

MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE




Planning Department

Phone: 907-343-7943

Fax: 907-343-7927

Mayor Ethan Berkowitz

Director's Guidance Memo 2020-01

DATE: 01/06/2020
TO: Planning Department; Zoning Plan Review
FROM: Michelle J. McNulty, AICP, Planning Director 
SUBJECT: Areas Included in the Measurement of Gross Floor Area (GFA)

Question: Which parts of the building(s) on a residential, non-residential, or mixed-use development site are included in the measurement of GFA in Title 21?

General Answer: AMC Title 21 Section 21.14.040, *Definitions*, provides the framework for determining if an area is included in the measurement of GFA. Title 21 defines "Gross Floor Area" as "The total horizontal area of all of the floors of a building, measured to the exterior of the wall, including mezzanines, stairwells, hallways, elevator shafts, and ventilation shafts, etc."

GFA includes the horizontal area of all enclosed floors including cellars, basements, mezzanines, penthouses, corridors, closets, and lobbies, as well as mechanical and elevator shafts, stairwells, and vents that extend through the floors, out to the exterior face of the exterior walls of the building. There is no deduction for the thickness of interior or exterior walls or columns.

On sites with multiple structures, the measurement of GFA includes all primary and accessory buildings with interior floor space. The measurement of GFA also includes mobile homes.

GFA does not include crawl spaces or cold (uninhabitable) attics. It does not include the portions of attic, half-story, and dormer living spaces that are less than 6 feet 8 inches in floor-to-ceiling height.

GFA does not include structures such as carports, gazebos, or unenclosed porches. This differs from the measurement of "lot coverage" in Title 21, which generally includes (with a few exceptions) these open, exterior structures.

Multiple Uses: When allocating the GFA between different land use types or housing units that are attached to each other, the GFA of each use type or housing unit is measured from the centerline of a common wall separating the two land use types or housing units. Likewise, the GFA of two attached buildings is measured from the centerline of a common wall separating the two buildings. Where two separate uses have a shared interior space such as an entry area, the GFA of the shared space is allocated by percentage of use.

Specific Interpretations: The table on the next page provides interpretations for specific types or parts of buildings. These examples can also help in GFA determinations for other kinds of spaces not listed.

Type or Part of Building	Included in GFA?
Floor areas of living spaces (e.g., habitable attics or half-stories) within sloping roof forms such as gable, shed, or dormer roofs.	Portions of attics and half-stories with at least 6 feet 8 inches floor-to-ceiling height: YES. Portions of attics and half-stories that have less than 6 feet 8 inches of floor-to-ceiling height: NO.
Cold/uninhabitable attics	NO.
Full basements, daylight basements, unfinished basements	YES. "Stories below grade plane" as defined by Title 21 are included in the definition of GFA.
Crawl spaces	NO. Crawl spaces are not floors or floor area.
Enclosed garages	YES. Garages are enclosed floor area in the building. Per the Building Code, enclosed garages are enclosed by walls on more than two sides.
Carports and tuck-under open parking areas.	NO. These are not enclosed floors within a building's exterior walls. Per the Building Code, carports are open (not enclosed by walls) on two or more sides.
Unenclosed porches, balconies, and decks	NO. Unenclosed porches, balconies, and decks are exterior to the building envelope, even if covered with a roof or canopy. Porches or balconies are considered unenclosed if they are open (not enclosed by walls), or are only partially enclosed up to 36 inches high as by a railing, on two or more sides.
Enclosed porches, balconies	YES. Enclosed porches or balconies have walls on more than two sides.
Attached solaria, atria, greenhouses, and storage spaces	YES, including structures accessed from the interior of a principal structure or that are accessed only by a separate exterior door.
Accessory structures including sheds or greenhouses	YES, if it is a structure with interior space having a minimum of 6 feet 8 inches of ceiling clearance.
Bay windows	YES.
Double-height rooms or atriums that span multiple floors	YES. This area is counted only once (i.e., not counted at the upper floor(s)).
Stairwells, stairs, elevator shafts, ventilation shafts.	YES. The area of the stairwell or elevator or ventilation shaft is counted once at each floor level. Stairs within an open area of a double-height room or atrium are counted only once, at the floor level where the stairs begin.
Rooftop access stairwell/elevator enclosures	YES. The area of the enclosure is counted at the rooftop level if it provides rooftop access. If the enclosure has a sloping roof, only the portion of the enclosure with a ceiling height of at least 6 feet 8 inches above the rooftop deck surface level is counted.
Rooftop mechanical enclosures	NO, if it meets the definition of a mechanical penthouse in 21.14.040. YES, if the enclosure is not used exclusively as a mechanical penthouse and has a minimum 6 foot 8 inches of ceiling clearance.