

**SANTA CRUZ COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT POLICY/ORDINANCE
INTERPRETATION**

Interpretation No.: BASEMENT-03 (Basement definition - perimeter exterior wall)

Effective Date: July 27, 2009

Revised: none

Question

How are the “basement exterior perimeter wall area” and the “perimeter exterior wall” as referred to in the definition of basement (13.10.700-B) calculated, for the purpose of determining if a portion of a structure qualifies as a basement for planning and zoning purposes?

Applicable Ordinance Section(s)

13.10.700-B

13.10.700-G

INTERPRETATION:

In order for a portion of a structure to qualify as a basement for planning and zoning purposes, the basement definition in Section 13.10.700-B requires in part that “more than 50% of the basement exterior perimeter wall area must be below grade and no more than 20% of the perimeter exterior wall may exceed 5 feet – 6 inches above the exterior grade.” In the definition, the phrases “basement exterior perimeter wall” and “perimeter exterior wall” both refer to the perimeter walls of the basement, regardless of whether the perimeter basement walls are exterior walls of the structure as a whole. A basement wall located entirely underground, or abutting another portion of the structure such as an under floor, is still considered a perimeter wall of the basement. In figure A below, walls a, b, c, and d represent the basement perimeter walls.

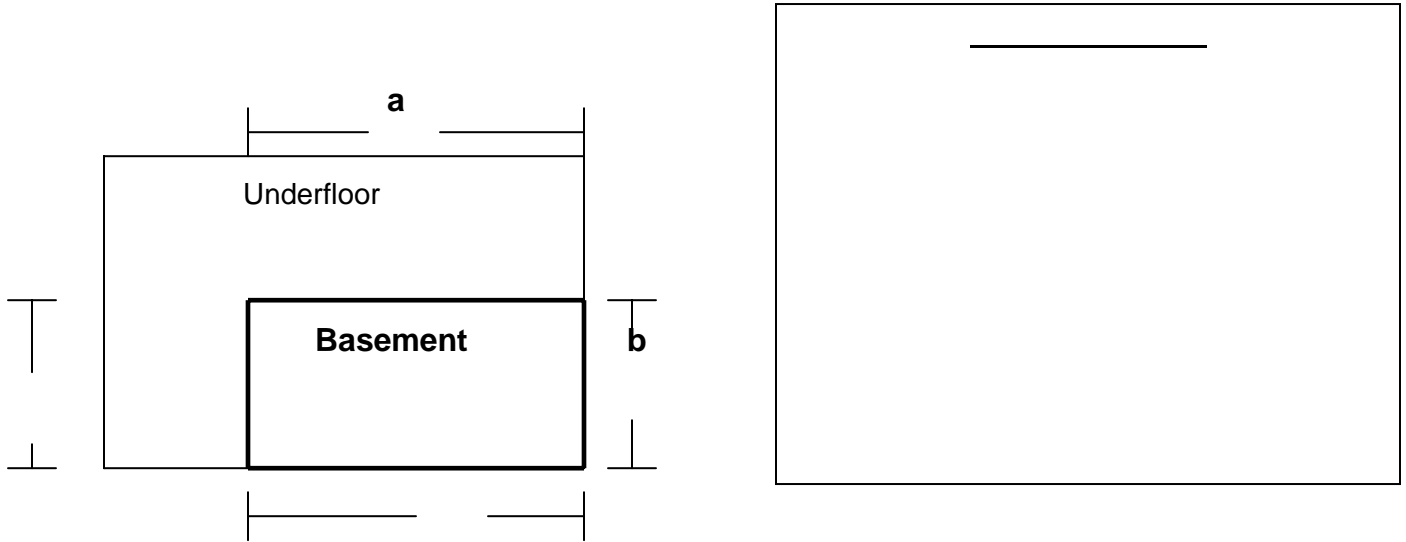
Therefore, to qualify as a basement, more than 50% of the perimeter wall area of the basement must be below grade and no more than 20% of the perimeter wall area of the basement may exceed 5 feet 6 inches above the exterior grade, regardless of the relationship of the basement perimeter walls to the exterior walls of the structure as a whole. (Note: Garages with interior access that are on the same level as the basement will be considered as part of the basement. Garages without interior access to a portion of the structure will be considered as separate accessory structures, consistent with the definition of garage in Section 13.10.700-G.)

As is consistent with the procedure for measuring structure height outlined in policy interpretation HT-01 (Building Height), when a perimeter basement wall is not located at the exterior of the structure, the height of that basement wall will be measured from the original (natural) grade, as it exists at the outside of the basement perimeter wall. When a perimeter basement wall is located at the exterior of the structure, the height of that basement wall will be measured from the finished grade or natural grade, whichever is lower, as it exists at the outside of the basement wall (see Figure B: Section View).

The location of the exterior grade at the outside of the basement perimeter walls should be included in submitted plans. To determine the location of the exterior grade for perimeter basement walls that abut another portion of the structure instead of facing directly outside, an elevation and/or sectional view may be required.

Figure A: Basement Perimeter Walls

Perimeter basement walls =
 $a+b+c+d$



Reason:

The intention of the basement definition is to ensure that the basement be located primarily underground. A basement that does not meet this requirement is considered a story or an under floor instead of a basement.

In order for the basement to be located primarily underground, it is necessary for the perimeter walls of the basement to meet the criteria contained in the definition, regardless of whether the perimeter basement walls are located at the structure exterior. The word perimeter refers to the entire perimeter of the basement, including portions of the perimeter that face directly outside and portions of the perimeter that face another portion of the subterranean area. This requirement flows logically from the definition, which reads in part, “To qualify as a basement more than 50% of the basement exterior perimeter wall area must be below grade and no more than 20% of the perimeter exterior wall may exceed 5 feet – 6 inches above the exterior grade” (underlining added). Since the entire sentence refers to the basement, the reference to the “perimeter exterior wall” refers to the perimeter walls of the basement, and not to some other portion of the structure.

Tom Burns, Planning Director

Date