

Connecticut Code Chronicle

An occasional publication by Harwood Wallace Loomis, Consulting Architect,
for the use and information of the design and code enforcement communities

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LEGISLATIVE BACKSLIDING

In 1971, Connecticut led the entire United States in becoming the first state in the U.S. to adopt a uniform, mandatory building code that applied to every municipality and jurisdiction within the state. Unfortunately, immediately following that auspicious start Connecticut immediately dropped the ball. The *1971 State of Connecticut Building Code* was based on the 1970 BOCA Basic Building Code. The BOCA model codes, like the ICC model codes, were revised on a regular cycle, yet Connecticut did not adopt a revised state building code for another ten years. The *1978 State of Connecticut Basic Building Code* was not adopted until September of 1981.

Our adoption cycle thereafter was extremely irregular. The 1978 State Building Code was in effect for five and a half years. The 1987 State Building Code was in effect for just two and a half years. The 1989 State Building Code lasted a little less than five years. The 1994 State Building Code remained in effect for five years.

The 1999 State Building Code was an anomaly. It remained in effect for five and a half years, but there were two interim amendments (in 2000 and 2004) within that period.

And then came the 2005 State Building Code. The 2005 CSBC soldiered on from 2006 through most of 2016, with interim amendments being issued in 2009, 2011, and 2013. The 2005 CSBC was based on the 2003 ICC model codes. The *2016 Connecticut State Building Code* was based on the 2012 ICC model codes, which meant that Connecticut skipped over the 2006 and 2009 model code cycles. The adoption of the 2016 was problematic in two regards: first, it skipped two complete cycles of the model codes and, second, by the time Connecticut adopted the 2012 model codes the 2015 model codes had already been available for well over a year, meaning that our 2012 CSBC was already obsolete as soon as it was adopted.

It's worth noting that in 1988 the legislature enacted Public Act 88-359, which required the State Building Code to be revised at least every four years, in order to keep up with subsequent revisions to the model codes. Obviously, Connecticut has failed to follow this statutory requirement.

Connecticut's *2016 State Building Code* survived for just two years, being replaced by the *2018 State Building Code* (which was based on the 2015 ICC model codes). By the time Connecticut adopted the 2018 CSBC, based on the 2015 ICC model codes, the 2018 model codes had already been available for over a year. According to the legislative intent of P.A. 88-359, in October of 2018 we should have been adopting the 2018 ICC model codes, not the 2015 model codes.

The 2018 CSBC was, in turn, replaced by the *2022 State Building Code*, which is currently in effect and will remain so until July of 2026. Once again, Connecticut skipped an entire cycle (2018) of the ICC model codes. The good news is that the 2022 CSBC was adopted only slightly more than a year after the

2021 model codes were published. The current code will have remained in effect for just under four years when the *2026 State Building Code* becomes effective.

Let's look at that graphically, to get a better feel for what it means:



As a very old television commercial famously asked: "Is this any way to run an airline?"

And now our legislature is poised to adopt a new Public Act that will establish in statute that the State Building Code may not be revised more often than every six years. Let's consider what this means. The national, model codes will continue to be revised on a three year cycle. If Connecticut can't revise the State Building Code more often than every six years, this means that we will automatically miss every other cycle. And that, in turn, will mean that every code cycle will guarantee that Connecticut is at least one cycle out of date compared to the model codes, for a minimum of three years.

I'm having a lot of difficulty trying to understand how this is in any way a good idea. I was active on the AIA|CT Building Performance and Regulations Commission when P.A. 88-359 was passed. AIA|CT was strongly in favor of it (and may, in fact, have initially proposed it—I don't remember). The intent of P.A. 88-359 was to ensure that Connecticut always adopted the latest revision of the model codes. It was written as "every four years" to recognize that the legislature has to approve each revision, so the "extra" year was to allow time for the legislature to review and to approve each new edition of the code. The way it was worded in the public act, unfortunately, didn't correctly convey the intent and allowed the adoption cycle to continually "slip" relative to the model code cycle.

Of course, it didn't matter because there was no penalty for not adopting a new code every four years, and (as the history of

the State Building Code clearly shows) we almost never succeeded in complying with the mandate.

And now the legislature is changing the four years to six years.

NEW FOR 2026

There are a lot of changes from the 2021 I-Codes to the 2024 I-Codes. With Connecticut poised to change to a 2026 State Building Code based on the 2024 I-Codes, we need to be aware of what's going to be our new codes. The following are some of the noteworthy changes to the 2024 *International Residential Code*:

Chapter 3 has been not only revised, but completely reorganized. Many sections that remain mostly unchanged have been renumbered and moved around. The new organization may take some effort to adjust to because most provisions will not be where we expect to find them.

