




DIVISION OF  
ENGINEERING & CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT  
PLAN REVIEW | PERMITTING | ENGINEERING | CONSTRUCTION

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Permitting, Plan Review, Construction, Customers, Contractors, Vendors  
FROM:  Robert Slocum, P.E., Director, Code Official  
SUBJECT: One and Two Family Dwelling Unit Determination  
DATE: October 12, 2016

The purpose of this memo is to provide guidance regarding the determination of a one or two family dwelling unit in accordance with the International Residential Code (IRC), as adopted by Washington County. The Zoning Ordinance for Washington County is independent of the IRC yet in accord with the guidance below.

The definition of a dwelling unit in the IRC is a single unit providing complete independent living facilities for one or more persons, including provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking and sanitation. A dwelling may be made up of "a room or group of rooms" located within a structure, forming a single habitable unit. An addition is defined by the IRC as "An extension or increase in floor area or height of a building or structure".

By definition, a single family dwelling unit may become a two-family dwelling unit by an addition or modification that provides independent access and independent interior space to two separate units. A structure with independent living space to accommodate independent living, independent access, and no common interior hallway constitutes a two family dwelling unit. Utility services, common or independent, often have no bearing upon the distinction of single or two family dwelling unit. The lack of appliances alone does not constitute a two family dwelling unit as single family unit.

Two family dwelling units must be separated from each other, if adjoined, with 1-hour construction; including walls, doors, and floor/ceiling separations. Common walls shall not have openings. Conditioned air shall not be shared. An automatic residential fire sprinkler system shall be installed in the new dwelling unit in accordance with Section R313 (Automatic Fire Sprinkler Systems) of the 2015 IRC.

Please feel free to contact the Permitting Department, 240-313-2460, or visit the website, <http://www.washco-md.net/permits/permits.shtm>, for more information regarding permitting services.