



Planning and Development Department  
Land Use Planning Division

# Zoning Information Guide #1: RESIDENTIAL ADDITIONS



## About This Guide

This document is intended to provide property owners, design professionals, and other community members with basic information on zoning requirements for residential additions in most residential districts. It includes the following information:

- How to look up zoning and other property information
- Common triggers for discretionary zoning review (Administrative Use Permits and Use Permits)
- Development standards (e.g. height, setbacks, lot coverage, etc.)
- Key definitions and regulations

This guide does not address the following topics; please visit the following links or contact staff (see page 6 for contact information):

- [Building Permit Forms and Checklists](#)
- [Administrative Use Permit Process](#)

- [Use Permit Process](#)
- [Accessory Dwelling Units](#)
- [Accessory Buildings](#)

Disclaimer: This guide should not be used as a substitute for adopted codes and regulations. Project applicants are responsible for compliance with all code and regulations, whether or not described in this guide. If in doubt, please consult with a planner.



## Getting Started

1. **Check your zoning** at [cityofberkeley.info/gis/PPP/default.htm](http://cityofberkeley.info/gis/PPP/default.htm). After finding your property, click “Parcel Conditions” on the left. The zoning will be listed near the top of the table.
2. **Check for special site conditions** such as landmarks, creeks and seismic hazards, by reviewing the Parcel Conditions at the above link. See page 4 for details.
3. **Review development standards** on the next page to determine allowable height, setbacks, and other requirements for your property.
4. **Special restrictions** – Check if the following apply to your project:
  - **New Floor Area:** Although there are no floor area limits, any addition over 600 square feet (or 15% of lot area, whichever is less) requires an

Administrative Use Permit (AUP). Additions after October 31, 1991 count toward the AUP threshold. Attic and basement conversions with no building expansion are not counted.

- **New Bedrooms:** In most districts, increasing the number of bedrooms *on the property* to five or more requires an AUP (for a fifth bedroom) or a Use Permit (for a sixth bedroom or greater). This regulation may apply to some rooms not labeled or used as a bedroom. See page 6 for details.
- **Demolition:** A project that removes 50 percent or more of a building’s exterior walls *and* roof is a “demolition” under the Zoning Ordinance and requires a Use Permit, with possible review by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.



**Table 1: Residential Development Standards**

Zoning District*	Density (Min. Lot Area Per Unit; sq. ft.)	Height Limit (ft.)**					Min. Setbacks (ft.)**					Max. Lot Coverage**			Min. Open Space** (sq. ft. per unit)
		Additions		New Main Buildings		Stories	Front	Rear	Side	Street Side (Corner Lots)	Between Main Bldgs. on Same Lot	Stories in Main Bldg.	Non-Corner Lots (%)	Corner Lots (%)	
		Average	Max.	Avg.	Max.										
R-1	--	14 <sup>5</sup>	--	28 <sup>7</sup>	--	3	20	20 <sup>8</sup>	4 <sup>11</sup>	4 <sup>12</sup>	--	All	40	40	400
R-1A	-- <sup>1</sup>	14 <sup>5</sup>	--	Front Bldg.: 28 <sup>7</sup>	--	Front Bldg.: 3	20	20 <sup>8,9</sup>	4 <sup>11</sup>	4 <sup>12</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> story: 8 <sup>10</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> story: 12 <sup>10</sup> 3 <sup>rd</sup> story: 16 <sup>10</sup>	All	40	45	400
				Rear Bldg.: 22		Rear Bldg.: 2									
R-2	2,500 <sup>2</sup>	14 <sup>5</sup>	--	28 <sup>7</sup>	--	3	20	20 <sup>10</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> story: 4 <sup>11</sup>	10 <sup>12</sup>	See R-1A	1	45	50	400
									2 <sup>nd</sup> story: 4 <sup>11</sup>						
									3 <sup>rd</sup> story: 6 <sup>11</sup>						
R-2A	1,650 <sup>3</sup>	14 <sup>5</sup>	--	28 <sup>7</sup>	--	3	15	15 <sup>10</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> story: 6 <sup>12</sup>	See R-2	See R-1A	See R-2			300
									2 <sup>nd</sup> story: 8 <sup>12</sup>						
									3 <sup>rd</sup> story: 10 <sup>12</sup>						
R-3	-- <sup>4</sup>	16 <sup>5</sup>	--	35	--	3	15	15 <sup>10</sup>	See R-2	See R-2A	See R-1A	1-2	45	50	200 <sup>13</sup>
												3			
Hillside Overlay	See applicable R district	Top of existing roof or R district limit, whichever is less <sup>5</sup>	20 <sup>6</sup>	See applicable R district <sup>6</sup>	35 <sup>6</sup>	See applicable R district <sup>6</sup>	See applicable R district <sup>6</sup>					See applicable R district			See applicable R district

