

City of Bellingham Policy

Policy No. 2014-002

Title: Ceiling Heights for Existing Residential Basements

Code: International Residential Code

Chapter: 3

Level of Policy: Departmental

Date Issued: September 5, 2014

Developed by: Jim Tinner, CBO

Date Revised: N/A

Revised by: N/A

Approved by: -----

Supersedes: All prior

See Also:

Purpose

To clarify ceiling height requirements for existing residential basements.

Scope

All one and two family residential properties within the corporate limits of the City of Bellingham.

Definitions

IRC means: The 2012 International Residential Code

Habitable space means: A space in a building used for living, sleeping, eating or cooking. For the purposes of this policy, bathrooms and restrooms are considered habitable space.

Policy/Conditions

Portions of residential basements that legally contain habitable space will not be required to meet current IRC ceiling height requirements under all of the following conditions:

- The habitable space is deemed to have been legally established if any of the following are true;
 1. There is a verifiable building permit that governed the establishment of the habitable basement.
 2. It can be established by legal records or by finish materials that the habitable basement was in existence prior to the City of Bellingham's permit records began.
- The lowest projection from the ceiling in the habitable space is to be no lower than 6'-4" above the finished floor.
- The space appears to be compliant with the applicable codes in effect when the habitable space was originally created.
- Spaces that cannot be demonstrated as having been legally established habitable space will be required to meet all code requirements (including ceiling height requirements) of the currently adopted version of the IRC.

Rationale

There are innumerable numbers of basements in older residential structures. Most of these basements were intended to become habitable space at some future point. Over the years, the building codes have become more restrictive as to ceiling height requirements, often making habitable use of the existing basements financially impractical even when there are no significant life-safety concerns.

The 2012 IRC allows projections from basement ceilings as low as 6'-4" therefore recognizing that 6'-4" does not pose a significant life-safety concern.