

Definition of a Kitchen and Determination of a Dwelling Unit

PURPOSE

This policy provides guidance to PRMD staff as to the allowable design and use of an accessory structure and in determining the number of kitchens within a dwelling unit. It shall be used when reviewing permit applications, checking plans, investigating complaints and inspecting buildings. The provision of a kitchen is one of the primary factors used to determine whether a structure is considered to be a dwelling unit and for determining the number of units within a structure or allowed on a given site. These guidelines shall be used by all staff in determining whether a building contains a kitchen and is an allowable dwelling unit.

GENERAL

The Sonoma County General Plan and Zoning Ordinance limits allowable residential densities (units per acre) in all zoning districts and allows additional dwelling units, such as second units, agricultural employee units, and farm family units, in some areas. Dwelling units are defined in the zoning code as “*a permanent building or portion thereof including manufactured and mobile homes designated or used exclusively as the residence, sleeping room or quarters with kitchen facilities which constitutes an independent housekeeping unit, for one (1) or more persons*”. Efficiency dwelling units can be as small as 220 square feet. Similarly, the Building Code defines a dwelling unit as “*A single unit providing complete independent living facilities for one or more persons, including permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking and sanitation*”.

This policy should be used in conjunction with Policy 1-4-1, *Definition of a Bedroom* in determining whether a structure or portion of a structure is considered a *dwelling unit* that must conform with the allowable density under the General Plan and Zoning Code or other applicable zoning requirements (e.g., second units). A *dwelling unit* must also conform to applicable septic system standards.

A non-commercial structure, or portion thereof, shall be considered a *dwelling unit* if it contains a kitchen as defined herein, and an area that constitutes a bedroom as defined in Policy 1-4-1. In most cases, a structure with a full bathroom will be considered as having a bedroom pursuant to Policy 1-4-1. Structures that meet this definition will be considered a *dwelling unit* regardless of how they are labeled on the plans (e.g., pool house, cabana, recreation room, guest house, studio, etc.). Where an additional dwelling unit cannot be allowed, the design of an accessory structure can be modified to eliminate the bedroom or kitchen facilities that constitute a dwelling unit.

AUTHORITY

Chapter 26, Sonoma County Code. Currently, the Sonoma County Code does not include a definition of a kitchen, but a kitchen is one of the determining features in the definition of a dwelling unit. Since dwelling units are limited by the allowable density and zoning standards, the definition of a kitchen is important in making the determination about whether a structure is a *dwelling unit* under the code.

Chapter 2 of the Sonoma County Code authorizes staff to record the conditions of approval of an issued permit.

PROCEDURE

PRMD staff shall determine whether an area is a kitchen and whether the structure is a *dwelling unit*. This determination shall be based on the design of the physical facilities rather than the proposed use or how the area is labeled on the plans. Staff shall use the following criteria.

DEFINITIONS

- A. **Kitchen.** A kitchen means an area within a structure that is used or designed to be used for the preparation or cooking of food and that contains one or both of the following:
1. Cooking appliances or rough in facilities including, but not limited to: ovens, convection ovens, stoves, stove tops, built-in grills or microwave ovens or similar appliances, 240 volt electrical outlets or any gas lines.
- OR
2. A sink less than 18 inches in depth with a waste line drain 1-1/2 inches or greater in diameter AND a refrigerator exceeding five (5) cubic feet in capacity or space opening with an electrical outlet that may reasonably be used for a refrigerator exceeding five (5) cubic feet in capacity.
- B. An approved kitchen may have more than one sink, stove, oven or refrigerator in the same room.
- C. **Wet Bar.** A single sink with a waste drain line no greater than 1-1/2 inches in diameter and an under counter refrigerator no greater than 5 cubic feet in size with cabinets and/or counter top area not exceeding 6 lineal feet. A wet bar shall not include a refrigerator in excess of 5 cubic feet in size or a kitchen sink greater than 2 square feet in size or a gas or electric range, stove top and/or oven (but may include a microwave oven).

EXCEPTIONS

Notwithstanding the criteria above, the following shall not be considered to be a kitchen:

- A. Gas lines and/or electrical outlets of 240 volts in a residential garage, barn, workshop or similar structure, if an operable garage door is provided and the space is unconditioned as defined in the adopted model codes. A garage may contain a refrigerator or freezer but cannot contain any cooking appliances.
- B. One laundry room in a dwelling unit. The laundry room may include utility hook-ups for gas or electric laundry appliances and may include a utility sink with a sink depth 18 inches (18") or greater and/or a full size refrigerator or freezer. A laundry room shall not contain cooking appliances.
- C. An "outdoor kitchen" that is placed in an unenclosed area that may be roofed but is open on at least two sides and exposed to weather.
- D. Any room where the director of PRMD or his/her designee determines that the room, by its design, clearly cannot reasonably be used as a kitchen. In considering whether a room is a kitchen that would designate a structure as a dwelling unit, the director may also consider but not be limited to, whether or not the structure has a full bathroom and/or potential sleeping area pursuant to Policy 1-4-1. When an exception is made per #4 above, it shall be documented by a Zoning Permit application and a "Notice" on the subject parcel shall be placed in PRMD's permitting computer system so that anyone researching the parcel is aware of the determination. A Deed Restriction and/or an Agreement may be required to be signed by the property owner and recorded to inform future property owners of restrictions on the use of a building and future permit requirements for any change in use.

An electrical outlet of 240 volts in capacity or a gas outlet including "rough-in" openings that provide for future installation of any kitchen facilities described in Section "A" above must receive planning approval/clearance prior to building permit issuance or final inspection. The criteria noted above shall be used to determine if the structure is an allowable use, if it constitutes a dwelling unit, and/or if it requires a deed restriction and agreement. Kitchen facilities described in Section "A" above, including "rough ins" may be allowed in structures that meet the criteria for a second unit and are designated and permitted as such, even though the structure is not used as a dwelling (i.e. allowing a gas line, refrigerator and sink in a workshop or artist studio or allowing a stove, refrigerator and sink in a pool house). The deed restriction/agreement will be binding on all successors in interest and will limit the use of the structure as permitted.

ATTACHMENTS

Sample Deed Restriction and Agreement

Approved by: /s/
Tennis Wick, Director

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