

# FINISHED BASEMENTS

Fairfax County  
VIRGINIA

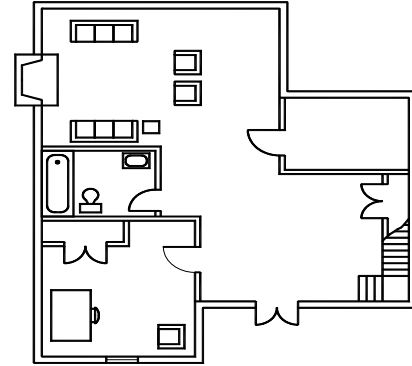
## Land Development Services

Department of Public Works and Environmental Services

Hours of Operation: Monday - Thursday: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
Friday: 9:15 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Location: **Herrity Building**  
12055 Government Center Parkway  
Fairfax, VA 22035-5504  
Telephone: 703-222-0801  
TTY: 711

For forms and publications, visit us on the Web at  
[www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes)



This publication provides guidelines for finishing a basement in an existing single family dwelling. The requirements herein are the most common and are not representative of all conditions you may encounter. Additional permits, plans and inspections may be required, depending on the complexity of your project. More information is available in the [Fairfax County Typical Finished Basement Details](#).

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## PERMITS REQUIRED

You must obtain permits for finishing a basement. Listed below are the types of permits required, depending on the complexity of the project. Apply for your permits at the **Permit Application Center** located at the Herrity Building, 2nd floor, **703-222-0801, TTY 711**.

- **Building permit** for construction of architectural and structural elements.
- **Electrical permit** for all electrical installations.
- **Plumbing permit** for installations of plumbing and gas piping systems.
- **Mechanical permit** is **not** required to install ductwork in a finished basement.

**HELPFUL HINT:** You may obtain permits in your own name; however, if a contractor is to perform the work, it is strongly recommended that the contractor secure the permit and be listed as the responsible party. In this way, the county will be in a better position to assist you in gaining code compliance if the work is defective. A contractor must be properly licensed in order to obtain a permit.

## BEFORE OBTAINING A PERMIT

### BUILDING CODE

Your project is required to comply with the 2006 Virginia Residential Code which may be purchased from the International Code Council at [www.iccsafe.org](http://www.iccsafe.org). Code books are also available in the reference section of the Fairfax County regional libraries.



- Ceiling height.
- Emergency egress is required for all finished basements and basement bedrooms regardless of when the house was constructed.** However, basements with bedrooms are only required to have emergency egress in the bedrooms. Egress may be attained with a walk-out door or approved window. Plans must show method of emergency egress. In the case of an egress window, show the height of the sill above the finished floor and window opening dimensions. See the [Fairfax County Typical Finished Basement Details](#) for more information.
- A window well for basement emergency egress is required when the sill of the egress window is located below exterior grade. Details must include the following:
  - All dimensions including length, width and depth.
  - Ladder details including, width, spacing of rungs and offset from window well wall.
  - Complete set of construction documents adequately detailing structural elements of the window well. The publication [Retaining Walls](#) can be used as a guide for constructing basement window wells.
  - Manufacturer's specifications for prefabricated window wells.
- If a new opening in the basement wall is necessary for emergency egress requirements, details of the alterations must be submitted.

## 2. FAIRFAX COUNTY TYPICAL FINISHED BASEMENT DETAILS

The [Fairfax County Typical Finished Basement Details](#) may be used in lieu of submitted drawings. The following conditions require the submission of plans: new window well, bedroom, kitchen, wet bar and any alteration to an existing load bearing wall, exterior wall, beam or column/post. The details are also available at the Permit Application Center.

