



**To:** Residential Review & Inspections Staff  
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Building Official Development Services Department  
**Date:** May 1, 2018  
**File:** Residential Code Interpretation

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**INTERPRETATION NUMBER: 20180425**

**TITLE:** Components of a Habitable Attic  
**CODE EDITION:** 2015 International Residential Code  
**SECTIONS:** R202 Definitions; Attic Habitable & Habitable Space  
R305.1 Minimum Height  
R311.4 Vertical Egress  
R802.4 Allowable Ceiling Joist Spans

**PURPOSE:** To provide clarification on what constitutes a habitable attic.

**DEFINITIONS:**

**R202 Definitions; Attic Habitable.** A finished or unfinished area, not considered a *story*, complying with all of the following requirements:

1. The occupiable floor area is not less than 70 square feet (17 m<sup>2</sup>), in accordance with Section R304.
2. The occupiable floor area has a ceiling height in accordance with Section R305.
3. The occupiable space is enclosed by the roof assembly above, knee walls (if applicable) on the sides and the floor-ceiling assembly below.

**R202 Definitions; Habitable Space.** A space in a building for living, sleeping, eating or cooking. Bathrooms, toilet rooms, closets, halls, storage or utility spaces and similar areas are not considered *habitable* spaces.

**CODE REQUIREMENTS:**

**R305.1 Minimum Height.** *Habitable space*, hallways and portions of *basements* containing these spaces shall have a ceiling height of not less than 7 feet (2134 mm). Bathrooms, toilet rooms and laundry rooms shall have a ceiling height of not less than 6 feet 8 inches (2032 mm).

**R311.4 Vertical egress.** Egress from habitable levels including habitable attics and *basements* not provided with an egress door in accordance with Section R311.2 shall be by a ramp in accordance with Section R311.8 or a stairway in accordance with Section R311.7.

**R502.3 Allowable joist spans.** Spans for floor joists shall be in accordance with Tables R502.3.1(1) and R502.3.1(2). For other grades and species and for other loading conditions, refer to the AWC STJR.

**R802.4 Allowable ceiling joist spans.** Spans for ceiling joists shall be in accordance with Tables R802.4(1) and R802.4(2). For other grades and species and for other loading conditions, refer to the AWC STJR.

**CODE INTERPRETATION:**

If an attic space has the requirements of a habitable space but does not have the required ceiling joist framing to support a habitable floor loading of 30 psf for residential sleeping area or 40 psf for residential living area (ref. the tables of R502.3), it is not considered habitable.

If an attic space has the requirements of a habitable space but is not able to provide the required vertical egress, it is not considered habitable.

Non-habitable attic spaces are to be labeled as such.



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