

Conversions to three or more dwelling units for architects

Converting a single-family or two-family (duplex) dwelling to a structure with three or more dwelling units is a significant undertaking under the Minnesota Building Code. The applicable building code changes from the Minnesota Residential Code Ch 1309 (IRC) to the Minnesota Building Code Ch 1305 (IBC).

The city of Minneapolis requires construction documents certified by a MN licensed architect for all projects converting a one- or two-family dwelling to a structure with three or more dwelling units.

Because the existing building will undergo a change in occupancy, the entire building is evaluated and both existing construction and new work must comply with the requirements of the new occupancy classification.

The following list identifies some of the more significant code compliance issues that should be considered by the designer and addressed in the construction documents. This is not a comprehensive list of all code issues that need to be considered.

1. The architect is strongly advised to consider the use of the MN Conservation Code for Existing Buildings (IEBC) in determining the appropriate means of achieving code compliance.
2. Evaluate for allowable stories, construction type, and sprinkler system provisions.
3. Typically, two exits are required per story. Egress windows are not considered exits.
4. Common path of travel and exit access travel distance are both limited under the building code and may also trigger the requirement for two means of egress.
5. Exterior walls may need to be rated from both sides of the wall depending on the fire separation distance.
6. Exterior wall projections (eaves) are limited based on fire separation distance. The building code limitation is different from the allowance in the residential code
7. Exterior walls may be required to be provided with a parapet (705.11).
8. Exterior wall openings (windows, doors, vents, etc.) are limited based on fire separation distance and the presence of a fire sprinkler system (NFPA 13 only – see Table 705.8 footnote)
9. Fire and sound separation is required between all dwelling units. The ventilation system, if located within these rated assemblies, will require appropriate dampers. Dryer vents are not permitted to have dampers. Shaft construction may be required.
10. Stair requirements are different in the building code than those in the residential code.
11. Common use stairways require rated construction as well as opening protection.
12. Guard height under the building code is higher (42 inches) than is required in the residential code (36 inches).
13. Minimum ceiling height in the building code is 7'-6" (1207.2).
14. Ventilation air per mechanical and energy code is required to be provided for the added dwelling. Ventilation air is not permitted to pass between dwellings (a common furnace is not permitted). A licensed contractor will need to provide plans showing compliance with mechanical requirements.
15. Electrical is inspected by the state electrical section of the MN Department of Labor and Industry. Electrical code requirements for the dwelling and the procedure for review of existing installation are per their office.