### OBTAINING A PERMIT

#### PERMIT PROCESS

Bring the construction documents described herein to the Permit Application Center on the 2nd floor of the Herrity Building where your permit process will begin. Here you will complete a building permit application. Permit technicians will direct you to the appropriate agencies necessary for permit approval. The applicable departments for a finished basement are:

- **Zoning** reviews for wet bars and second kitchens. The Zoning Permit Review Branch is located at the Herrity Building, 2nd floor, **703-222-1082, TTY 711**.
- **Health Department**, located at 10777 Main Street, Fairfax, **703-246-2444, TTY 711**, reviews finished basements that are adding basement bedrooms and are served by a private sewer or well.
- **Building Plan Review**, located on the 2nd floor of the Herrity Building, **703-222-0114, TTY 711**, will review for compliance to the applicable building codes. This review is not required if the [Fairfax County Typical Finished Basement Details](#) are used in lieu of submitted drawings and no window wells or new basement wall openings are required.

The building permit is issued when all required approvals have been obtained and applicable fees have been paid. Once your permits are issued, you must post a copy on the job site until the project has received final approval. Most finished basements are eligible for the Walk-Thru Program which allows you, in most cases, to apply for and obtain your permit in the same day.

#### ELECTRICAL AND PLUMBING PERMITS

Electrical and plumbing permits are issued after the building permit is approved, but may be processed at the same time. Plans submittals are not required.

#### FEES

For information on the related fees for a finished basement contact the following:

- Permit Application Center for [building](#), [electrical](#), and plumbing permits at **703-222-0801, TTY 711** or visit [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/living/buildingpermits](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/living/buildingpermits).
- Health Department for fees related to septic systems and wells at **703-246-2444, TTY 711**.

## AFTER OBTAINING A PERMIT

### INSPECTION REQUIREMENTS

- A copy of the approved permit and plans must be on the job site and must be available to the inspector during each inspection.
- All close-in and final inspections for building, electrical and plumbing are required to be conducted simultaneously; the inspector may hold the requests until all trades are ready to be inspected.
- Please review the Inspection Timing Checklist herein to determine the time and number of inspections required.

INSPECTION TIMING CHECKLIST	
INSPECTION TYPE	REQUIREMENTS PRIOR TO INSPECTION
	Notes: 1. Approval must be obtained prior to proceeding with the next applicable element. 2. All inspections are conducted by residential inspectors.
Close-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All vents, sewer pipe and/or water pipe to be enclosed must be installed.</li> <li>• All initial wiring must be complete.</li> </ul>
Framing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sill plates must be installed and secured.</li> <li>• Duct work must be installed.</li> <li>• Fire blocking and draftstopping must be installed.</li> <li>• All subflooring must be installed.</li> <li>• <b>Electrical and plumbing close-in inspections must be approved or completed at the same time as the framing inspection.</b></li> </ul>
Final	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electrical wiring must be complete.</li> <li>• Appliances, fixtures, outlets, switches, etc., must be installed.</li> <li>• Plumbing fixtures and piping must be installed.</li> <li>• Roughed-in plumbing fixtures must be permanently capped.</li> <li>• Approvals must be secured for well and septic systems from the Health Department when adding a bedroom.</li> <li>• All work on the approved plans must be complete.</li> <li>• All floor covering must be installed.</li> <li>• Emergency egress components must be installed.</li> </ul>

### SCHEDULING AN INSPECTION

It is the responsibility of the permit holder or the permit holder's representative to notify the county when the stages of construction are reached that require an inspection. Ladders, scaffolds and testing equipment required to complete an inspection must be provided. Inspection requests may be made using one of the three methods listed below; please have your permit number available when scheduling an inspection. Requests made prior to 11:59 p.m. on automated systems will be scheduled for the next workday.

- Inspection Request Center: **703-222-0455, TTY 711**, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday – Thursday, and 9:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Fridays.
- Fairfax Inspections Database Online (FIDO): [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fido](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fido) or call **703-222-2474**, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Fairfax County is committed to a policy of nondiscrimination in all county programs, services and activities and will provide this document in alternative formats and in different languages upon request. Please call **703-324-5033, TTY 711** or write Department of Public Works and Environmental Services, Suite 659, 12055 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, VA 22035-5506. Please allow at least seven working days for preparation of material.



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