

# Chatham Board of Health Regulation: Determination of Bedroom Count in Residential Dwellings

## §1. Purpose

This regulation establishes criteria for determining the number of bedrooms in residential dwellings within the Town of Chatham for the purpose of septic system design and compliance with 310 CMR 15.000 (Title 5). Bedrooms are the primary determinant of residential occupancy and wastewater flow; therefore, accurate classification is essential to protect public health and environmental resources.

## §2. Definitions

**Bedroom:** A room shall be classified as a bedroom if it meets all of the following criteria:

- Contains at least one operable window with a minimum clear opening of 5.7 square feet for emergency egress.
- It has 50% or more of its floor area above grade.
- It has a door opening of less than 72 inches,
- Or if 72 inches or greater and is adjacent to or includes an ensuite full bathroom (sink, toilet, shower/tub).
- It is equipped with a dedicated heat source (excluding portable heaters).
- It has electrical service.
- Provides a degree of privacy (e.g., enclosed by walls, stairways).

**Loft:** An elevated area inside of a home that is accessible via a flight of stairs, has railings but does not feature four standard plaster walls. Lofts overlook a main living area, such as a living room or kitchen, and function as an additional room within a home that can be used for relaxing, working.

**Unfinished:** A room lacking drywall, finished flooring, or plumbing/electrical systems.

## §3. Atypical Bedroom Classifications

Rooms with unconventional layouts or locations shall be classified as bedrooms if they meet the criteria in §2. These include:

- Rooms above attached garages
- Basement rooms with majority above-grade floor area and natural light/ventilation
- Lofts with full bathrooms.
- Finished attic or storage rooms

## §4. Detached Structures

Any room within a detached structure on the same lot as the primary dwelling shall be considered a bedroom for Title 5 purposes if it meets the criteria in §2, regardless of the structure's stated function (e.g., garage, office, studio).

However, such rooms shall **not** be classified as bedrooms if the detached structure lacks **any one** of the following domestic features:

- Heat
- Toilet

The absence of these features indicates the structure is not suitable for regular habitation.

## **§5. Whole House Room Count**

In accordance with Title 5's Total Room Count provision:

- A dwelling with nine (9) or more total rooms shall be assigned a bedroom count equal to half the total number of rooms, rounded down.
- Total rooms include bedrooms, living rooms, kitchens, dining rooms, family rooms, and offices and rooms with distinctive physical borders and/or a distinct domestic function.
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An open concept design, where the large space has a small dividing wall, half-wall, pillars, built-in cabinetry or other architectural features that protrudes into the space or obstructs normal movement within the space, and produces a defined visual demarcation, shall be considered for Title-5 purposes as separate rooms.

A bedroom cannot be solely accessible through another bedroom. The room providing access to the more distal bedroom would be a room.

A loft, accessed by a stairwell, or a spiral staircase is a separate room regardless of its openness to the room below, unless the loft is only accessible through a bedroom.

Other rooms such as bathrooms, hallways, foyers, mudrooms, closets, and unfinished spaces are excluded from the count.

The **final bedroom count** shall be the greatest of:

- The number of rooms meeting the physical criteria of a bedroom (§2–§4), or
- The number determined by Total Room Count methodology.

## **§6. Enforcement and Review**

The Chatham Board of Health, and or its agent, shall review all septic plans, variance request, building plans, renovation proposals, and property assessments to determine bedroom count. The Board, and or its Agent, reserves the right to inspect properties and apply this regulation in accordance with Title 5 and relevant Board of Health Regulations.