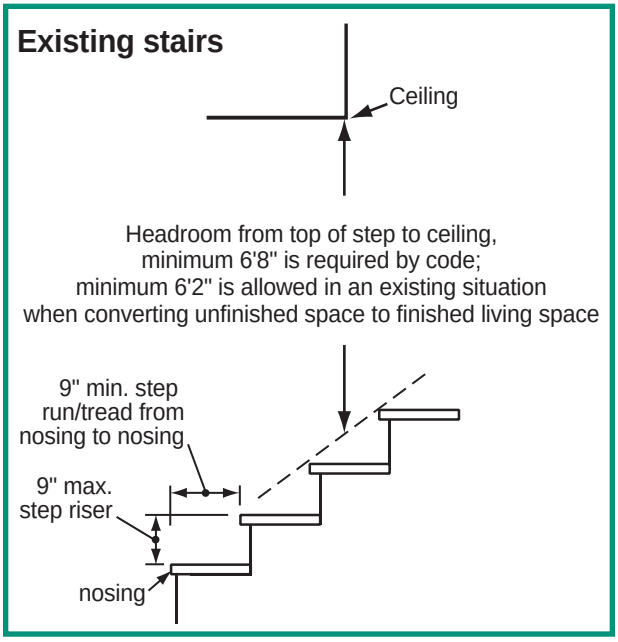
Minimum room area and ceiling height

- Living space must have at least 70 square feet of floor area. Utility and storage rooms, closets, bathrooms or kitchens may be any size. In living space with sloped ceilings, no more than one half of the minimum required floor area may have a sloped ceiling less than 6’8” in height with no part of the required floor area less than five feet in height.
- Living space in basements must have a ceiling height of at least 6'8". Beams, heating ducts, pipes, etc. are allowed as low as six feet from the floor if they are within two feet of a wall, or as low as 6'2" where they do not take up more than 10% of the floor area in the room that they are located.
- In bathrooms with sloped ceilings, not more than 75 percent of the floor area is permitted to have a ceiling height less than 6'8", provided an area of 21 inches deep by 24 inches wide in front of toilets and lavatories has a minimum height of 6'4", measured from the finished floor. An area of 24 inches by 30 inches both in front of, and inside of a tub or shower shall have a minimum height of 6'4", measured from the standing surface of the fixture.



Stairs

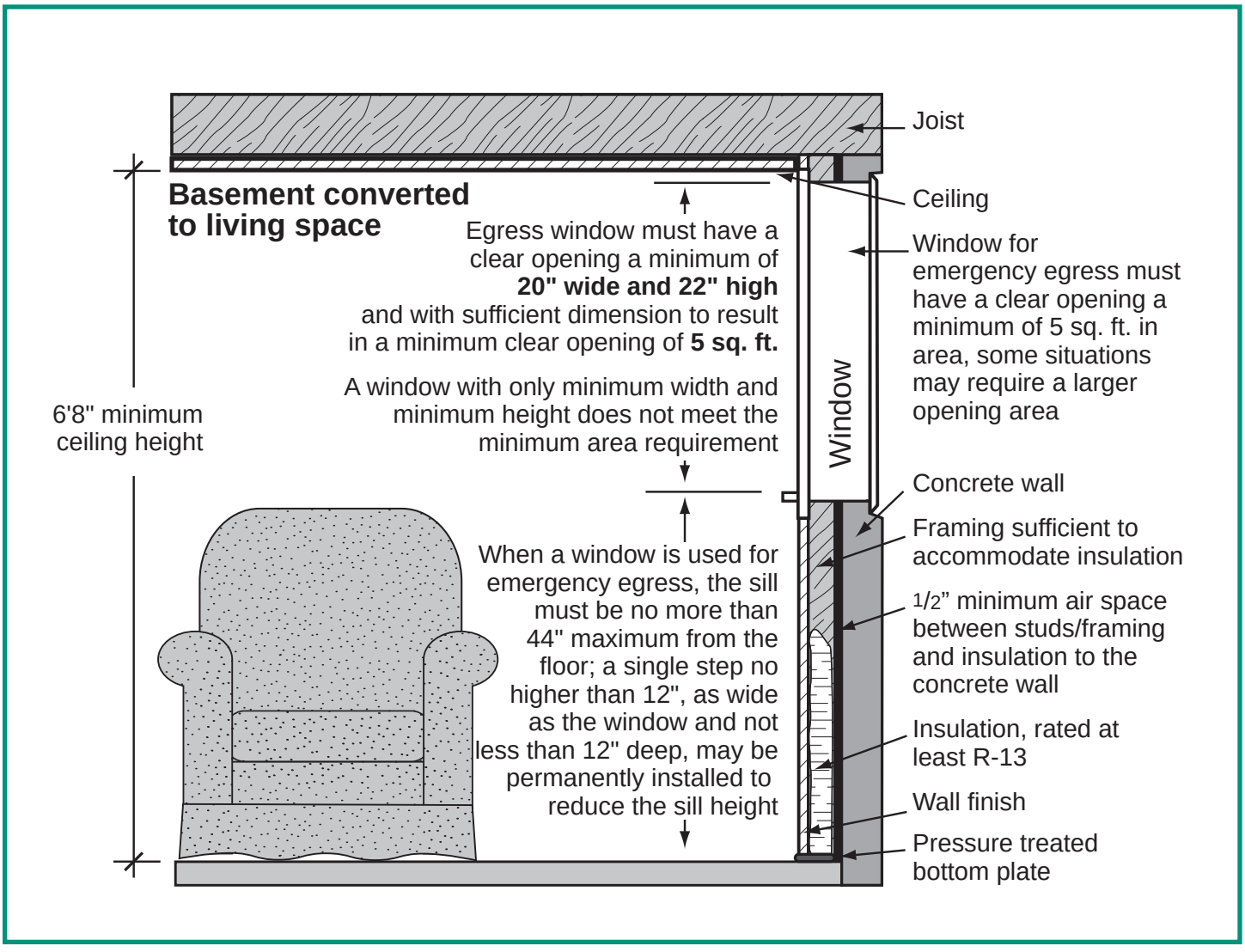
- If you are building a new stairway, it will need to meet current code requirements. Our Stair handout describes the requirements for new stairs.
- An existing stairway leading to new living space may be steeper, narrower and have lower headroom than the current code allows. Existing stairs must be at least 30 inches wide and must have headroom of 6'2" or higher, including landings.
- Landings are required at the top and bottom of stairs. The length and width must be at least as wide as the stairs.
- Doorways are allowed at the top of stairs as long as the door does not swing over the stairs.
- The stairway must have runs no smaller than nine inches and risers no higher than nine inches. The steps should be relatively even. A difference of more than a three-eighths inch between the biggest and the smallest rise or run will not be approved.



