

Attic Projects 1 & 2 Family Homes

Do you have an attic and a growing need for more living space? Attic remodeling can create usable floor area at a reasonable cost but there are many codes requirements to consider. When it comes to attic remodeling, do not evade code safety issues, as attic spaces are a leading source of residential fire fatalities. The following is by no means a complete list of all the requirements, but it should get you started in the right direction.

Plans must be submitted, and a building permit issued for any alteration project in an attic. This includes a sitting room, bathroom, hobby room, den or even putting up some paneling and carpeting. Attics are to remain unfinished. Existing rooms or finished areas may or may not be legal and would be subject to relevant codes.

Plan evaluation

Here are some of the issues an inspector looks for when evaluating plans for attic alterations.

There must be two legal exits from the attic. This is one of the most difficult issues involved in attic renovation.

Second floor attics in a single-family home require an acceptable stair and can typically utilize adequately sized windows as a second exit. *Third floor attics* require two stairways. The stairs must be separated from each other and go to the second-floor level or grade. The second stair can be a 5' spiral stair.

The habitable rooms need to have ceilings at least 7' 0" high for 50 percent of the area but other areas such as storage, closets and other misc. spaces may be lower. Windows must be sized in proportion to the size of the room to provide code required natural light and ventilation.

Existing floor joists must be sufficient to support the new rooms and may need to be reinforced. Existing stairs will be an issue that will need to be reviewed. In some cases, the existing stair will be acceptable but needs to be at least 32" wide and have clear headroom of 6'-4". In some neighborhoods, where existing homes are on

narrow or small lots, zoning regulations may present challenges.

Submitting plans

The best direction to take is to call with your preliminary questions and ideas. Then when you have your ideas on paper arrange for an appointment with the building inspector to discuss your thoughts and review preliminary plans. During the appointment the inspector will confirm that your plans meet state and local codes or identify areas that must be changed before the building permit can be issued.

Permit submittal

Two copies of the plans for the project are required. The plans must: Be drawn to scale. Show the location and size of the rooms involved. Show the size and location of doors, windows, and ceiling heights. Indicate how the rooms will be used (bedroom, sitting room, office, etc.).

Associated permits

An electrical permit will be required if the project involves electrical work. If a bathroom is installed, a plumbing permit is required and of course the space must be heated so a heating permit is also needed.