**FLOOR AREA:** The above districts do not include floor area ratios (FARs); however, additions over 600 sq. ft. or 15% of lot area require an AUP.

**PARKING:** For dwelling units, the parking standard is one space per unit in all districts. See page 3 for additional details.

**Notes:**

\* See [Zoning Ordinance](#) for ES-R, R-4, R-S, and R-SMU Districts.

\*\* See pages 4-6 for definitions and special provisions.

1. Max. 2 units; min. 4,500 sq. ft. required for 2 units.
2. Additional unit allowed for any remaining area over 2,000 sq. ft.
3. Additional unit allowed for any remaining area over 1,300 sq. ft.
4. For Group Living Accommodations (e.g. dormitories), standard is 350 sq. ft. per resident, plus 1 resident for any remaining area over 200 sq. ft.
5. May be exceeded with an AUP, up to main building limit.
6. May be exceeded with an AUP, if necessary due to steep topography, irregular lot pattern, unusual street conditions, or other special hillside conditions.
7. May be exceeded with an AUP, up to 35 ft.
8. If lot depth is less than 100 ft., may be reduced to 20% of depth (without AUP).

9. For 2<sup>nd</sup> unit (not ADU), may be reduced to 12 ft. with AUP.
10. For lots with 2 or more main buildings, may be reduced with AUP.
11. If lot width is less than 40 ft., may be reduced to 10% of width (without AUP), but not less than 3 ft. (5 ft. where 6 ft. is required). Not applicable to R-3 District or rear buildings in R-1A District.
12. If the adjacent lot to the rear is not a corner lot, the street side setback shall be at least one-half the existing or required front setback of the lot to the rear, whichever is smaller. If the subject lot has a rear setback of 50 ft. or greater, the street side setback may be reduced to 4 ft. without an AUP (6 ft. for rear buildings in R-1A). This provision does not apply in the R-3 District.
13. For Group Living Accommodations, standard is 90 sq. ft. per person.

## Getting Started (continued)

5. **Non-conforming conditions** – Many buildings in Berkeley were built decades ago and may not “conform” to current zoning standards. Lawfully established non-conforming conditions may be maintained and repaired, but expansions or modifications of such conditions may trigger additional review, as in the following cases:
- **Setbacks:** Alterations and additions within a non-conforming setback require an AUP. Non-

conforming setbacks may be extended vertically or horizontally, but not further reduced.

- **Lot Coverage:** Any vertical addition on a property that exceeds the maximum lot coverage requires a Use Permit. No additional coverage is allowed.
- **Density:** Any addition on a property with more dwelling units than the zoning district allows requires a Use Permit.

## Parking Standards

**Number of spaces:** One parking space is required per dwelling unit (except for Accessory Dwelling Units). For properties not meeting this standard, documentation may be required to show the parking shortfall was legally established.

