

# City of Peterborough

Building Division

*Residential Information Guides*

## Basement Finishing Guide

This information is intended to be used as an guide that outlines minimum requirements when finishing a basement, as well as what is required in order to make an application for a building permit to do so. If you have any questions, feel free to contact the building division!



### Questions?

Phone: (705)742-7777 x 1892

Web: [www.peterborough.ca](http://www.peterborough.ca)

# General Requirements

All construction must conform to the Ontario Building Code (OBC).

Homes that are less than 5 years old must conform to OBC Part 9, however, any home that is 5 years or older may conform to OBC Part 11.

Part 11 of the Ontario Building Code provides alternative renovation requirements in order to provide minimum health and safety standards without imposing undue costs to owners.

The following guide is provided to assist in clarifying the most critical health and safety requirements that will apply to a residential single unit detached basement finishing project built to OBC Part 9. For other projects, consult the Ontario Building Code for specific requirements.

## **Fire Safety:**

In a single-unit detached dwelling a minimum of one smoke alarm is required on each floor level, including basements. In addition, a smoke alarm is required in each bedroom as well as in each hallway outside of bedrooms. All smoke alarms are required to be interconnected, such that the activation of one alarm will cause all alarms within the dwelling unit to sound. In addition, all smoke alarms are required to have a visual signalling component.

## **Safe Exiting:**

The Ontario Building Code sets out minimum sizes for doorways and hallways to facilitate a safe path towards an exit in the event of an emergency.

Doors in the path between the basement and the exterior must be a minimum width of 810mm (32”).

**Other Doors:**

Utility room doors must also be 810mm (32") minimum width. Bathroom doors are permitted to be 610mm (24") wide; however, all other doors must reach a minimum width of 760mm (30"). Hallways are required to have a minimum width of 860mm (34").

**Ceiling Height:**

As a health and safety matter, the Ontario Building Code regulates a minimum ceiling height in all finished spaces. Basement spaces are permitted to be as low as 1950mm (6' 5") under beams and ducts, however at least 75% of the required floor area must be at least 2100mm (6' 11") high.

Bedrooms located in basements are required to be at least 2100mm (6' 11") over the entire area or 2300mm (7' 7") over at least 50% of the space, but no less than 1950mm (6' 5") under beams and ducts.

**Bedroom Windows:**

Windows in a bedroom must be a minimum size for various reasons. As a health matter the window must be openable and the window glass area must be a minimum of 5% of the floor area of the bedroom. For example, a 120 ft<sup>2</sup> bedroom would require a minimum window glass area of 6 ft<sup>2</sup>.

As a fire safety issue, every basement level that contains a bedroom shall be provided with a properly sized egress window. In addition to other requirements, the window must have a minimum, unobstructed opening of 0.35m<sup>2</sup> (3.8ft<sup>2</sup>) with no dimension being less than 380mm (15"). This window does not necessarily need to be provided in the bedroom, but somewhere in the basement. The egress window must provide the required opening without the use of tools or special knowledge. Casement windows without permanent handles, or sliders that slide and tilt are not permitted to be used.

**Other Windows:**

Basement recreation rooms, utility rooms, closets, and bathrooms do not require windows. Any other room not mentioned (such as offices, dens, sewing rooms etc.) require a minimum window glass area of 5% of the floor area of the room.

**Stairs:**

Stairs are required to have uniform risers (the height of all finished risers in a flight must be equal). If you intend to raise the height of the finish floor, or if you intend to finish the stairs with flooring this is a common pitfall to be wary of.

**Bathrooms:**

If there is a bathroom roughed in, or if you intend to add a bathroom or bar sink it must meet the plumbing requirements of the Ontario Building Code. Mechanical ventilation requires an exhaust fan, vented to the exterior, with minimum capacity 25L/s (50cfm), as well as pipe size, length and elbow restrictions.

**Ventilation/Heating:**

In most homes (especially new homes), the ventilation and heating system are combined, but the requirements for ventilation need to be looked at separately from the heating/cooling. An adequate amount of supply and return air ducts will need to be provided for the basement space. If you are unsure of the requirements, speak with a qualified mechanical contractor who is HRAI registered (Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Institute of Canada) to ensure the system is properly designed and installed. A poor design will cause discomfort and lead to poor energy efficiency as well as higher operating costs.

If your house has an HRV that you wish to reuse for the exhaust of the bathroom, a new HRV balancing report will need to be submitted after the installation. Otherwise, if the HRV system is not changed, a mechanical fan with a capacity of 25L/s (50cfm) should be supplied.

# Frequently Asked Questions

**Q:** When do I require a building permit for my basement project?

**A:** *A building permit is required for any construction in your basement project unless you are only painting and decorating. Any other work requires a building permit, including drywall work or installing new plumbing fixtures (even in an already roughed in bathroom).*

**Q:** How do I get a building permit for my basement project?

**A:** *A building permit is easily obtained from the Building Division at City Hall by submitting a complete application (see next question). A permit will be issued within 10 business days if drawings comply with the Ontario Building Code, are sufficiently detailed, and the application is complete.*

**Q:** What is required for a complete building permit application?

**A:** *A complete permit application requires the building permit application to be filled out, including Schedule 1. Payment is required as well as two sets of construction drawings (either hand drawn or computer drawn) drawn to scale and dimensioned must be provided. A floor plan which has the following information will be sufficient:*

- *Room names and areas*
- *Door sizes (width and height)*
- *Window sizes (width and height) and operation type (casement, awning, slider etc.)*
- *Walls (no single line drawings)*
- *Bathroom layout (if applicable)*
- *Existing stair location*
- *Ceiling height (including areas where the ceiling height changes, such as under bulkheads or beams)*
- *Any new beams or structural supports*

- *Location of existing (or relocated) mechanical equipment, such as furnace, HRV (heat recovery ventilator), water heater, clothes washer/dryer*
- *Location and sizes of existing duct work (including supply and cold air returns)*
- *Plans will be accepted in either metric or imperial measurements.*

**Q: Is it okay to start framing while you review my plans?**

**A: No. Construction cannot start until a building permit has been issued.**

**Q: How can I check to see if my contractor is licensed?**

**A: At this time the City of Peterborough does not require licensing for most of the construction trades. Some trades are required to be licensed, such as plumbers. We can help to check if your plumber is licensed.**

**Q: How much does the building permit cost?**

**A: Building permit fees are determined by City Council each year. For 2016, a building permit for the finishing of a basement costs \$20.65 for every \$1000 of estimated construction value, with a minimum charge of \$207.00.**

**Q: How long does it take to get a building permit?**

**A: Provided that the building permit application is complete (see previous questions), the application will be reviewed and a permit issued within 10 days, however, applications with the proper information are normally processed much faster.**

# Notes

# Checklist

- A building permit application filled out (including Schedule 1)
  
- Payment ready (Cash, cheque or Interac Debit)
  
- Two (2) sets of drawings including:
  - *Room names and areas*
  - *Door sizes (width and height)*
  - *Window sizes (width and height) and operation type (casement, awning, slider etc.)*
  - *Walls (no single line drawings)*
  - *Bathroom layout (if applicable)*
  - *Existing stair location*
  - *Ceiling height (including areas where the ceiling height changes, such as under bulkheads or beams)*
  - *Any new beams or structural supports*
  - *Location of existing (or relocated) mechanical equipment, such as furnace, HRV (heat recovery ventilator), hot water heater, clothes washer/dryer*
  - *Location and sizes of existing duct work (including supply and cold air returns)*
  - *Plans will be accepted in either metric or imperial measurements.*

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