Minneapolis
City of Lakes

Conversion to a Three-Unit Dwellings (or Two Units plus an Accessory Dwelling Unit) – Common Code Rules

Overview

In Minneapolis, you can convert a single-family home or duplex to a three-unit dwelling.

Examples of a three-unit dwelling:

- Three-plex
- Duplex with an accessory dwelling unit (ADU)

This type of conversion is a major project under the Minnesota Building Code.

Although Minnesota state law does not require an architect for buildings with fewer than four units, keep in mind that:

- The City of Minneapolis requires that plans show how the project will comply with the code.
- Most homeowners or contractors will need an architect to provide construction drawings that are complete enough to get the building permit.
- The City requires an architect if you propose a code alternate or code modification.
- If you want to legalize an unpermitted dwelling, the City recommends that you hire an architect.

Common code rules to follow

❑ Zoning and land use review

Review for compliance with all zoning regulations, including:

- Entrance locations
- Window requirements
- Parking area
- All other applicable codes

❑ Two exits required

Each occupant of a non-sprinklered building must have access to two exits, per International Building Code (IBC) Section 1021.2(1). When two exits are required, they must be separated from each other (50% of maximum diagonal length of the dwelling unit), per 1015.2.

Read IBC Section 1021.2(1)
Read IBC Section 1015.2

Single-exit exception
When a private exit is provided at grade level, IBC Section 1021.2.3 allows a single exit. Notes:

- Typically, a first-floor unit exits at grade.
- A basement unit could qualify if at walk-out level.
- Second or third floor units that require travel down a stairway will need two exits under this provision.

Read IBC Section 1021.2.3

❑ Three-story buildings (including two-story plus occupied attic)

Buildings of three or more units (including ADU) must be of one-hour construction. Existing one and two-family homes are not one-hour construction. The alternative is to provide a sprinkler system throughout. An architect may propose existing plaster over wood or metal lath when in good condition and continuous fire blocking is provided at floor levels as alternative compliance.

❑ Buildings of more than 4,500 square feet in area

When converted from one or two dwellings to three dwellings (including ADU), building must be fully sprinkled. Note that most existing one or two-family homes do not exceed 4,500 sq. ft. However, the **Two exits required rule** (above) would still apply if you have a three-story building. An architect may propose systems other than 13R systems as an alternate on an individual basis if system meets fire design criteria.

❑ Unit entry and exit doors

Per IBC 1008 The exit door from the dwelling must provide 32” clear width between the face of the door and the stop when the door is open 90 degrees. This usually means a 36” wide door. Landings are required at stairs and doors per Chapter 10.

Read IBC 1008

❑ Stair requirements

- Existing stairs: 8” maximum rise, 9” minimum run (run measured face of nosing to face of nosing).
- Stair headroom: 6’-6”. Existing stairs can be improved to meet this minimum.
- New stair construction: 7” maximum rise, 11” minimum run, 6’-8” headroom.
- Landings are required both sides of stair doors with a few exceptions where doors do not swing over the stair.
- Provide notes and dimensions.

- Winding, circular and spiral stairs each have specific requirements in the code.

Read Minnesota Building Code 2015

❑ Stair Enclosures

Common stairways connecting 3 floors (including basement) require a minimum of one-hour label doors and hardware.

❑ Exit illumination and exit signs

Common exit stairs require exit illumination and exit signs per Chapter 10.

Read Chapter 10

❑ Guards and guardrails

- Common area guards and exterior guards must be 42" minimum height and have openings less than 4".
- Interior guards within an individual dwelling may be 36" in height.

❑ Ceiling height

Per IBC 1208, habitable or usable space in basements shall have a ceiling height of 7-6, except that kitchens, baths, storage, laundry and halls may be 7'-0". An architect may propose IRC ceiling height criteria at basement or 3rd floor if maximum achievable ceiling height provided.

Read IBC 1208

❑ Egress windows

Each sleeping room shall have one complying egress window. See Basement Egress Window handout. (exception for sprinklered building when two exits from each unit provided) The window well requires a minimum setback (zoning) of 2'-0" from interior side yard property lines.

Read Minnesota State Fire Code sections 1104.25 through 1104.25.5.2

❑ Dwelling unit sound and fire separation

New dwellings require sound separation per 1207 and fire separation between the new dwelling and adjoining space. If existing drywall or plaster, option to add one-layer 5/8" drywall over sound channel, or ½" type "X" or "c" drywall over sound channel at ceiling separating units and interior unit/common area walls.

Read Minnesota State Fire Code section 708
Read Minnesota State Fire Code section 420.2

❑ Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors required

- Sleeping rooms and hall or room outside of sleeping rooms require smoke alarms, per Minnesota Building Code Chapter 1305 907.2.11.2.

- Carbon monoxide alarms required within 10 feet of each sleeping room, per Minnesota Building Code 1305 908.7.

Read Minnesota Building Code Chapter 1305 907.2.11.2
Read Minnesota Building Code 1305 908.7
Read Minnesota State Fire Code Table 1103.8

❑ Fire alarm

Required when any sleeping or dwelling unit is located two or more stories above the lowest level of exist discharge or located more than one story below the highest level of exit discharge.

Read MSFC and NFPA-72 MSFC-1103.7.5

Exceptions:

- Fire alarm not required 1103.7.5.1-when there is no interior corridor serving dwelling/sleeping units and where each dwelling unit has an exit door opening directly to an exterior exit.
- Fire alarm not required when the building is protected throughout with an automatic sprinkler system.

Read MSBC 1103.7.5.1
Read NFPA13 or 13R

❑ Newly insulated areas or finishing space

Newly insulated areas or finishing space that exposes exterior wall cavities or roof/ceiling must comply with energy code insulation values where possible.

❑ Existing Plumbing and Mechanical installations installed without permit

Existing Plumbing and Mechanical installations installed without permit shall be evaluated for compliance by licensed plumbing and mechanical contractors. Permits will be required for any corrections or alterations, or for final inspection if no changes are needed.

❑ Ventilation air

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 (this means a common furnace is not permitted). A licensed contractor will need to provide plans showing compliance with mechanical requirements.

❑ Electrical inspection

The Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry's electrical section:

- Inspects electrical work
- Enforces electrical code requirements for the dwelling and the procedure for review of existing installation

❑ Electrical, plumbing and mechanical work

All electrical, plumbing and mechanical work must be performed by licensed contractors.

❑ Sewer access charge and park dedication fee

SAC and Park Dedication fees apply to the additional dwelling units (ADU exempted).

- 2021 sewer access charge rate: $2,485
- 2021 park dedication rate: $1,614

❑ Address numbers

Address numbers must be posted, per Minneapolis Housing Maintenance Code (MHMC) 435.60.

Read MHMC 435.60

❑ Building security

Includes requirements for locks at doors, windows and garages.

Read MHMC Title 12, Article XV

❑ Fire extinguishers

Fire extinguishers required, per 244.920.

Read MHMC 244.920

❑ Rental license

Rental license required.

Read MHMC Article XVI beginning at 244.1800

❑ Certificate of occupancy

Required for the new dwelling units, including an ADU in a two-dwelling plus ADU building, prior to occupancy.

Read MHMC 85.130