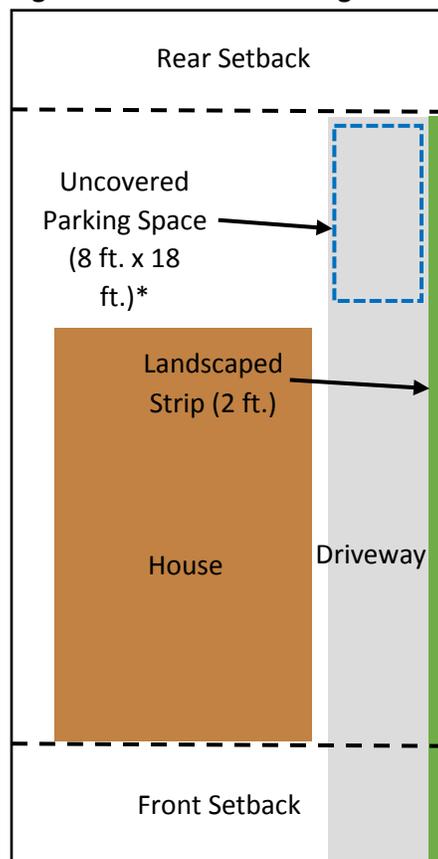
**Parking and driveway design guidelines** (dimensions, turning radii, etc.) are available [here](#) or by contacting the Transportation Division at 510-981-7010. Traffic engineer review is required for all modifications to vehicle parking and circulation. Some standards may be modified for unusual circumstances.

**Landscaping and setback requirements** apply to new or relocated uncovered parking spaces, as follows (see Figure 1; check BMC Section [23D.12.080](#) for complete requirements):

- A landscaped strip at least 2 feet wide is required between a side or rear property line and any new driveway or uncovered parking space.
- Uncovered parking within a required front setback requires an AUP and is generally not approved, except when the existing driveway is less than 7 feet wide, or if front yard parking is necessary due to an occupant’s disability or other site constraints (e.g. steep topography).
- An AUP is required for uncovered parking within a required rear or street side setback, or for more than one space within a required side setback.

- Existing covered parking is generally considered the official parking for a property, and cannot be removed unless uncovered parking is provided in accordance with the above standards.

**Figure 1. Uncovered Parking Standards**



\* **Note:** Minimum width is increased by 6 inches on each side located adjacent to a fence, wall, post or similar obstruction.

## Special Site Conditions

### LANDMARKS

Alterations to City landmark buildings require approval of a Structural Alteration Permit by the [Landmarks Preservation Commission](#) (LPC). In some cases, separate buildings on properties with a landmark building may also require LPC review. For further details, see BMC Section [3.24.200](#), or contact the LPC Secretary at 510-981-7410.

### CREEKS

The City's [Creeks Ordinance](#) (BMC Chapter [17.08](#)) regulates construction near [open](#) and [culverted](#) creeks. For open creeks, additions are not permitted within 25 feet, and an AUP is required for additions within 25-30 feet. For culverted creeks, additions are not permitted within 15 feet, and a creek permit is required for additions within 15-25 feet. For further information or to verify if a protected creek or culvert is present on your property, contact Vincent Chen at 510-981-6409.

### SEISMIC HAZARDS

The State [Seismic Hazards Mapping Act](#) (SHMA) and [Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Act](#) (EFZA) require additional geological investigation for new construction and major additions in designated landslide, liquefaction and fault rupture zones. The following projects are exempt from the SHMA and EFZA:

- Single-family, wood-frame dwellings 2 stories or less in height (note that for split-level homes, each level counts as a separate story)
- Additions under 50 percent of existing floor area and value (a recent appraisal may be required to document this).

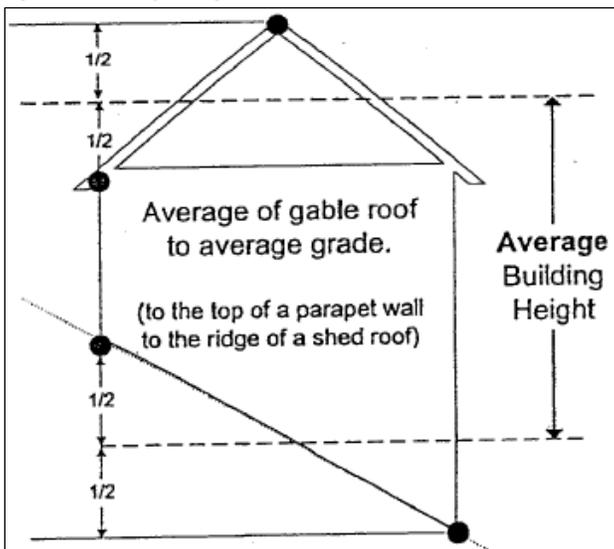
For further details, see the California Geological Survey's [Special Publication 117](#) for landslide and liquefaction zones, or [Special Publication 42](#) for fault rupture zones.