The second and third paragraphs of section R302.1 are new:

R302.1 Exterior walls. Construction, projections, openings and penetrations of exterior walls of dwellings, townhouses and accessory buildings shall comply with Table R302.1(1) based on fire separation distance; or dwellings and townhouses equipped throughout with an automatic sprinkler system installed in accordance with Section P2904 shall comply with Table R302.1(2) based on fire separation distance.

For the purposes of determining fire separation distance, dwellings and townhouses on the same lot shall be assumed to have an imaginary line between them. Where a new dwelling or townhouse is to be erected on the same lot as an existing dwelling or townhouse, the location of the assumed imaginary line with relation to the existing dwelling or townhouse shall be such that the existing dwelling or townhouse meets requirements of this section.

Where a lot line exists between adjacent townhouse units, fire separation distance of exterior walls shall be measured to the lot line. Where a lot line does not exist between adjacent townhouse units, an imaginary line shall be assumed between the adjacent townhouse units and fire separation distance of exterior walls shall be measured to the imaginary line. Fire separation distance and requirements of Section R302.1 shall not apply to walls separating townhouse units that are required by Section R302.2.

This clarifies that the requirements for multiple IRC dwelling structures on the same parcel are subject to fire separation distance requirements, just like other types of buildings are under the IBC. The new language also parallels the IBC in establishing that an imaginary lot line must be created between two dwelling structures on the same parcel, and that fire separation distance is the distance from each building to the imaginary lot line, not the full distance between the two structures.

Section R302.3, addressing fire separations between two-family dwelling units, has been extensively revised. Connecticut is amending a couple of the new sections, so pay attention. The new language reads as follows:

R302.3 Two-family dwellings. Dwelling units in two-family dwellings shall be separated from each other in accordance with Sections 302.3.1 through 302.3.5, regardless of whether a lot line exists between two dwelling units.

R302.3.1 Dwelling unit separation. The two dwelling units shall be separated by fire-resistance rated assemblies that are vertical, horizontal, or a combination thereof.

R302.3.2 Fire-resistance rating. Vertical and horizontal assemblies separating dwelling units shall have a fire-resistance rating of 1 hour, or a fire-resistance rating of one-half hour in buildings equipped throughout with an automatic sprinkler system installed in accordance with Section P2904. Fire-resistance ratings shall be based on testing in accordance with ASTM E119 or UL 263, or an analytical method in accordance with Section 703.2.2 of the International Building Code.

R302.3.3 Continuity. Vertical and horizontal assemblies separating dwelling units shall be constructed in a manner that provides continuity of the fire-resistance rating between the dwelling units.

R302.3.3.1 Horizontal assemblies. Horizontal assemblies separating dwelling units shall extend to and be tight against exterior walls or vertical separation assemblies complying with Section 302.3.2.

R302.3.3.2 Vertical assemblies. Vertical assemblies separating dwelling units shall extend to and be tight against any combination of the following:

1. The foundation.
2. A horizontal assembly complying with Section R302.3.3.
3. The underside of roof sheathing.
4. The ceiling beneath an uninhabitable attic, provided that the ceiling is constructed using not less than 5/8-inch (15.9 mm) Type X gypsum board, an attic draft stop constructed as specified in Section R302.12.1 is provided above and along the vertical assembly terminating at the ceiling, and the structural framing

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supporting the ceiling is protected by not less than 1/2-inch (12.7 mm) gypsum board or equivalent.

R302.3.4 Supporting construction. Vertical and horizontal assemblies separating dwelling units shall be supported by construction having an equal or greater fire-resistance rating.

(Amd) **R302.3.5 Vertically stacked dwelling units.** Where one *dwelling unit* in a two-family *dwelling* is located above the other and an automatic sprinkler system complying with Section P2904 is not provided in both *dwelling units*, both of the following shall apply:

1. Horizontal and vertical assemblies separating the *dwelling units*, including an interior *stairway* serving as the *means of egress* for the upper *dwelling unit*, shall have a fire-resistance rating of 1 hour based on testing in accordance with ASTM E119 or UL 263, or an analytical method in accordance with Section 703.2.2 of the *International Building Code* portion of the Connecticut State Building Code..
2. A notification appliance connected to smoke alarms in the other *dwelling unit* shall be provided in each *dwelling unit*.

