



City of Milwaukie Building Department  
6101 SE Johnson Creek Blvd., Milwaukie Oregon 97206

## Converting Attics, Basements and Garages to Living Space

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.

### Increasing your livable space

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.

### 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 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 will need to show how you will maintain one required on-site parking space. The space may be either covered or uncovered, but must be a minimum of 9' X 18' and be located outside the required front yard and street side yard setbacks.

#### Attic conversions

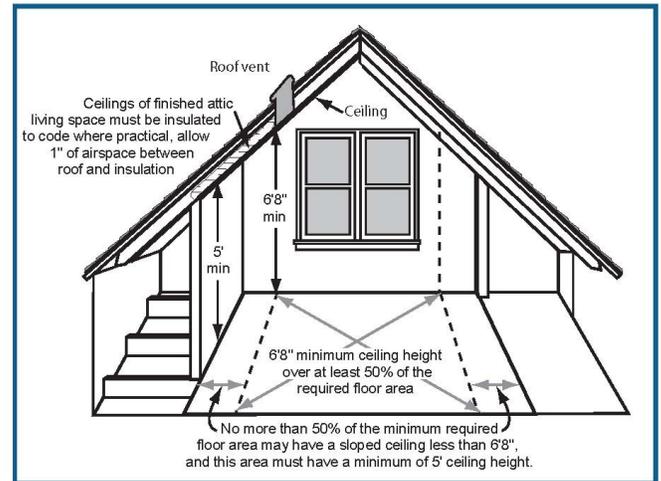
- Determine if the existing attic floor structure is strong enough to carry the weight of people and furniture.
- If converting attic space to living space would mean raising the roof. Zoning height regulations may affect your project.
- Adding a new dormer or enlarging an existing dormer may trigger additional structural improvements to the existing structure for the purpose of resisting wind or earthquake loads, unless the addition is defined as minor by Building Department staff.
- If you are converting 200 square feet or more, you may be required to dedicate Right of Way to the city if the street fronting the property does not meet current standards.

## Standards for existing situations

To make conversions easier, the Building Department 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.

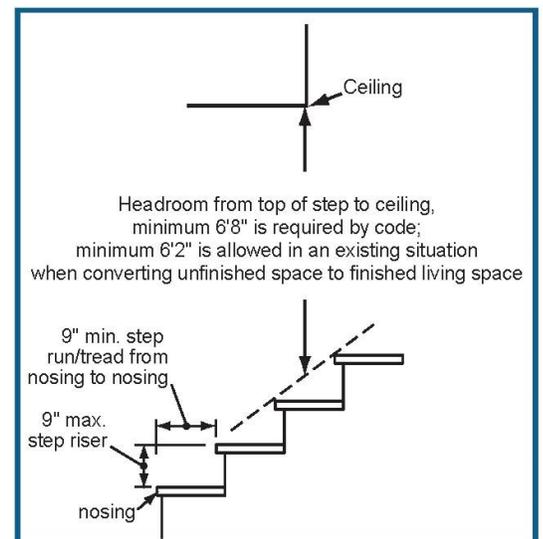
### Minimum room area and ceiling height

- 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.
- An existing stairway leading to a 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 three-eighths inch between the largest 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.