## Key Definitions and Provisions

### AVERAGE HEIGHT

Except for Accessory Dwelling Units, building height is measured using the Average Height method, which is illustrated in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2. Average Height (see Table 1 for standards)

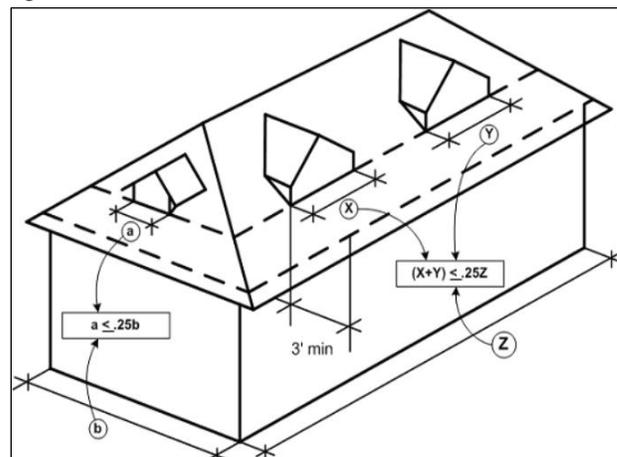


Note: For shed and parapet roofs, height is measured to the top of the shed roof or parapet wall.

### DORMERS

Dormers are exempt from the average height limit if they are: (1) set back at least 3 feet from the wall below; (2) have eaves that project no more than 2 feet; (3) are located below the main roof ridge; and (4) the total horizontal dimension of the dormer(s) facing a given side of a building, as measured parallel to that side, do not exceed 25% of the length of the exterior wall(s), as shown in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3. Dormer Calculation

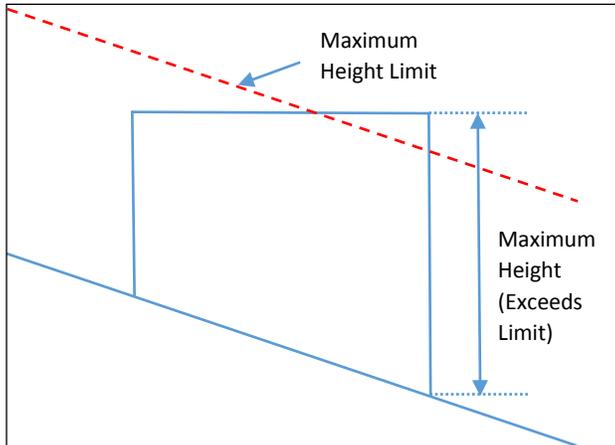


## Key Definitions and Provisions (continued)

### MAXIMUM HEIGHT

Buildings in the Hillside Overlay District and Accessory Dwelling Units are subject to Maximum Height limits. Unlike average height, maximum height is measured continuously from the finished grade to the top of the roof or parapet walls, as shown in Figure 4 below:

Figure 4. Maximum Height (see Table 1 for standards)

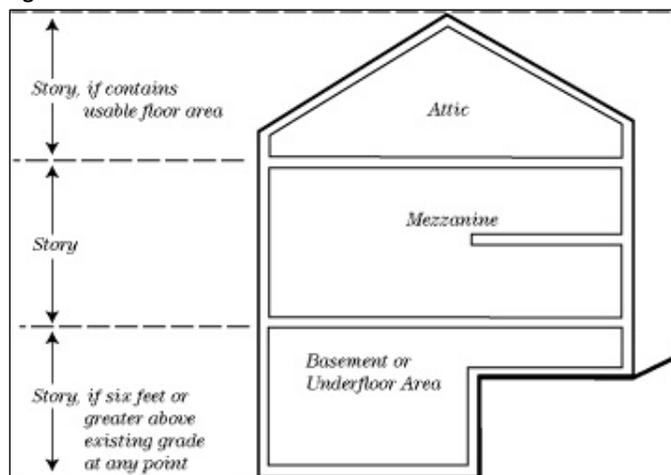


### STORY

A “story” includes usable attics (with a fixed stair and/or conditioned space) and basements and crawl spaces where the floor level above is more than 6 feet above exterior grade at any point. See Figure 5 below.

