

**Chester  
Building Official  
Code Enforcement**

Thom Roy  
84 Chester Street  
Chester, NH 03036  
603-887-5552  
603-887-4404 (fax)  
chester@gsinet.net



Stairways – Handrails

***Consult the building code before proceeding on stairway projects. The majority of the information below applies to one-two family residential dwelling units. Commercial, Townhouses, and Apartments may be different; consult with the Building Official.***

New Residential – Class A – required for all new residential construction.

Max Riser = 7 ¾ inches and Min Tread = 10 inches – (as measured from leading edge to leading edge).  
Riser height and Tread width variability is required to within 3/8 of an inch.

Existing Residential – Class B - not accepted for new construction

Max Riser = 8 inches and Min Tread 9 = inches – (as measured from leading edge to leading edge).

All others: - i.e. commercial

Max Riser = 7 inches and Min Tread = 11 inches –(as measured from leading edge to leading edge)

A nosing of not less than ¾” and not more than 1 ¼” is required on solid treads – not required when over 11 inches tread width.

Residential stairs and ramps are required to have handrails on only one side in new construction when the stair width is 38 inches or less. When stair widths are greater than 38 inches a handrail should be on each side.

Handrails must be positioned not less than 34” and not more than 38” above the surface of tread as measured vertically from the top of the rail to the leading edge of the tread. Handrails must be provided on all treads or flights with four or more risers. Ends of handrails are to be returned to the wall or terminated in newel posts. Handrails must be continuous from top to bottom and must provide for 1 ½” clearance between the handrail and the wall.

Handrails – restricted sizing/shapes – shape and grip size are defined within Type I and Type II handrails. Type I handrails with circular cross section shall have a outside diameter of 1 ¼ inches minimum to 2<sup>inches</sup> maximum. When the handrail is not circular a perimeter dimension between 4 to 6 ¼ inches is allowed with a cross section maximum of 2 ¼ inches. *Standard 2 x 4 or 2 x 6 lumber does not qualify as handrails.* Type II handrails have specific dimensions providing for graspable finger recess areas on both side of the rail profile (see code references).

Guard heights are to be not less than 36 inches for all areas located over 30 inches above floor/grade below except on the open sides of stairs with a total rise of 30 inches the guards may be not less than 34 inches in height. While the minimum is 36” the general practice is between 38” to 42” inches for most guards.

Balusters spacing is to be 4 inch maximum spacing – measuring the openings up to 34 inches above the tread.

Stairways are to be not less than 36 inches in width; and not less than 44 inches width if >50 capacity – check requirements if other than residential one- and two-family.

Stairs shall have landings – exception in one-and two-family, a door at the top of an interior flight of stairs is permitted provided it does not open over the stair (i.e. opens in). This exception is not provided for the bottom of stairways and all stairways must have a continuous floor or landing a minimum of 36” without wall or door interruptions. All stairs must have a floor or landing at the bottom of a minimum of 36” in the traveled length; this includes stairs leading off decks or at the bottom of basement stairs. Insure that walk-up attics provide for the proper landing at the base of the stairway.

Landings are required at doors. A floor or landing is required on each side of all exterior doors. The floor or landing may not be more than 1 1/2” at the required egress door; exception provided such that the landing or floor may not be more than 7 3/4” if the door does not swing over the landing. For all other exterior doors, other than the main exit door, the landing or door must not be more than 7 3/4” below the top of the threshold. A landing is not required where a stairway of two or fewer risers and the door or storm door does not swing over the stairway.

Required minimum size of the required exit door is 36” in width by 6’ 8” in height. No exceptions are provided.

Minimum headroom for all parts of the stairway is 6 feet 8 inches as measured vertically from the plane of the nose of the tread or floor surface of the landing.

Maximum single stairway access without a 2<sup>nd</sup> landing is 12 feet vertical.

All interior and exterior stairways need to be provided with a means of lighting, including the landings and treads.

Usable areas under stairways require that all undersurfaces, walls, stringers, landings, and soffit be enclosed with gypsum board. This includes basement stairs with storage space under.

The control for activation of interior stairway lighting shall be accessible at the top and bottom of each stairway without traversing any step. The illumination of exterior stairs shall be controlled from inside the dwelling unit. Exception - Lights that are continuously illuminated or automatically activated.