

# MAJOR RESIDENTIAL REMODELS/ NEW CONSTRUCTION

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Many homeowners are choosing to remodel their homes. When the project becomes a major residential remodel, the city identifies the house as new construction. New homes have additional requirements that will impact the project scope, such as required photovoltaic systems and fire sprinklers. This handout is to clarify the guidelines defining major remodels.

These requirements apply to single-family and duplex residential structures. They do not apply to multifamily properties or commercial properties. For information relating to additional new home requirements, please search the city of Sunnyvale's website for *Residential Fire Sprinklers*, *Green Building Program*, and *Single Family Residential*.

## WHAT QUALIFIES AS A MAJOR REMODEL?

- **Removing 50% or more of the exterior walls above the foundation.** Removing 50% or more of the exterior walls above the foundation triggers the requirements of a new building.
- **Raising the plate height of 50% or more of the exterior walls.** For example, removing the existing top plates of the exterior wall and adding studs to increase the plate height constitutes as removing the wall. Another example is extending an existing wall by adding a gable on top of plates due to reconfiguration of an existing roof.
- **Removed** walls are permanently removed, torn out and rebuilt in the same location, or become an interior wall as a result of the project.
- **Exterior** walls are bearing or non-bearing, that are used to enclose a building and have weather exposed surfaces.
- **Interior** walls are bearing or non-bearing that are not exposed to the weather.
- **Demolition** is the destruction of a structure.

## EXEMPTIONS?

- **Conversions that don't remove exterior walls or expand the structure's footprint or envelope:** Existing permitted areas such as unfinished basements and attics that are converted to habitable space without removing exterior walls or expanding the structure's footprint or envelope are not considered major remodels or additions even if the project adds new interior living space over 499 square feet.
- **Detached accessory dwelling units (ADU's):** Please refer to our handout *Sunnyvale Homeowners: Interested in Building an Accessory Dwelling Unit?*

## ENFORCEMENT?

- **Enforcement:** If a Building Inspector determines that modifications to the project scope have changed a project to a major remodel or addition, or a demolition, without the required permit revision or new permit, the Inspector will issue a **Stop Work Order** for the project until the changes have been approved under the proper permit.

## TRIGGERING A CHANGE TO MAJOR REMODEL OR ADDITION STATUS AFTER THE PERMIT IS ISSUED

**Table 1: Permitting requirements for projects that change from a minor to a major remodel or addition**

Type of change	Example of change	Required Permit Change
Changes to scope of work don't change the project type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minor Remodel to Major Remodel</li><li>• Minor Addition to Major Addition</li></ul>	Applicant submits plan changes. Major addition requires new department approvals.
Changes to scope of work do change the project type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minor Remodel to Major Addition</li><li>• Minor Addition to Major Remodel</li></ul>	Applicant submits plan changes. Major addition requires new department approvals.

- **Project changing from a minor to a major remodel:** Changes to the scope of work after a permit has been issued may require a permit revision, a new plan, and new department approvals, depending on the type of project change. Table 1 specifies which requirement applies when the project changes to a major remodel or addition after the original permit has been issued. Though the permit type (remodel or addition) may not change, the requirements for new plans will be triggered when changing from a minor remodel or addition to a major remodel or addition.
- **Project changing from a major remodel or addition to a demolition:** A change in the scope of work may shift the project from a major remodel or addition to a demolition. If your project changes from a major remodel or addition to a demolition, you'll need to stop work on the project, obtain a demolition permit, and meet the requirements for demolition projects. Reconstruction will be considered a new structure. For information relating to demolition requirements, please search the city of Sunnyvale's website for *Demolition Permit Requirements*.

**Notification is the best prevention! Make the required notifications at least 30 days in advance of starting work if there is ANY possibility that your project could become a major remodel or addition. This will prevent your project from being delayed.**

# RULES TO CALCULATE REMOVED EXTERIOR WALLS

To calculate removed exterior walls, first, determine the total lineal feet of the existing exterior walls above the foundation, then calculate the exterior walls that will be removed. Removed walls include the portion of each wall that will be entirely replaced.

## **Example wall calculations for a major remodel project**

To determine the amount of removed exterior walls, for each story, add the following:

Exterior walls rebuilt in the same location  
+ Permanently removed exterior walls  
+ Exterior walls converted to interior walls  
= Total removed walls

If the total removed walls in linear feet are greater than or equal to 50% of the existing wall area, then the work qualifies as a major remodel.

- Walls with any plate height changes including an added or extended wall to accommodate a gable or change in roof design are considered removed.
- Openings such as doors and/or windows increasing in size more than 25%.

## **How is exterior wall length determined?**

- Exterior wall length is measured from corner to corner on the exterior side of the wall siding.
- Where there are jogs in the wall because of bump-outs or angle changes, the length of each wall segment is added together to determine the total exterior wall length.
- Portions of walls with a sloping top plate that are less than 7' tall are excluded from the calculation of the wall length.
- The linear length of a wall along a sloped grade will be determined at the line of the average grade plane along that wall.
- Walls that form basements (as defined in the California Residential Code) are excluded from the calculations.
- Windows and doors that are moved, removed, or replaced are not considered removing the wall, so long as the rest of the wall remains. Replaced windows need to remain relatively the same dimensions as the existing windows. ( $\leq 25\%$  change only. i.e. 4040 to 4050)
- Removing siding or sheetrock does not constitute removing a wall.

## **How are garages, carports, and porches counted?**

- A garage and a house with connected foundations will be considered as a single structure for determining wall length.
- A garage with a foundation that is not shared with the house is not included in the calculations for the house.
- Attached carports and covered patios that are not enclosed by walls do not count toward wall length.