



BASEMENT CONVERSION TO LIVING SPACE

One of the most cost-effective ways to add living space to a home is to utilize the basement. However, this space was not initially designed to meet minimum life-safety standards for living space. The following information will be required to evaluate a basement in order to obtain a permit.

FLOOR PLAN showing the area to be remodeled. Floor plan must include:

- Provide and label a floor plan showing the existing space and the proposed scope of demolition
- Provide and label a new floor plan showing the proposed use of each space
- Show and label any proposed structural modifications
- Window location, size and headers
- Newly finished basement spaces need natural ventilation or balanced mechanical ventilation per SPS 321.05(2). This is referring to outside air. Infiltration may not be considered as make up air.
- Door locations and sizes
- Location of smoke and carbon monoxide detectors (hard wired with battery back-up)
- Stairways (even if the existing stairs will be reused)
 - Rise – 8 inches maximum (8-1/4" for houses built prior to 1980); Run – 9 inches minimum (8-1/2" for houses built prior to 1980)
 - Headroom: (houses built prior to 1980 – 6 feet; houses built since 1980 – 6 feet 4 inches)
 - Width: (houses built prior to 1980 – 34 inches; houses built since 1980 – 36 inches)
 - Handrails: 30-38 inches above the tread nosing

CROSS-SECTION showing framing, materials and ceiling heights

- Ceiling height – (houses built prior to 1980 - 6 feet 8 inches minimum for 50% of the floor area, houses built since 1980; houses built since 1980 - 7 feet minimum for 50% of the floor area)
- Beams and ducts may not hang more than 8 inches below the minimum ceiling height

NOTE: the use of rigid foam insulation requires a 15 minute fire-barrier such as ½ inch drywall

NOTE: an electrical panel may not be located in a toilet room.

WARNING! *Creating living space may impact the combustion air needed for furnaces, boilers and water heaters. Improper combustion can result in carbon monoxide problems. Make sure you don't restrict air flow to these devices.*

BASEMENT BEDROOMS must be designed as follows:

- Door - minimum of 32 inches in width
- Natural light (window) equal to 8% of the bedroom floor area
- Exits – either an egress window within each bedroom or two exits from the basement level. An egress window must have a clear opening of 20 x 24 inches with a sill height not exceeding 46 inches above the floor. An area well must be provided that is at least as wide as the window and not less than 36 inches perpendicular to the window.
- A smoke detector is needed in each new bedroom. This detector needs to be interconnected with a smoke/carbon monoxide detector within 21' of the bedroom door.

This informational guide was updated 7/2024. Reference Wauwatosa City Ordinance