

## BUILDING AREA AND FLOOR AREA IN THE MARIN COUNTY DEVELOPMENT CODE

The Marin County Development Code contains two different ways of measuring the area of a building: “building area” and “floor area”. As used in the Development Code, the term “building area” has a broader definition than the term “floor area”. This distinction is important because “building area” is often used to determine whether a Design Review will be necessary for a project, whereas “floor area” is used to determine whether a structure meets the “floor area ratio” standard established in certain zoning districts. The definitions for these terms are provided below. Please note that the California Building Code has definitions for gross floor area, net floor area, and habitable space that are distinct from the definitions of area in the Development Code and are used for different purposes.

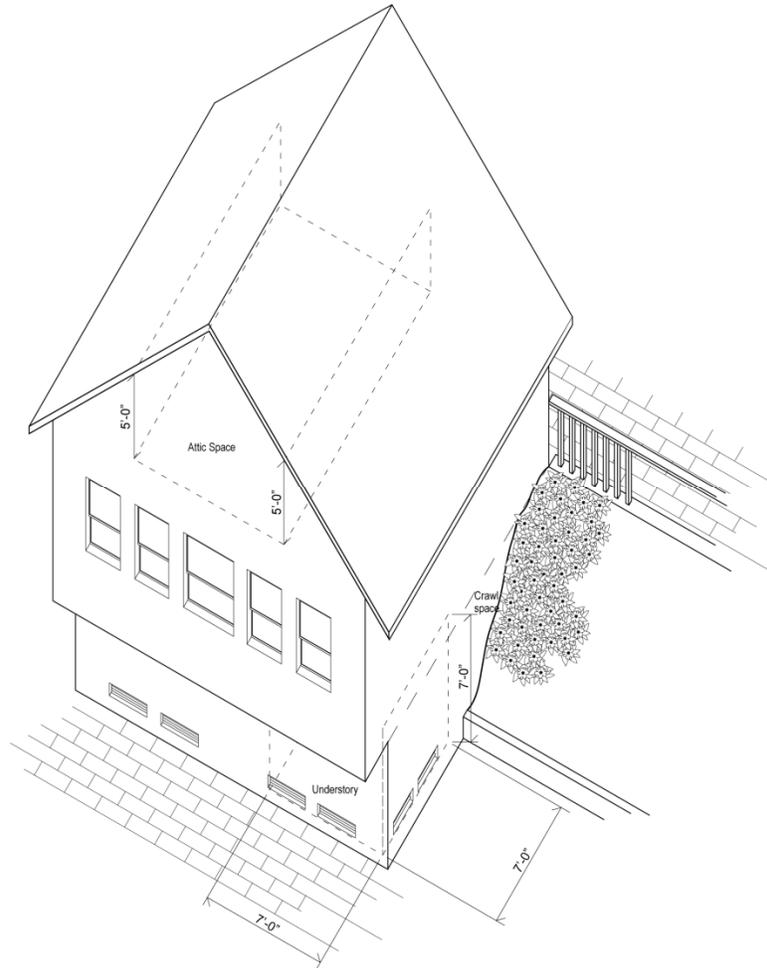
**Building Area** – The sum of the floor area of all floors in all buildings on a site. Unlike “Floor Area,” building area includes garages, carports, storage buildings, and other attached or detached accessory structures. (Marin County Code Section 22.130.030.B)

**Floor Area** – Except as specified by the Tamalpais Area Community Plan, the sum of the gross area of all floors in all buildings on a site, measured from the exterior faces of the exterior walls, including enclosed understory, basement, and attic space that can be easily converted to living area, but excluding:

1. All unenclosed horizontal surfaces, including balconies, courts, decks, porches, terraces;
2. For single-family residential structures, the first two hundred fifty square feet of floor area of all detached accessory structures not designed for and/or used for habitable space;
3. For single-family residential structures, the first five hundred and forty (540) square feet of garage areas permanently allocated for vehicle parking;
4. For two-family, multi-family, and non-residential structures, all floor area that is required to meet minimum parking standards under Title 24;
5. Exterior wall thickness of greater than six inches, where the additional wall thickness results in greater energy efficiency (e.g., straw bale construction or earthen wall construction), as demonstrated by the applicant and subject to the approval of the Director; and
6. Bay windows.

The floor area of stairways, elevators, and other vertical accesses, is included in the total floor area only as to the “footprint” (area at the base) of the vertical access, and is not counted at each floor of a building. In order to qualify as an unenclosed horizontal surface, at least one of the longest wall planes of the space shall be kept open with the exception that railings with a surface area that is at least fifty percent open and unobstructed by structural elements and that are necessary for safety or convenience purposes may be allowed within the open wall plane. As defined herein, understory,

basement, and attic space that can be easily converted to living area include: (1) unconditioned and unimproved spaces that yield a minimum clear room area of seven feet by seven feet and a minimum ceiling height of seven feet or higher; and (2) all attic areas with a minimum ceiling height of five feet or higher. (Marin County Code Section 22.130.030.F)



*Illustrated example with floor area minimum dimensions*

**Floor Area Ratio (FAR)** – The total floor area of all buildings on a lot, divided by the area of that lot. For example, a building with three thousand square feet of floor area on a ten thousand square foot lot has a FAR of 0.30. (Marin County Code Section 22.130.030.F)