

Notes From the Commish

The Building Code Alphabet

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Rather than write about one topic, I have decided to take on the alphabet and one of the point, idea, thought, or regulation can be represented by each letter.

Application: Filled out completely, all the fine print read, signed by all the necessary departments, the owner and the contractor.

Blocking: For point loads in the structure carried to the foundation, or to prevent the spread of fire in walls and ceiling cavities.

Contractor: Someone who has done construction more than a few times, who is licensed, registered and insured to show they are competent and will help protect the customer from headaches, deliver a good product, and understands the code and will work with the inspectors. The contractor shall apply for and receive the permit before work begins. (see permit)

Dampproofing: The black stuff we paint on a foundation that slows the migration of dampness through the concrete. Not to be confused with waterproofing a thicker material or system that is designed to keep ground water out of a basement or below grade area.

Energy code: The air sealing requirements and minimum insulation values for floors, walls, windows, ceilings and conditioned piping from the 2006 International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) soon to be 2009 IECC, a quickly and constantly changing document. When applied and followed correctly it will result in a comfortable and efficient structure.

Fastening: The placement and use of nails, screws, bolts, hangers and hardware to connect the various building components to the foundation, walls, ceiling, and roof. Tightened or driven to the correct torque and depth but never driven through the hardware, face of sheathing, sheetrock or other membranes.

Grade: Sloped away from the foundation 6” in the first 10’ to provide positive drainage and lessen the water pressure against the dampproofing.

House Number: The assigned street address visible at all times on your structure or lot so we and the emergency services can find you to assist you.

Insulation: Properly installed with the correct value (see E, for energy code) a heat retarding material to keep your structure warm or cool and more of your money in your pocket.

Jacks: The proper number and sized studs or other supports under the header, beams and point load to support the weight from above. For windows & doors.

Knowledge: The information stored in our heads, code books, reference standards and gained from our experiences, that should be consulted when dealing with a question, problem, situation or in forming an educated opinion of what the right thing to do is.

Ledgers: The board attached to the structure that the joists for the deck or porch are attached to. The ledger needs to be properly flashed (think like a water drop) and fastened to the building with bolts, specialty screws or other hardware that will resist all the weight that can be put on the floor without pulling off the building or shearing off the connection (think party).

Masonry: Brick, stone and stucco are not water proof, proper water proofing membrane, flashing and weeps holes, are a must for any exterior masonry installations.

New Materials: Manufactures are always coming out with new materials, some that replace existing products, some that are totally new. Read the directions for installation, just because it is similar to something else, it probably does not behave or fasten the same way other products do.

Ordinary Repairs: Painting, papering, replacing glass or a few clapboards are examples of ordinary repairs. Full roofing, siding, replacement window(s), door(s), remodeling your kitchen or bathroom are not ordinary repairs and require a permit.

Permit: The colored card we issue after someone (see contractor) submits the application, scale drawings and other required documentation showing the work proposed, before you proceed with a project and which gives the construction guys permission to proceed with the work.

Qualifications: What you should evaluate before you hire someone to do work on your property. Presentation, appearance, past experience, length of time in business, references, licensing, registrations and professional affiliations should all be verified before signing a contract.

Racking Resistance: The ability of a structure to overcome the lateral forces and stay a box shape rather than become a parallelogram. The 7th edition of the code now in effect has made this a critical requirement and it can be tricky in wall areas that lack sufficient sheathing area on them.

Scale: A ratio of drawing size to actual building size used on plans; one quarter inch drawn equals one foot built ($1/4"=1'$) is a common scale. All drawings should be drawn to scale and reproduced in the scale indicated, this makes the plan review process much easier.

Tempered Glass: A type of safety glazing that breaks into pea like pieces when broken, and is required within five feet of the standing surface of a tub, all door glazing and within twenty four inches of the edge of a door.

Underlayment: A second layer of material used on floors to offer additional support for finishes like tile and sheetgoods. Often the cause of the upper basement stair rise being out of code compliance due to the height increase not accounted for when constructing the basement stair stringers.

Ventilation: The controlled exchange of air and moisture in and out of a building. Bathroom fans, clothes dryer and kitchen hoods properly ducted to the outside of the building with controlled make up air intakes or heat recovery ventilators are ways to control ventilation in a structure.

Web Site: <http://www.townofcharlton.net/buildingcommission.htm> the Building Commissioner's web site that this article and lots of other helpful information can be found at.

X-Ray Vision: Except for cartoon characters no one has this power. I even bought the special glasses from the back of the comic book. It is impossible for inspectors, contractors, plumbers, electricians and excavators to see behind, through or into walls that are covered, underground or beneath concrete. If you cover it and I cannot see what lies beneath, plan on uncovering it.

Yard: The green grassy area around the structure with the shed, pool, deck or garage that requires permit to erect; the fence or a retaining wall that may or may not need a permit; the dog house, swing set, play scape or sand box that does not need a permit.

Zoning: A set of regulations enacted by the town's people that govern land use, intensity of use, building setbacks from property lines, set requirements for site plan review, regulate signs and set forth appeal procedures.

Hmm A is for Appeals, Ok next time The Zoning Alphabet.

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