

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

Interpretation No.: RES-BSMNT-01 (Basement FAR)

Effective Date: August 19, 2003

Revised:

Question

How is Floor Area Ratio (FAR) calculated for “basements” (excavated or naturally occurring subterranean areas) of a residential building?

Applicable Ordinance Section(s)

§ 13.10.323(c)

§ 13.10.700 - B and - F

Certain residential parcels, as determined by the R-1 and RM Residential Zone Districts Site and Structural Dimensions Charts in County Code Section 13.10.323(c), are subject to a maximum 0.5:1 Floor Area Ratio regulation.

Section 13.10.700-F defines Floor Area Ratio (FAR) as “The Gross Area divided by the net site area.”

Section 13.10.323(c) lists those areas included in Gross Building Area, including:

Basements, attics and under floor area which reach ceiling height of 7 ft. 6 inches or higher, then all areas greater than 5 feet 0 inches in height shall count as areas for F.A.R. calculations

The term “Basement” is defined, in part, in Section 13.10.700-B as:

Basement. For planning and zoning purposes, a basement is the space below the bottom of the floor framing (joists or girders that directly support the floor sheathing) and the basement floor.

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.

INTERPRETATION:

There is a three-part analysis that is required to determine Floor Area Ratio for a subterranean area (excavated or naturally occurring) of a residential building:

1. Is the subterranean area directly below the bottom of the floor framing (joists or girders that directly support the floor sheathing) and the basement floor? If yes, continue to the next criteria. If no, that portion of the subterranean area that is not directly below the bottom of the floor framing is not considered a “basement” and is counted in the Gross Building Area.
2. Is more than 50% of the basement exterior perimeter wall area below grade and is no more than 20% of the perimeter exterior wall exceeding 5 feet – 6 inches above the exterior grade? If yes, continue to Section 3. If no, the subterranean area is not a basement. Check and see if it qualifies as an Underfloor.
3. Does any part of the basement area, as determined above, have ceiling height of 7 ft. 6 inches or higher? If yes, then all areas greater than 5 ft. 0 inches in height shall count as Gross Building Area for Floor Area Ratio. If no, then none of the area shall count as Gross Building Area for Floor Area Ratio.

Tom Burns, Planning Director

Date

13.10.323(c)