

One and Two Family attic spaces, what makes them habitable?

- A common question we get with attic spaces, how can I make my attic space into another bedroom?
 - We understand that this can be underutilized space and could be potentially more rental income if the space was another bedroom. You could turn a 2 bedroom duplex into a 3 bedroom or a 3 bedroom into a 4 bedroom.
- What is habitable space?
 - Space in a structure for living, sleeping, eating or cooking.
 - The major goal of this webinar is what makes this area sleeping space.
- There are several codes that must be met to convert uninhabitable space into habitable space. We going to go through each one of these items. Please always remember that each case is different and unique. This is a generalization and the appropriate permits must be obtained from our office to document the change in the structure.
 - A quick note, that permits have always been required for making a space habitable. Our files will indicate if space was previously approved. If work was performed without the appropriate permits in place or completed by an unlicensed professional, you could have added additional expenses to your project.
 - Always get the proper permits and hire licensed contractors to perform this work.
- The goal of this webinar is to give you an idea of the amount of work you may have ahead of you if you wanted to convert the attic space into a habitable space.
- Now, what are the items to convert my attic space into a legally habitable bedroom? This list is not all exclusive; there could be additional items depending on your situation.
 - Access to the attic
 - Do you have to walk through an existing bedroom to access the attic stairs?
 - If so, you will lose this walk through bedroom because it is no longer original design.
 - If possible, you could create a hallway in the walkthrough bedroom to alter the layout to keep bedroom on the second floor and allow access to the attic space desiring to be a bedroom.
 - Reminder, you must still have 7 feet of width in that bedroom if you are creating a hallway
 - Is there enough head clearance on the stairs?
 - It must be stairs. It cannot be a pull down ladder situation. Must be the typical flight of stairs with proper riser height and tread depth
 - You must have 6 feet 8 inches from the stair tread to the ceiling for proper clearance, this includes the landings on the flight of stairs
 - Treads and risers, are they consistent and able to support imposed loads?
 - 7 ¾ inch on riser, 10 inches on tread
 - Handrails and guardrails, is there the proper items in place?
 - Fall protection at the stairs, guardrails around the stairs

- Clearances once the fall protection is in place.
 - If the guardrails installed would block access to the attic area then a reconfiguration of the stairs may be required.
 - If the guardrails make it were you do not have the proper ceiling height over stairs, then this is an issue.
- Size of the space and unit
 - Is the space large enough to be a bedroom? Square footage
 - 7 foot wide, 70 total square feet for 1 person, 100 for 2, and so on
 - With this additional bedroom, is the living and dining space large enough to accommodate the additional people?
 - Cover square footage of those spaces
 - Does the space have the appropriate ceiling height? Flat ceiling or sloped
- Walls and floor
 - Is there a fire wall along the shared duplex wall?
 - You will need at least one hour separation wall
 - Will the joist and floors support imposed loads for living spaces?
 - Attic spaces were not built for full-time occupancy
 - It is 40 psf for living space. Typically storage space is designed for 20 psf
 - Now people would be living in the space and having furniture.
 - Do I need to insulate the space?
 - Insulating of the space to meet energy code is required, walls and ceiling
 - R-30 is required in the ceiling with no attic space. This would have to be at least a 2x8 rafter to get the space for R-30 or blown insulation could be used
- Window size/emergency escape
 - Do the window sizes meet the ventilation code requirement?
 - Ventilation is to be 4% of the habitable floor space. So 100 square feet would need at least 4 square feet of openable window area
 - Is the existing window size larger enough for an emergency escape window?
 - Although ventilation may only be 4 square feet. You must have 5.7 square feet of clear opening for an emergency escape window
 - Every sleeping area located from the basement to the 3rd floor requires an emergency escape window
 - We understand at times these things could be existing but an emergency escape window is required
 - Lower than 18 inches to the floor for sill height of the window
 - It will have to be tempered glass because this is considered a hazardous location
- Electric/Heat
 - Number of electrical receptacles/outlets for the room

- Meet current electrical code, not property maintenance
 - Wall switch controlled light or outlet for room
 - Stairs must be illuminated
 - 3 way switch
 - Pull string light on pulleys does not meet code
 - How is the space going to be heated?
 - Extend ductwork into this space
 - Mechanical permit
 - Can electric baseboard be used?
 - Yes, must maintain 65 degrees Fahrenheit
 - One thing to consider is how will they cool the space during summer months
 - Not required by code but you know an occupant will most likely want an AC unit for the space. Can the electric wiring and service accommodate an additional AC unit?
 - Need to maintain egress and ventilation for the space once a window unit is installed
 - Might want to consider a mini-split system for this space so it can heat and cool there area. More of an investment but could be valuable in the long run
 - Smoke and/or CO Alarms
 - The additional bedroom on the attic level will require the additional smoke alarm
 - Electric or battery required?
 - Electric is going to be required to make the space habitable and additional electric smoke alarms in the rest of the structure may be required depending on the situation.
 - CO Alarm will be required if there is fossil fuel burning equipment in the structure. Such as a furnace, water heater, or oven/stove. Also if there is a fireplace or wood stove.
 - Grant Opportunity
 - DCED
 - Ask for Kaitlin Bell
- FAQs
 - How do I find licensed contractors to perform the work?
 - You can go to our webpage. If you go to hagerstowncode.org and hover over licensing. At the bottom of the list you will see Hagerstown Licensed Contractors.
 - Types of permits needed to make this change?
 - A building permit is required for this change of use in the space. An electrical permit will mostly be required as well. A mechanical permit may be required depending on the work being performed.