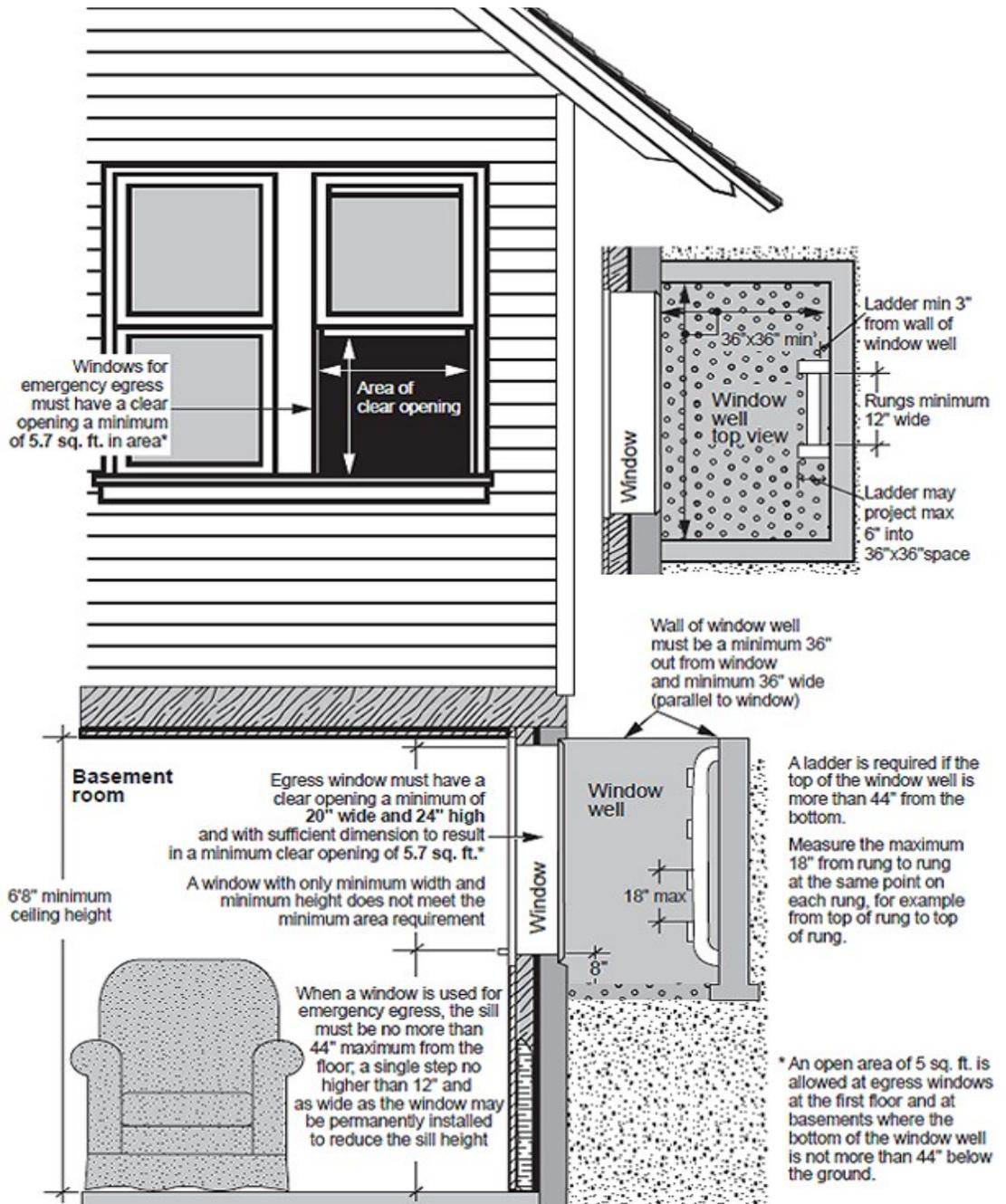


**Doors and emergency escape and rescue openings (egress windows)**

- Basement 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.

- 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. The minimum openable area shall be 5.7 square feet with a minimum height of 24 inches and a minimum width of 20 inches.



## 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 of 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 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.
- The building official may approve alternates to the above requirements on a site specific basis provided a reasonable degree of safety is maintained.

## Helpful Information

### Schedule an inspection

- Call 503-786-7575 prior to 7:30 am for same day inspections on our 24 hour inspection request line.
- On line at <http://www.ci.milwaukie.or.us/building>.
- Inspections are conducted Monday through Thursday.
- Leave your permit number, job site address, type of inspection you are requesting and a phone number where you can be reached during weekdays and if you want the inspection in the morning or afternoon.
- There must be an adult over age 18 to let the inspector inside.
- Electrical inspections are conducted through Clackamas County. Call 503-742-4720 to schedule your electrical inspections.

## Contact Information

Building Department, main number	.....	503-786-7613
Building Department Fax	.....	503-786-7612
Building code information	.....	503-786-7611
Zoning information	.....	503-786-7630
Permitting process	.....	503-786-7613
Permit resources and records	.....	503-786-7613
Building Department Fax	.....	503-786-7612
24-hour inspection line	.....	503-786-7575
Residential information for		
one and two family dwellings	.....	503-786-7613
Building Department E-Mail		<a href="mailto:building@ci.milwaukie.or.us">building@ci.milwaukie.or.us</a>