

## Getting Started

You are considering converting an existing space in your home to an accessory dwelling unit or constructing an addition for this purpose. We would like to see you succeed in your endeavor. Here are our top tips to ensure that your project is a successful one.

- **Be patient and plan ahead.** Creating an accessory dwelling unit will most likely require some construction work and building permits. Construction work takes time and requires that you follow all the correct procedures and codes.

## Hire a Professional Architect or an Experienced Designer

- We strongly recommend that you hire a **professional architect or an experienced designer** who is familiar with the Virginia Building Codes. It will save you time and money in the long run.
- Once you have hired an architect or a designer and have a conceptual design, you may want to request a **code consultation meeting** with the technical staff in the County's Inspection Services Division - so you don't end up with any unpleasant surprises. Code consultation information can be found here - <http://building.arlingtonva.us/project/code-consultation/>

## Do Your Homework Before You Invest Time and Money

- Make sure that your proposal is allowed under the Arlington County Zoning Ordinance. Contact or visit the **Zoning Office** at 2100 Clarendon Boulevard, 10th floor, Arlington, VA, (703) 228-3883.
- Any exterior work to be performed in a historical district must be accompanied by a Certificate of Appropriateness obtained prior to applying for permit. Contact **Historic Preservation** at (703) 228-3812 for further information.
- The addition of any plumbing fixtures may incur an impact fee from the **Department of Environmental Services** (DES). Contact DES at (703) 228-3629 for further information.

**You will need a building permit if you are converting an existing space to an accessory dwelling unit or constructing an addition.**

## Building Code Implications

- The Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (VUSBC) contain several requirements for buildings containing two dwelling units: units must be separated by fire-rated construction; units require separate means of egress; etc... Meeting these requirements can be very time consuming and expensive.
- The VUSBC for one and two family dwellings can be found here:  
[http://codes.iccsafe.org/app/book/toc/2012%20VA\\_Residential\\_HTML/index.html](http://codes.iccsafe.org/app/book/toc/2012%20VA_Residential_HTML/index.html)

Below are some building code implications of changing a single dwelling unit building into a two dwelling unit building:

- **Means Of Egress**  
A second dwelling unit would require a code compliant means of egress. Providing such a means of egress could entail significant alteration to existing basement areaways or adding an exterior exit stair from an attic level.
- **Height & Area Limitations**  
The alteration of an unoccupied attic space into a second dwelling unit may cause the attic space to be classified as another story. This addition of another story to the building may cause the building to fall out of compliance with height & area requirements, may cause the building to be subject to the IBC rather than the IRC, and may require the installation of a sprinkler system.
- **Sleeping Rooms**  
All sleeping rooms created in the new second dwelling unit would require emergency egress windows and any required corresponding window wells. All sleeping rooms also require smoke detectors.
- **Dwelling Unit Separation**  
Dwelling units in two-family dwellings shall be separated from each other by fire rated wall and floor assemblies having not less than 1-hour fire-resistance rating. Fire rated floor-ceiling and wall assemblies shall extend to and be tight against the exterior wall, and wall assemblies shall extend to the underside of the roof sheathing. When floor assemblies are required to be fire-resistance-rated, the supporting construction of such assemblies shall have an equal or greater fire-resistive rating. Major alterations and/or a sprinkler system may be required to fully separate the two dwelling units.
- **Ceiling Height**  
Habitable rooms, hallways, corridors, bathrooms, toilet rooms, laundry rooms and basements shall have a ceiling height of not less than 7 feet. The required height shall be measured from the finish floor to the lowest projection from the ceiling. Many existing basements and attics do not meet the required minimum ceiling height and significant alteration to the structure could be required to meet this requirement.
- **Light, Ventilation And Heating**  
All habitable rooms shall be provided with aggregate glazing area of not less than 8 percent of the floor area of such rooms. Natural ventilation shall be through windows, doors, louvers or other approved openings to the outdoor air. Such openings shall be provided with ready access or shall otherwise be



# Accessory Dwellings: Top Tips for Success

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readily controllable by the building occupants. The minimum open area to the outdoors shall be 4 percent of the floor area being ventilated. Meeting the minimum light and ventilation requirements may require significant alteration to an in-ground basement level.

- **Mechanical, Electrical & Plumbing Systems**

Significant alteration to the structure or systems may be required to provide mechanical, plumbing and electrical systems to serve each dwelling unit.

- **Addresses**

Approved numbers or addresses shall be provided for all buildings in such a position as to be plainly visible and legible from the street or road fronting the property.

## Documents Required for Permits

The following documents are required for building permits. All plans must indicate new and existing work (clouds are not an acceptable method to indicate new work).

- See the Building Arlington website for the permit and plan submission requirements - <http://building.arlingtonva.us/>
- **Architectural Drawings**  
Scaled and dimensioned floor plans; elevations; sections; details; framing plans; foundation plans; room/door/window schedules; and partition schedules with fire ratings and test numbers.
- **Mechanical Drawings**  
Show mechanical layout and equipment list. Must show location of new outdoor mechanical units on plat.
- **Mechanics' Lien Information**  
Additions Only – Three (3) copies of **survey plat**, sealed by an engineer or surveyor (applies also to 2nd story additions). Chesapeake Bay Water Quality Impact Worksheet (DES) if footprint of addition is more than 1000 square feet.

## Contact Us

**Arlington County Inspection Services Division**  
**2100 Clarendon Boulevard**  
**10<sup>th</sup> Floor – Suite 1000**  
**Arlington, VA 22201**  
**(703) 228-3800**

Visit us online: <http://building.arlingtonva.us/>