

Finishing Basements

Frequently Asked Questions:

Do I need a permit?

Yes,

- You need a building permit to finish or partially finish a residential basement

Is there anything special for a bedroom?

Yes,

- Bedrooms, just like every habitable room, must have an area of at least 70 square feet, and cannot be less than 7 feet in any dimension
- Bedrooms, habitable rooms, hallways, etc. must have a minimum ceiling height of 7 feet
- Bedrooms are also required to have an emergency escape window. It shall be operable from the inside without the use of special knowledge, tool, or extra force, beyond that required for normal window operation. The window must meet these requirements:
 - Maximum sill height: 44"
 - Minimum clear opening **width**: 20"
 - Minimum clear opening **height**: 24"
 - Minimum clear opening **area**: 5 sq. feet at grade; 5.7 sq. feet below grade

- A smoke detector must be located within 15 linear feet of all bedroom entrance doors **and** inside each bedroom. Basement smoke detectors must be hard wired and interconnected. If existing smoke detectors in rest of home are interconnected the basement smoke detectors must also be interconnected with the rest of the alarms throughout the house
- A Carbon monoxide detector is required within 15 linear feet of all bedroom entrance doors on each level of the home where sleeping rooms are present

What are the stairway guidelines?

Often, existing stairways need to be modified:

- Risers must be solid or have a toe board which limits the riser opening to less than 4"
- A continuous graspable handrail shall be provided along one side of the stair located 34" to 38" above the nosing of the tread. End of handrail must be returned to the wall or a newel post.

Is there anything else I should know?

Yes,

- All plumbing, mechanical and electrical work must be performed in accordance with the International Building Codes, Illinois Plumbing Code, and City of O'Fallon Ordinances. If hiring outside help, plumbers must be licensed by the State of Illinois.
- On basement renovations it is very important to identify both existing and new construction. Show basement room layout and identify use of each room/space by name and indicate both new and existing walls, as well as, furred and insulated concrete foundation walls
 - *Rooms which resemble a bedroom, or that could easily be converted to a bedroom in the future will

be reviewed for bedroom requirements regardless of the room name presented on the drawing

- The rest of the specific guidelines can be found in Attachment Sheet 2; Finishing Basements. Please refer to this sheet for more specific questions

What is the next step?

Next, you need to:

- Complete and submit your permit application with:
 1. Two separate complete sets of detailed building construction plans drawn to scale and containing:
 - Floor plans
 - Wall sections
 - Other sections and details

PLEASE NOTE: These guidelines are not a comprehensive presentation of all the ordinances involved in finishing or partially finishing a basement. For more specific guidelines refer to Attachment Sheet 2; Finishing Basements.

If you have questions or concerns please contact the O'Fallon Planning and Zoning Department at (618) 624-4500 ext. 4

Finishing Basements

These guidelines are intended to provide the homeowner/contractor with basic information needed to finish or partially finish most residential basements.

Insulation:

- Concrete Foundation walls shall be furred out and insulated. All perimeter walls to be insulated to R13 minimum.

Ventilation and Natural Light:

- Glass area in habitable rooms shall not be less than 8% of the floor area served
- 1/2 of this area must be available to unobstructed ventilation with screens included
- Artificial lights and/or mechanical ventilation may be used as an alternative if the existing windows are of inadequate size

Ventilation, Heating and Air Conditioning, and General Mechanical:

- Combustion Air-Gas appliances located in closets or utility room spaces whose volume is less than 40 cubic feet/1000BTU/hr input rating shall have combustion and ventilation air provided
 - Minimum clearance from combustibles is 18 inches, or per manufacturer's specifications.
- Finished rooms, without adequate windows, require artificial ventilation to be supplied at a rate of 0.35 air changes per hour or 15 cubic feet per minute per person, whichever is greater.
- Forced air and returns are required in habitable rooms.
- Inside air- 1 sq. in. shall be provided/1000BTU/hr each opening.
 - Opening shall not be less than 100 sq.in.
 - One opening shall be provided within 12" of the ceiling and within 12" above finished floor.
- **Clothes dryers** shall be independent of all other systems and exhaust to the exterior
- **Bathrooms**, without windows, shall exhaust 50 CFM minimum to the exterior

Safety Glazing:

- Fully tempered, laminated safety approved wired glass or approved shatter-resistant plastic must be used in doors intended for human passage, patio doors, windows within 24" of a door, and shower/bathtub enclosure walls

Ceiling/Floor Draftstopping:

- Dropped ceilings below wood joists or attached directly to wood floor trusses shall be draftstopped with ½" drywall or 3/8" plywood at 1000 sq feet intervals and parallel to framing members

Stairs Serving Finished Basements:

- Stairs serving finished basements that are framed below (enclosed) and will be accessible must have a minimum of ½" drywall applied to the inside walls & underside of stringers.

Firestopping:

- Firestopping consisting of 2" lumber, minimum 23/32" structural paneling, or approved non-combustible materials shall be provided at the ceiling line in concealed spaces of stud walls/partitions, including furred or studded-off spaces of concrete foundation walls and at soffits, openings around pipes, dropped ceilings and similar spaces

Electrical:

- **GFCI's** are required for receptacles and/or circuits installed in the following locations: Receptacles to serve counter top surfaces, bathrooms, and unfinished basement spaces (except laundry circuit and single sump pump receptacles).
Receptacles are required in following area: All habitable rooms so that no space along a wall is more than 6' from a receptacle (all wall areas at least 2' wide), hallways of 10' or more in length, adjacent to the basin in bathrooms, and at least 1 in laundry area and one in basement unfinished area (in addition to the laundry receptacle)
- **Lighting** is required in the following areas: at least 1 wall lighting switch in every habitable room (bathroom, hallway, stairway, and exterior doors), interior stairways at each floor level that are separated by 6 or more steps, and at least 1 lighting outlet in each unfinished basement space (located at point of entry)
 - **Lighting in closets:** incandescent fixtures not completely enclosed in lamps and the use of pendant fixtures is prohibited without proper clearance
 - Fixtures must be surface mounted and incandescent fixtures need a 12" minimum clearance and florescent or recessed fixtures need a 6" minimum clearance from edge of closet shelving
- **Electrical Panels:** Circuit breaker panels shall not be concealed and electrical panels are not permitted in bathrooms or clothes closets. Lighting is required in the vicinity of the electrical panel. A minimum of 3' clearance is required in front of existing electrical panels.

PLEASE NOTE: These requirements apply to most simple residential basement finishing projects. However, there are sometimes unusual circumstances that dictate the need for additional information on any particular project. It should also be emphasized that especially on interior renovation project many Code requirements are verified through the inspection process and are not necessarily reflected within the approved plan documents.

If you have questions or concerns please contact the O'Fallon Planning and Zoning Department at (618) 624-4500 ext. 4