(Amd) **R302.3.6 Shared common areas.** Shared common areas shall be separated from each individual *dwelling unit* by fire-resistance rated assemblies that are vertical, horizontal, or a combination thereof having not less than a 1-hour *fire-resistance rating* based on testing in accordance with ASTM E119, UL 263 or an analytical method in accordance with Section 703.2.2 of the *International Building Code* portion of the Connecticut State Building Code. Openings and

penetrations between the shared common area and *dwelling unit* shall comply with Sections R302.3.6.1, R302.6.2 and R302.3.6.3. Attachment of gypsum board shall comply with Table R702.3.5.

(Amd) **R302.3.6.1 Opening protection.** Openings from a shared common area directly into a room used for sleeping purposes shall not be permitted. Other openings between the shared common area and *dwelling units* shall be equipped with solid wood doors not less than 1¾ inches (35 mm) in thickness, solid or honeycomb core steel doors not less than 1¾ inches (35 mm) in thickness, or a fire door assembly with a 20-minute fire-protection rating, equipped with a self-closing or automatic-closing device..

(Amd) **R302.3.6.2 Duct penetration.** Ducts penetrating the walls or ceilings separating the *dwelling* from the shared common area shall be constructed of sheet steel not less than No. 26 gage (0.48 mm) or other approved material and shall not have openings into the shared common area.

R302.3.6.3 Other penetrations. Penetrations through the walls, ceiling and floor-level separation required in Section R302.3.6 shall be protected as required by Section R302.11, Item 4.

(Add) **R302.3.7 Sound transmission.** Wall and floor-ceiling assemblies separating *dwelling units* shall comply with Appendix BG – Sound Transmission.

The 2024 IRC also introduces a new table, Table R302.3.6, to spell out the minimum construction requirements for various types of separations for shared accessory rooms in two-family dwellings:

TABLE R302.3.6 DWELLING-SHARED ACCESSORY ROOM SEPARATION

SEPARATION	MATERIAL
From the dwelling units and attics	Not less than 1/2-inch gypsum board or equivalent applied to the accessory room side wall
From habitable rooms above or below the shared accessory room	Not less than 5/8-inch Type X gypsum board or equivalent
Structures supporting floor/ceiling assemblies used for separation required by this section	Not less than 1/2-inch gypsum board or equivalent

Moving on in Chapter 3:

(Amd) **R302.6 Dwelling unit garage fire separation.** The garage shall be separated as required by Table R302.6 except that wood structural members of the minimum dimension specified in the *International Building Code* portion of the Connecticut State Building Code for Type IV-HT construction shall be acceptable without further protection. Openings in garage walls shall comply with Section R302.5. Attachment of *gypsum board* shall comply with Table R702.3.5. The wall separation provisions

of Table R302.6 shall not apply to garage walls that are perpendicular to the adjacent *dwelling unit* wall.

Table R302.6, which addresses construction of fire separations between dwelling units and garages, has been revised in the 2024 IRC to remove the sprinkler exception and to allow the use of ½” gypsum wallboard in some locations. TAKE NOTE: Connecticut deletes the new table and uses the same table R302.6 we have in the IRC portion of the 2022 Connecticut State Building Code.

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For 2024, Foam Plastic has been moved from section R316 to section R303 and heavily revised. Two new subsections have been inserted at the beginning of the section:

R303.1.1 Spray-applied foam plastic. Single- and multiple-component spray-applied foam plastic insulation shall comply with the provisions of Section R303 and ICC 1100.

R303.1.2 Insulating sheathing. Foam plastic materials used as insulating sheathing shall comply with the provisions of Section R303 and the material standards in Table R303.1.2.

The section on ceiling heights, which we have been finding in section R305, has been moved to section R313 and revised. The revisions include a new subsection R313.1.2, addressing headroom in habitable attics:

R313.1.2 Habitable attics and basements in existing buildings. Where a habitable attic or habitable space in a basement is created in an existing building, ceiling height shall not be less than 6 feet 8 inches (2032 mm). Bathrooms, toilet rooms and laundry rooms shall have a ceiling height of not less than 6 feet 4 inches (1930 mm).

Exceptions:

1. For rooms with sloped ceilings, the required floor area of the room shall have a ceiling height of not less than 5 feet (1524 mm) and not less than 50 percent of the required floor area shall have a ceiling height of not less than 6 feet 8 inches (2032 mm).
2. At beams, girders, ducts or other obstructions, the ceiling height shall be not less than 6 feet 4 inches (1930 mm) from the finished floor.

A new section, numbered R315, addresses sleeping lofts for the first time. (I suspect this is due to the influence of the tiny home market segment.)

