

# 8

## Stairs and Residential Building Permits



Bureau of Development Services  
FROM CONCEPT TO CONSTRUCTION



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Portland, Oregon 97201  
503-823-7300  
bds@portlandoregon.gov  
www.Portland.gov/BDS

### One and Two-Family Homes- Information related to permit and inspection requirements

Read about stairs remodel permit requirements in the City of Portland including all required measurements. Read about building permits and spiral stairs, new stairs projects, winder stairs, handrails, guardrails permits and more. Each situation is unique, so please call or visit the Development Services Center with any questions.

### Who can install or remodel stairs- work that requires a building permit

For work that requires a permit, the owner of a single-family home or duplex may hire a licensed contractor to do the work, or in some cases, do the work themselves. This means that the owner will be responsible for doing the work; not a friend, neighbor, tenant or relative, unless they hold an appropriate contractor’s license.

The permit requirements for an owner doing their own work are the same as those for a contractor doing the work.

### Still need help? Schedule a 15-minute appointment

If you have questions after reviewing the information on this page, we recommend you book a free 15-minute appointment with us. This is an optional step. We're here for you if you have questions about the information and materials you need to apply. You can book an appointment online at [www.portland.gov/bds/early-assistance/15-minute-appointments](http://www.portland.gov/bds/early-assistance/15-minute-appointments), and if you prefer calling in, once you've booked an appointment you can find the dial-in phone number in your meeting invite.

STAIRS PROJECT	PERMIT REQUIREMENT
Existing stairway that leads to existing finished living space that was created with a building permit (Verify prior permits at the Development Services Center or on the Portland Maps website: <a href="http://www.portlandmaps.com">www.portlandmaps.com</a> ).	No changes are required.
Existing stairway that leads to existing unfinished space (basement, attic or garage) that you plan to convert to living space.	May be allowed to remain without changes if it meets the alternative requirements in our brochure <b>Converting Attics, Basements or Garages to Living Space</b>
Build a new stairway.	Apply for a building permit and have inspections to current code.

### Stair width and code requirements

New stairways must be at least 36 inches wide from wall to wall above the handrail (except spiral stairs which must be at least 26 inches wide from center post to outside edge of tread).

### Risers and treads

- If you are building a new standard residential stairway (not a spiral), each step (or riser) can't be more than 8 inches high.
- Treads are the flat surfaces that you step onto. For new stairs, the treads have to be a minimum of 9 inches deep from front to back (not counting the part underneath the nosing of the tread above). The exposed edge of the tread is called the nosing, and the nosing must stick out at least ¾ inches, but not more than 1 ¼ inches.
- The steps in a flight of stairs have to be even so that people don't trip. The code allows only ⅜ inch difference between the largest and the smallest rise, and only ⅜ inch difference between the largest and smallest tread measured from front to back.

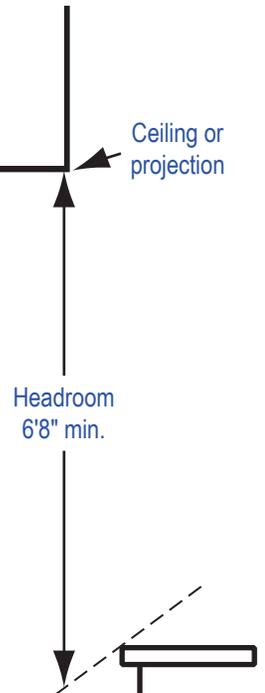
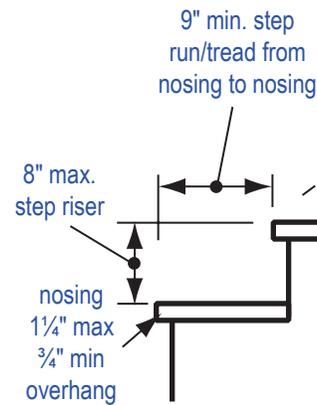
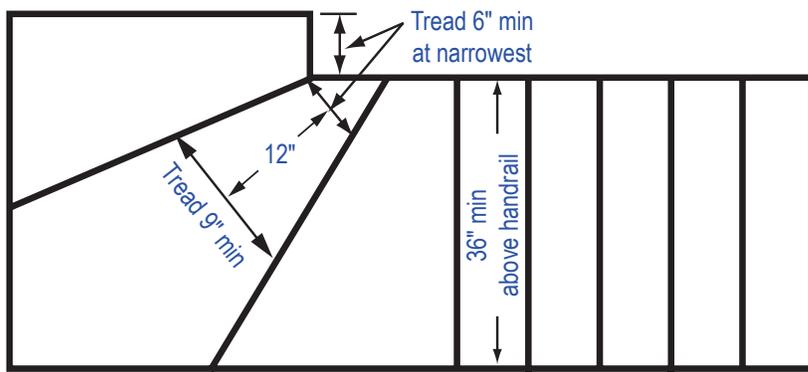


