



DATE: April 29, 2024
POLICY MEMO NO.: PM2024-0002
TITLE: Modification Criteria for Review of Triplexes Under the International Residential Code
RELATED DEPT. & DIVISION: Development Services Department, Residential Plan Review
TOPIC: Permits, Dwelling Units
DECISION MAKER: Todd Wilcox, Building Official

SUMMARY: This policy memo establishes the parameters by which certain triplex structures may be reviewed under the International Residential Code.

CODE SECTIONS: Land Development Code (LDC), Chapter 25-5 (*Site Plans*)

- [§ 25-5-2](#) (*Site Plan Exemptions*)

Land Development Code (LDC), Chapter 25-12 (*Technical Codes*)

- [§ 25-12-3](#) (*Local Amendments to the International Building Code*)
- [§ 25-12-243](#) (*Local Amendments to the International Residential Code*)

2021 International Residential Code (IRC)

- [Table R302.1\(2\)](#) (*Exterior Walls – Dwellings with Fire Sprinklers*)
- [§ R302.4](#) (*Dwelling Unit Rated Penetrations*)
- [§ R311.2](#) (*Egress Doors*)
- [§ R302.12](#) (*Draftstopping*)

2021 International Building Code (IBC)

- [§ 703.2.2](#) (*Analytical Methods*)
- [§ 717.6](#) (*Horizontal Assemblies*)
- [Chapter 11](#) (*Accessibility*)

ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials)

- [ASTM E119](#) (*Standard Test Methods for Fire Tests of Building Construction and Materials*)

UL (Underwriters Laboratories)

- [UL 263](#) (*Fire Tests of Building Construction and Materials*)

POLICY:Background

On December 7, 2023, City Council adopted [Ordinance No. 20231207-001](#), which established a new “three-unit residential” use defined as “the use of a lot for three dwelling units other than a mobile home.” A three-unit residential use may be constructed as either detached units, a single unit and a duplex, or a single, attached triplex.

Historically, the City of Austin has reviewed single-family structures, duplexes, and townhomes under the International Residential Code (IRC), and structures with three or more units have been reviewed under the International Building Code (IBC). This policy memo establishes the criteria by which triplexes may be reviewed under the IRC, similar to a single-family home or duplex. Projects that do not meet these criteria will continue to be reviewed under the IBC.

Policy

Subject to the following criteria, the Building Official will approve an administrative modification allowing triplex structures to be designed and constructed according to the provisions of the International Residential Code (IRC) as amended by Section 25-12-243 (*Local Amendments to the International Residential Code*). For purposes of this policy memo, a triplex is defined as “a single building, other than a townhouse, containing three dwelling units.”

The project’s Design Professional is responsible for submitting a [Request for Modification](#) application, including all drawings and documents necessary to determine compliance with the criteria established in this policy. Although eligible for review under the IRC, triplexes must still comply with specific construction standards from the IBC as detailed in this policy.

General Eligibility Criteria for Approval of Modification to Construct a Triplex under the IRC

- The development must be site plan exempt in accordance with Land Development Code (LDC) Section 25-5-2 (*Site Plan Exemptions*).
- A triplex may not be more than 3 stories in height above grade plane.
- Installation of an automatic sprinkler system is required.

Construction Standards that will Continue to Apply to Triplexes with Approved Modifications.

- Triplexes will continue to be reviewed for accessibility in accordance with International Building Code (IBC) Chapter 11 (*Accessibility*), as amended by Section 25-12-3 (*Local Amendments to the International Building Code*). The IRC will not apply for matters of accessibility.
- Dwelling units in a triplex shall be separated from each other and from shared components of the Means of Egress, by wall and floor assemblies having not less than a 1-hour fire-

resistance rating when tested in accordance with ASTM E119, UL 263, or Section 703.2.2 (*Analytical Methods*) of the IBC. Fire-resistance rated floor/ceiling and wall assemblies shall extend to and be tight against the exterior wall or another separation assembly, and wall assemblies shall extend from the foundation or floor/ceiling assembly below and be securely attached to one of the following:

- The underside of the floor or roof sheathing, deck, or slab above.
- The underside of a floor/ceiling or roof/ceiling assembly having a fire-resistance rating that is not less than the fire-resistance rating of the wall.
- Where floor assemblies are required to be fire-resistance rated, the supporting construction of such assemblies shall have an equal or greater fire-resistance rating.
- Where fire-resistance rated interior wall assemblies do not extend to the underside of the floor or roof sheathing, deck, or slab above, the space above and along the line of the wall shall be provided with draftstopping in accordance with IRC Section R302.12 (*Draftstopping*).
- If provided, Shared Means of Egress components shall meet the following requirements:
 - Openings between a Shared Means of Egress component and a dwelling unit shall be equipped with 45-minute fire-rated doors. Doors shall be self-latching, equipped with a self-closing or automatic-closing device, and shall meet the dimensional and operational requirements of IRC Section R311.2 (*Egress Door*).
 - Shared Means of Egress components shall discharge directly to the exterior of the building and provide access to a public way. If a door is provided, it shall meet the dimensional and operational requirements of IRC Section R311.2.
- Penetrations of wall or floor/ceiling assemblies required to be fire-resistance rated shall be in accordance with IRC Section R302.4 (*Dwelling Unit Rated Penetrations*), except that duct and air-transfer openings through fire-resistance rated floor/ceiling assemblies shall be protected in accordance with IBC Section 717.6 (*Horizontal Assemblies*).
- Construction, projections, openings, and penetrations of exterior walls of triplexes shall comply with IRC Table R302.1(2) (*Exterior Walls – Dwellings with Fire Sprinklers*).



Todd Wilcox, Building Official