R315.1 Sleeping lofts. Where provided in dwelling units or sleeping units, sleeping lofts shall comply with this code as modified by Sections R315.2 through R315.5. Sleeping lofts constructed in compliance with this section shall be considered a portion of the story below. Such sleeping lofts shall not contribute to the number of stories as regulated by this code.

Exceptions: Sleeping lofts need not comply with Section R315 where they meet any of the following conditions:

1. The sleeping loft has a depth of less than 3 feet (914 mm).
2. The sleeping loft has a floor area of less than 35 square feet (3.3 m²).
3. The sleeping loft is not provided with a permanent means of egress.

R315.2 Sleeping loft limitations. Sleeping lofts shall comply with the following conditions:

1. The sleeping loft floor area shall be less than 70 square feet (6.5 m²).
2. The sleeping loft ceiling height shall not exceed 7 feet (2134 mm) for more than one-half of the sleeping loft floor area.

R315.3 Sleeping loft ceiling height. The clear height below the sleeping loft floor construction shall not be less than 7 feet (2134 mm). The ceiling height above the finished floor of the sleeping loft shall not be less than 3 feet (914 mm). Spaces adjacent to the sleeping loft with a sloped ceiling measuring less than 3 feet (914 mm) from the finished floor to the finished ceiling shall not contribute to the sleeping loft floor area.

R315.4 Sleeping loft area. The aggregate area of all sleeping lofts and mezzanines within a room shall comply with Section R314.3.

Exception: The area of a single sleeping loft located within a dwelling unit or sleeping unit equipped with an automatic sprinkler system in accordance with Section P2904 shall not be greater than two-thirds of the area of the room in which it is located, provided that no other sleeping lofts or mezzanines are open to the room in which the sleeping loft is located.

R315.5 Permanent egress for sleeping lofts. A permanent means of egress shall be provided for sleeping lofts. The means of egress shall comply with Section R318 as modified by Sections R315.5.1 through R315.5.3.

R315.5.1 Ceiling height at sleeping loft means of egress. A ceiling height of not less than 3 feet (914 mm) shall be provided for the entire width of the means of egress from the sleeping loft.

R315.5.2 Stairways. Stairways providing egress from sleeping lofts shall be permitted to comply with Sections R315.5.2.1 through R315.5.2.3.

R315.5.2.1 Width. Stairways providing egress from a sleeping loft shall not be less than 17 inches (432 mm) in clear width at or above the handrail. The width below the handrail shall be not less than 20 inches (610 mm).

R315.5.2.2 Treads and risers. Risers for stairs providing egress from a sleeping loft shall be not less than 7 inches (178 mm) and not more than 12 inches (305 mm) in height. Tread depth and riser height shall be calculated in accordance with one of the following formulas:

1. The tread depth shall be 20 inches (508 mm) minus four-thirds of the riser height.
2. The riser height shall be 15 inches (381 mm) minus three-fourths of the tread depth.

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R315.5.2.3 Landings. Landings at stairways providing egress from sleeping lofts shall comply with Section R318.7.6, except that the depth of landings in the direction of travel shall be not less than 24 inches (610 mm).

R315.5.3 Ladders. Ladders used as a means of egress from sleeping lofts shall comply with Sections R315.5.3.1 and R315.5.3.2.

R315.5.3.1 Size and capacity. Ladders providing egress from sleeping lofts shall have a rung width of not less than 12 inches (305 mm), and 10-inch (254 mm) to 14-inch (356 mm) spacing between rungs. Ladders shall be capable of supporting a 300-pound (136 kg) load on any rung. Rung spacing shall be uniform within 3/8 inch (9.5 mm).

R315.5.3.2 Incline. Ladders shall be inclined at 70 to 80 degrees from horizontal.

As our codes and our buildings become more complicated, we often encounter conditions or situations that don't seem to neatly fit into the explicit language of the codes. We can get some help through networking at CBOA meetings, but those are held only once per month, and we usually only talk to the people seated at our table. There's an Internet forum that provides access to experienced building officials, architects, and engineers from all across the United States, and internationally. It's a great resource, and most of it can be accessed for free. A "sawhorse" membership unlocks access to additional features and discussions. I encourage all code officials to check it out and support it by taking out a sawhorse membership.

<https://www.thebuildingcodeforum.com/forum/>

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The editor is a licensed architect and a licensed building official, with more than 40 years of experience. I offer non-structural plan review services for projects of any size, with special rates for municipal building departments.

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What topics would you like to see discussed in future issues? It helps all of us if we can all be on the same page, to avoid those "But I never have to do that in [town]" complaints.

Send me an e-mail if you think of any issues that affect all building officials, everywhere.