## Stair permit requirements and headroom

- Headroom is the distance, measured vertically (plumb, straight up and down), between the ceiling or any projection from the ceiling, such as a beam, and a sloped line formed by placing a straight-edge along the nose of the stair treads.
- New stairs must have headroom of at least 6 feet 8 inches (except spiral stairs which may have headroom of 6 feet 6 inches).

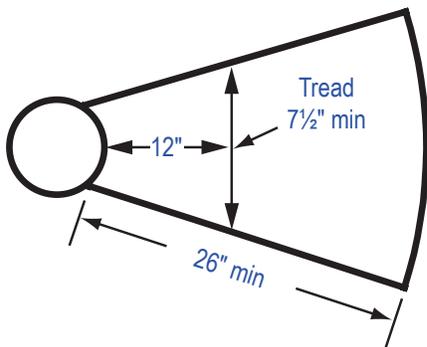
## Winder stairs and permit requirements

- Stairways that turn a corner, with treads that are narrow on one end and wider at the other, are called winder stairs. You may build winder stairs, but the treads must be at least 6 inches deep at their narrowest point. Also, all of your treads must be at least nine inches wide, measured 12 inches from where they are the narrowest.
- Although the tread size varies on winder stairs, there still may not be more than  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch variation between the largest and smallest rise.



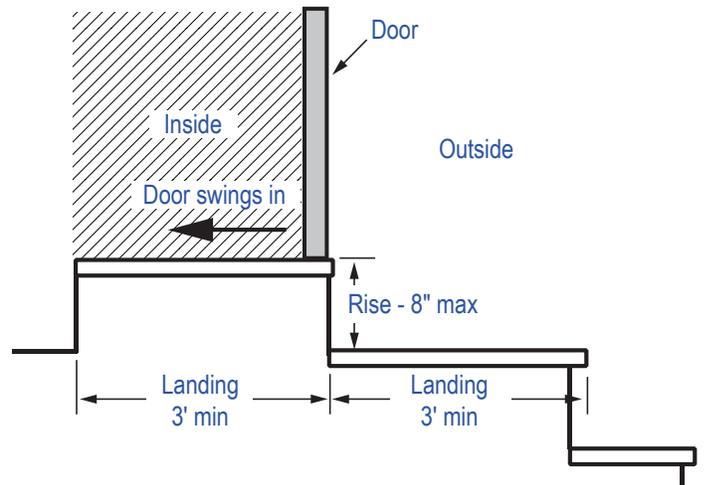
## Spiral stairs and code requirements

- Spiral stairway treads must be at least 7½ inches deep measured 12 inches out from where they are the narrowest. The risers can't be more than nine and one half inches high.
- The minimum width of a spiral stairway from the center pole to the outside edge of the tread is 26 inches.
- Each spiral stair tread must be identical.