Note: Because the lot coverage standard varies with the number of stories in some districts, it is important to check lot coverage when creating a new story.

Figure 5. Determination of Stories



### SETBACKS

A setback (or “yard” in the Zoning Ordinance) is a required clear space between a building and a property line. See Table 1, notes 8-12 for allowable setback reductions. Other key provisions include:

- On a corner lot, the front setback is measured from the shortest street frontage (regardless of building address or front door location).
- Eaves, water heaters, chimneys, and similar features may project 1.5 feet\* into required interior side setbacks, and 2.5 feet into required front, rear and street side setbacks.
- Uncovered porches, decks over 30 inches tall (not including railing), stairs and landings may project 1.5 feet\* into required interior side setbacks, and 6 feet into required front, rear and street side setbacks.
- Decks under 30 inches tall (not including railing) are not subject to setback requirements.

\* Note: A side setback of 3 feet is required for such features (even if minimum building setback is 4 feet).

### LOT COVERAGE

Lot coverage (also known as “building footprint”) is the percentage of the lot covered by the following:

- Buildings or structures with a roof (to exterior wall surface, or posts/columns for open structures such as porches and carports)
- Upper-story overhangs (e.g. cantilevers)
- Portions of eaves projecting more than 2 feet from building walls (or posts/columns for open structures)
- Decks over a paved surface, or with boards or lattice enclosing the space beneath the deck
- Balconies, decks or stairs covered by eaves or by another balcony, deck or stair
- Horizontal trellises, pergolas, arbors, etc.



## Key Definitions and Provisions (continued)

### USABLE OPEN SPACE

Usable open space (UOS) standards are intended to provide active or passive recreational areas for building occupants. The following must be met for an area to count as UOS:

- Parking, driveways, and required walkways do not count as UOS.
- Minimum dimensions of 10 feet by 10 feet (6 feet by 6 feet for balconies).
- Maximum 50 percent of UOS requirement may be satisfied by balconies.
- 40% of UOS, excluding balconies, must be landscaped.
- UOS that is accessible only to a particular unit may only be counted for that unit.

Please see BMC Section [23D.04.050](#) for full UOS requirements.

### BEDROOM DEFINITION

In all residential districts except ES-R\*, R-4, R-S, and R-SMU, an AUP is required to create a fifth bedroom on a property, and a Use Permit is required to create a sixth bedroom or greater. Any room meeting the following definition is considered a “bedroom” for the purposes of this regulation:

*“Any Habitable Space in a Dwelling Unit or habitable Accessory Structure other than a kitchen or living room that is intended for or capable of being used for sleeping with a door that closes the room off from other common space such as living and kitchen areas, that is at least 70 square feet in area, exclusive of closets and other appurtenant space, and meets Building Code standards for egress, light and ventilation. A room identified as a den, library, study, loft, dining room, or other extra room that satisfies this definition will be considered a bedroom for the purposes of applying this requirement.”*

\* **Note:** In the ES-R District, an AUP is required for all new bedrooms, regardless of number.

## Further Information

### ZONING QUESTIONS

- **Phone:** 510-981-7410
- **E-mail:** [zoningcounter@cityofberkeley.info](mailto:zoningcounter@cityofberkeley.info)
- **Zoning Counter:** Planners are available for drop-in consultation at 1947 Center Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, during the following hours (please arrive at least 30 minutes before closing to ensure service):

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday: 8:30 – 4

Tuesday: 8:30 – 2:30

Friday: closed

***Note:** An advance appointment is required for AUP and Use Permit submittals. Please call the number above to schedule.*

### BUILDING PERMIT QUESTIONS

If your project does not require an AUP, Use Permit, Structural Alteration Permit, or creek permit, the next step is to obtain a building permit. For questions about the building permit process, including submittal requirements, fees and review times, please contact the Permit Service Center at 510-981-7500 or [permits@cityofberkeley.info](mailto:permits@cityofberkeley.info).

### BUILDING CODE QUESTIONS

For information on the California Building Code, please contact the Building and Safety Division at 510-981-7440 (choose option 0) or [buildingandsafety@cityofberkeley.info](mailto:buildingandsafety@cityofberkeley.info).