

Basements and Lightwells

"Basement" means a space in a structure that is partly or wholly below grade and where the vertical distance from grade to a finished floor directly above such space is less than or equal to 42 inches (see info below).

"Lightwell" means an excavated area adjacent to a building that is enclosed on four sides, that is open at the top, and allows light into a below-grade level of a building.

What's required? The application for a basement must include a grading and drainage plan stamped and signed by a registered civil engineer. Water collected from a basement shall either be transported to a nearby city storm drain inlet or to another drainage facility. Disposition and treatment of on-site storm water shall be consistent with the requirements of the Santa Clara Valley Urban Runoff Pollution Prevention Program (NPDES requirements). The basement size may be limited based on drainage issues or issues raised in the geotechnical or soil reports.

Please see [City Code section 15-80.035](#) for more information

Does a basement need to be located beneath the building footprint of an enclosed structure? Yes, otherwise, the area is considered a [subterranean structure](#) with different standards. The building footprint is measured to the exterior surface of the exterior walls.

Can a basement be in the setback? No. See website if you need help determining your [setbacks](#)

Can a lightwell be in the setback? A lightwell may extend up to three feet into the side setback area or up to four feet into the rear setback area.

What is the maximum ceiling height of a basement? A basement shall be a one level structure with a maximum floor to ceiling height of twelve feet. Floor, in this case, means finished floor, and ceiling means the bottom level of the ceiling framing members.

Does a "basement" count towards floor area?

It depends. See next page for *hillside lots*. The finished floor directly above the basement must be less than or equal to 42 inches above grade at any point along the perimeter to *not* be counted as floor area and to not be considered a "story". Otherwise, the area is considered a story and counts towards floor area. The term "grade" shall mean either the natural grade or finished grade immediately adjacent to the exterior walls of the structure, *whichever is lower*. The City may determine the grade. The number of stories measured vertically at any given point shall not exceed the maximum number of stories allowed in each zoning district.

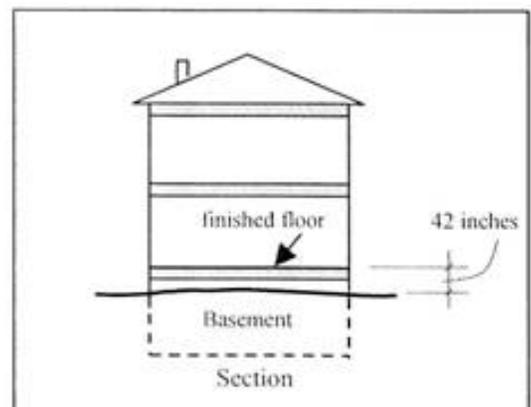


Figure 1a

Basements and Lightwells

On [hillside lots](#), at least 80% of the “basement” must be less than or equal to 42 inches above grade at any point along the perimeter to *not* be counted as floor area (See Figure 1c).

Otherwise on hillside lots, only the portion of space where the vertical distance of the finished floor is more than 42 inches above grade shall be counted as floor area and considered a story. The number of stories measured vertically at any given point shall not exceed the maximum number of stories allowed in each zoning district. (See Figure 1b)

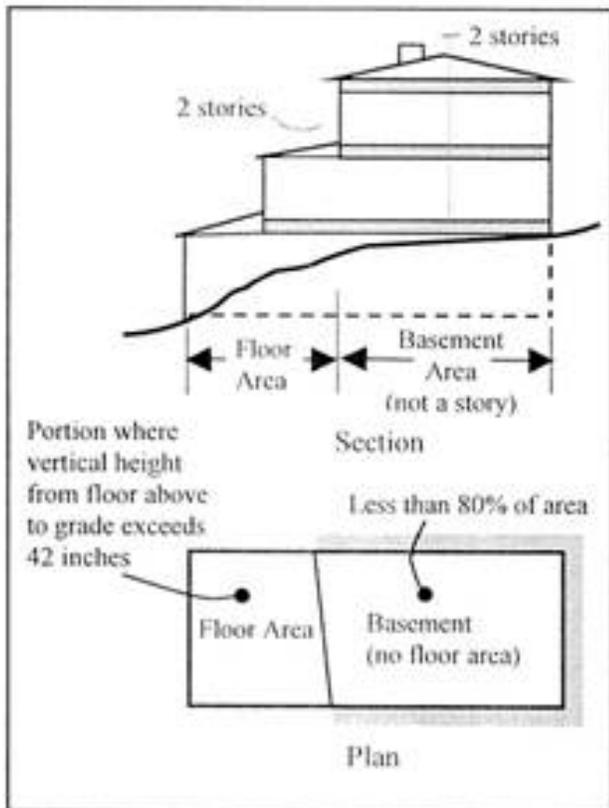


Figure 1b

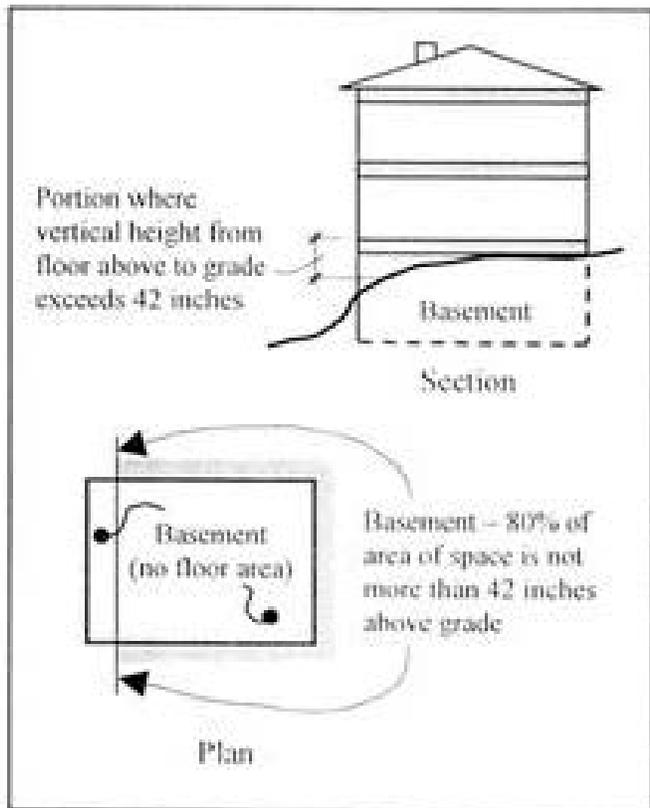


Figure 1c