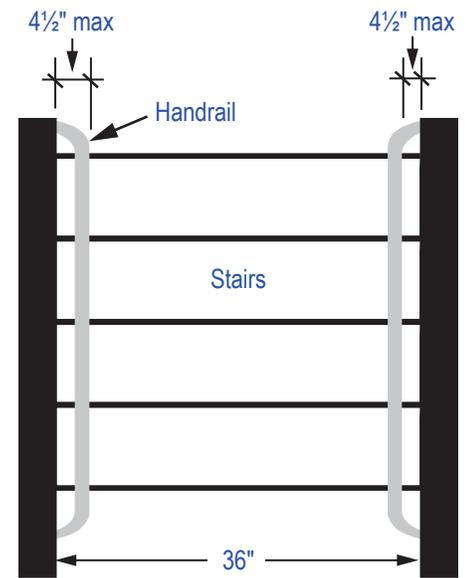
## Landings and code requirements

- Any exterior entry/exit door must have a landing at least 3' x 3' inside the door before there can be a step. The interior landing must not be more than 11/2 inches lower than the top of the threshold. On the outside of the door, the step down may be eight inches before you need another 3' x 3' minimum landing, providing the door does not swing over the stairs. After the landing there may be additional steps.



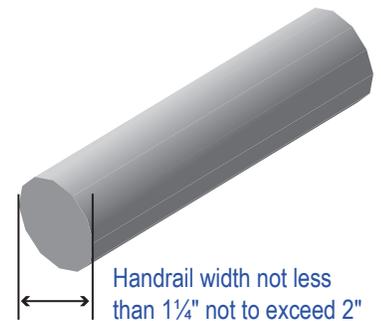
## Handrails and stairs permits

- Stairways must have a handrail if the stairway has more than three risers.
- Handrails may project over stairs by 4½ inches maximum on each side of the stairway.
- Handrails must be continuous for the full length of the stairs. They must turn back into the wall or butt into a post so that purse straps and clothing won't get caught behind them and cause a fall.
- Handrails attached to the wall must have a space between the wall and the rail of at least 1½ inches to provide a grippable surface.
- Handrails on the open side of a stairway must meet guardrail requirements.
- The height of handrails is measured straight up from the nosing of the treads to the top of the handrail. A handrail along a wall must be between 30 inches and 38 inches high.
- A round handrail must have a diameter no smaller than 1¼ inches and no larger than 2 inches, so that it can be easily and securely gripped. Other handrail shapes are allowed, if the perimeter dimension is at least 4 inches and not more than 6¼ inches, with a cross section dimension not more than 2¼ inches.