- Existing winder stairs, which are triangular in shape, are allowed. New winder stairs must meet current code.

Doors and emergency escape and rescue openings (egress windows)

- Basements with living space and all sleeping rooms must have at least one egress window or exterior door for escape or rescue in case of an emergency. An egress window or an exterior door in a sleeping room located in the basement satisfies the requirement for at least one egress window in the entire basement.
- The door that leads into a converted attic, basement or garage must be at least 6'2" high and 30 inches wide. Exterior doors used for emergency escape and rescue must be at least the same size.
- The egress window sill height must be 44 inches or less. A single step, not less than 12 inches deep, no higher than 12 inches, and at least as wide as the window opening, may be permanently installed to reduce the sill height to 44 inches or less, provided there is at least six feet from the top of the step to the ceiling.
- The sill height for an exterior door used for emergency escape and rescue is not limited.
- An existing window opening used for emergency egress must have a total clear opening at least five square feet in area, and a minimum clear opening width of at least 20 inches and a minimum height of at least 22 inches. A window with only minimum width and minimum height does not meet the minimum area requirement of five square feet.
- New egress windows may need to have a larger opening area. Our Windows brochure contains more information about emergency egress windows.



Insulation and ventilation

- In general, additions that increase the floor area of the house must be insulated as though for new construction.
- New windows or doors must meet current code requirements for energy conservation. Existing double glazed windows or storm windows placed over existing single glazed windows will be approved.
- If finishes are removed from the exterior walls or roof so that the framing is exposed, then those cavities must be insulated. R-13 insulation is allowed between existing two-by-four studs or rafters. If the attic areas can be accessed without removing the finishes, they too must be insulated to the maximum extent possible to meet current code.
- Existing concrete exterior walls must be furred out with framing sufficient to accommodate the required insulation. Any wood in contact with concrete must be pressure treated wood.
- When new construction affects basement walls, they must be insulated to current code. Existing insulation in basement walls that is R-11 or greater will be approved.
- Attic and garage ceilings must be insulated to current code. When ceiling height is a problem, R-13 rigid insulation with one inch airspace between the insulation and roof deck will be approved in spaces between existing two-by-four rafters. Roof ventilation is required to meet current code where insulation is added.
- Minor dormer additions may be constructed and insulated to match existing conditions.
- If new wood floor joists are installed over an existing concrete floor, then insulation and a vapor barrier must be provided in the joist space.
- Verify combustion air requirements for all fuel burning appliances when areas containing furnaces and water heaters are finished or made smaller.
- Habitable rooms must have natural ventilation provided by windows or doors to the outdoors with openings of at least 2.5 percent of the floor areas being vented, unless outdoor air is provided by a mechanical system.

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www.ci.wilsonville.or.us

All information in this publication is subject to change.

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