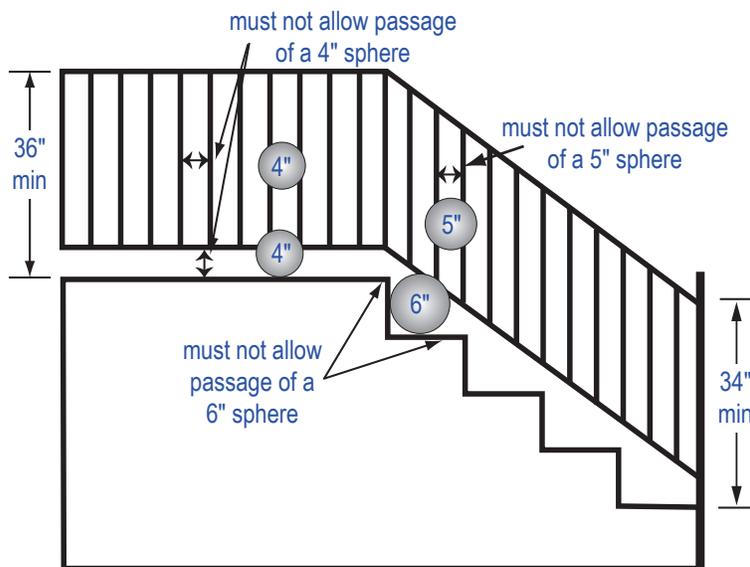


## Guardrails and permit requirements

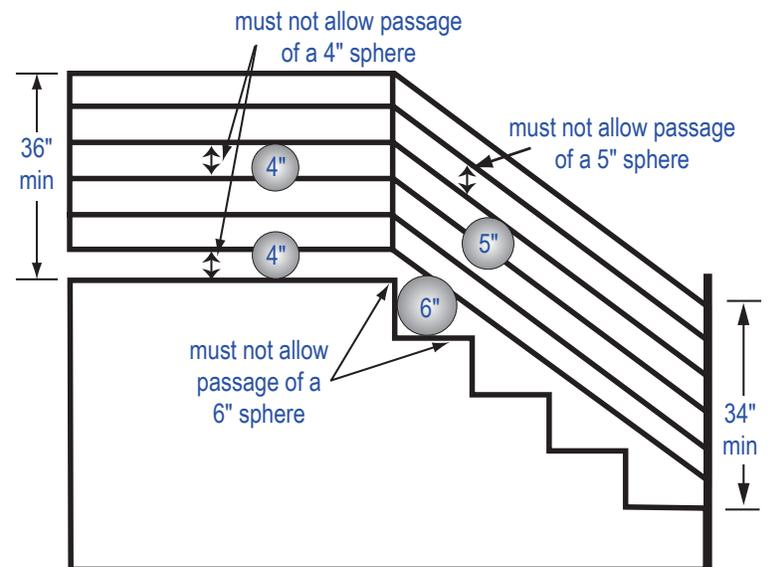
- A guardrail is required to prevent someone falling from a balcony, deck, landing, etc. that is more than 30 inches above the floor or ground below. Guardrails must be at least 36 inches high, except that they may be 34 inches (measured straight up from the nosings) at the open sides of stairways.
- Guardrails on stairs must have some kind of a pattern, so that a 5 inch sphere can't pass through. However, all guardrails along raised floors, landings, porches, decks and balconies must have intermediate rails or ornamental closures that do not allow passage of a 4 inch sphere.
- At the bottom edge of a guardrail along a series of steps, the space between the tread, riser and the guardrail must be small enough to prevent a 6 inch sphere from getting through.



### Guardrail with vertical pattern



### Guardrail with horizontal pattern



## Schedule an inspection

- Call 503-823-7000, the BDS 24 hour inspection request line
- Enter your IVR or permit number
- Enter the three-digit inspection code for the type of inspection you are requesting
- Enter a phone number where you can be reached during weekdays and if you want the inspection in the morning or afternoon
- There must be an adult over age 18 to allow the inspector entry

## Resources

BDS publishes other handouts that provide helpful information about other residential projects, such as:

- What Plans Do I Need for a Building Permit?
- Guide to Permits and Inspections for One and Two Family Dwellings
- Converting Attics, Basements and Garages to Living Space
- Fences, Decks and Outdoor Projects
- Windows

These handouts and others as well as permit applications and code guides are available both in the Development Services Center and on our website.

## Contact Us

Bureau of Development Services  
 City of Portland, Oregon  
 1900 SW 4th Avenue, Portland, OR 97201  
[www.portland.gov/bds](http://www.portland.gov/bds)

### Office Hours:

Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
 BDS main number: 503-823-7300

### Permit Information is available at the following location:

- Development Services Center (First Floor)  
 For Hours Call 503-823-7310 or visit [www.portland.gov/bds](http://www.portland.gov/bds)
- Permitting Services (Second Floor)  
 For Hours Call 503-823-7310 or visit [www.portland.gov/bds](http://www.portland.gov/bds)

## Important Telephone Numbers

BDS main number .....	503-823-7300
DSC automated information line.....	503-823-7310
Permit information for electrical, mechanical, plumbing, sewer and signs.....	503-823-7363
Building code information .....	503-823-1456
Permitting process and fee information .....	503-823-7357
Permit resources and records .....	503-823-7660
Residential information for one and two family dwellings....	503-823-7388
BDS 24-hour inspection request line (requires IVR number and three-digit inspection code) .....	503-823-7000
Oregon Relay Service .....	711

**For more detailed information regarding the bureau's hours of operation and available services:**

**VISIT OUR WEBSITE:  
[WWW.PORTLAND.GOV/BDS](http://WWW.PORTLAND.GOV/BDS)**

Note: All information in this brochure is subject to change.

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 Turjumida ama Fasiraadda | 翻訳または通訳 | Письменный или устный перевод  
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 503-823-7300  [BDS@PortlandOregon.gov](mailto:BDS@PortlandOregon.gov)  [www.portland.gov/bds/brochures-forms/translated-brochures-forms](http://www.portland.gov/bds/brochures-forms/translated-brochures-forms)

The City of Portland is committed to providing meaningful access. For accommodations, modifications, translation, interpretation, or other services, please call **503-823-7300** or the **Oregon Relay Service** at **711**.