

CHAPTER 1.5

MODIFIED LIMITED DENSITY OWNER-BUILT RURAL DWELLING REGULATIONS (FOR ALTERNATIVE OWNER BUILDERS)

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331.5-1. General Provisions.

On July 10, 1984, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors, duly made findings that there are special local conditions within specified areas of Humboldt County where modifications and changes of the standard regulations for limited density owner-built rural dwellings are reasonably necessary because of local climatic, geographical or topographical conditions. The rural housing construction standards adopted by this chapter are modifications to the standard building regulations otherwise applicable in Humboldt County and are adopted pursuant to Section [17958.5](#) of the Health and Safety Code. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984)

331.5-2. Purpose and Intent.

The modifications contained in this chapter are intended to permit, under specified circumstances, the use of the ingenuity and preferences of individual builders of dwellings in designated areas of Humboldt County, while at the same time maintaining minimum requirements for the protection of life, limb, health, property, safety and welfare of the general public and the occupants of dwellings constructed pursuant to this chapter. It is further intended to allow the use of substitute materials and procedures and alternatives to the specifications prescribed by the uniform technical codes to the extent that a reasonable degree of health and safety is provided by these modifications.

In applying these modifications, the Chief Building Official shall have the authority to exercise reasonable judgment in determining compliance with all requirements of this chapter. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984; Ord. 2656, § 1, 10/27/2020)

331.5-3. Application.

The provisions of this chapter shall apply to the construction, enlargement, conversion, alteration, repair, use, maintenance, and occupancy of limited density owner-built, owner-occupied dwellings, owner-built accessory dwelling units, and appurtenant structures in rural areas in Humboldt County. Such dwellings and appurtenant structures shall include seasonally or permanently occupied dwellings, hunting shelters, vacation homes, recreational shelters and detached bedrooms used solely by the owner of the dwelling except for owner-built accessory dwelling units which may be used by persons other than the owner of the dwelling. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984; Ord. 2656, § 1, 10/27/2020)

331.5-4. Existing Buildings.

A building permit may be obtained pursuant to the provisions of this chapter for a dwelling that was constructed or was partially constructed before the effective date of these modifications, provided:

- (a) The applicant is the owner of the dwelling at the time of application for and issuance of the permit; and
- (b) The dwelling meets all standards required by this chapter; and
- (c) An inspection of the dwelling is made by the Chief Building Official and he/she determines that the requirements of this chapter have been met or substantially met to the extent that no abnormal risk to health or safety will result from occupancy of the dwelling. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984)

331.5-5. Definitions.

For purposes of this chapter, the following words and phrases shall have the meanings given below:

- (a) *Accessory dwelling unit.* For the purposes of this section, an accessory dwelling unit is any structure consisting of one or more habitable rooms intended or designed for single-family occupancy with all basic facilities for living and sleeping which is situated or is to be situated in a rural area to which the provisions of this chapter are applicable and which is accessory to an existing single-family residence on the same property.
- (b) *Detached bedroom.* A separate accessory structure without kitchen or sanitation facilities, designed for and used primarily as a sleeping facility in conjunction with a main structure which includes kitchen and sanitation facilities.
- (c) *Graywater.* As defined in Section [611-2](#), "graywater" means untreated wastewater that has not been contaminated by any toilet discharge; has not been affected by infectious, contaminated, or unhealthy bodily wastes; and does not present a threat from contamination by unhealthful processing, manufacturing, or operating wastes. "Graywater" includes wastewater from bathtubs, showers, bathroom washbasins, clothes washing machines, and laundry tubs, but does not include wastewater from kitchen sinks or dishwashers. Graywater as defined above has the same meaning as "gray water," "grey water," and/or "greywater."
- (d) *Owner-occupied rural dwelling.* Any structure consisting of one or more habitable rooms intended or designed for single-family occupancy with all basic facilities for living and sleeping which is situated or is to be situated in a rural area to which the provisions of this chapter are applicable and which is owned by one or more members of the family occupying the structure.
- (e) *Owner-built.* A structure owned and constructed by any person or family who acts as the general contractor for, or as the provider of, all or the major part of the labor expended to build the structure.
- (f) *Rural or rural area.* That part of Humboldt County which is outside boundaries of any incorporated city, a community services district, a sphere of influence as designated by the Humboldt County Local Agency Formation Commission (or a city planning area established pursuant to Section [65300](#) of the Government Code in the absence of a designated city sphere of influence), or outside of an urban limit line as designated in the Humboldt County Land Use Plans. "Rural" or "rural area," for the purposes of this chapter, also includes any area which is within a community services district or sphere of influence which is located beyond the reasonably projected availability of water or sewer services, and which is zoned to permit residential use either as a principal use or with a conditional use permit.

The written determination by a city or community services district as to whether or not community services will be available to any parcel in the foreseeable future, based upon reasonable projections, shall be used as the primary basis for deciding if land for which a permit is sought pursuant to this chapter is located beyond the reasonably projected availability of community services.

- (g) *Sound structural condition.* "Sound structural condition" means a structure in which:
- (1) Any plumbing, any fireplace, wood stove or other source of heat, and electrical wiring, has been built in conformance with and conforms to the applicable codes and has been and is maintained in a good condition so as to present no unreasonable risk of health and safety; and
 - (2) The fireplace or chimney does not list or bulge and has not settled due to defective material or deterioration, and in which fireplaces and chimneys are of sufficient size to carry imposed loads with safety.

(h) *Substandard building.* A structure in which there exists any condition that abnormally endangers the life, limb, health, or safety of anyone within or outside of such structure. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984; Ord. 2656, § 1, 10/27/2020)

331.5-6. Permit Applications.

Permits shall be required for the construction or repair of owner-built, owner-occupied rural dwellings, owner-built accessory dwelling units, and appurtenant structures. Applications for a permit pursuant to this chapter shall be made to the Chief Building Official. Permit applications shall contain the following information:

- (a) Name and mailing address of the applicant;
- (b) The location, Assessor's parcel number, and address (if known) of the site where the proposed structure is to be built;
- (c) A general description of the structure and the intended use (where applicable), mechanical installations with all clearances and venting procedures detailed, electrical installations, and fire safety details;
- (d) A plot plan indicating the location of the dwelling in relation to property lines, other structures, sanitation and bathing facilities, water source and water ways;
- (e) If the application being made pertains to a dwelling structure, application shall be made concurrently for approval by the County Department of Public Health of the installation of sewage or waste disposal facilities;
- (f) In the case of dwellings, a certification by the applicant that the dwelling is to be owner-built and used only for residential purposes;
- (g) The plan provided for in Section [331.5-8](#) of this chapter;
- (h) Such other necessary data or information as may be required by the Chief Building Official to implement these regulations. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984; Ord. 2656, § 1, 10/27/2020)

331.5-7. Frequency of Permits.

No more than one (1) building permit for initial construction of an owner-built dwelling in a rural area shall be issued to the same person in any two (2) year period, except that a building permit for initial construction of both an owner-built dwelling and owner-built accessory dwelling unit may be issued to the same person. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984; Ord. 2656, § 1, 10/27/2020; Ord. 2681, § 2, 8/10/2021)

331.5-8. Plans.

Each applicant for a building permit pursuant to the provisions of this chapter shall, at the time of making such application, submit a plan for the proposed structure. Such plans shall contain a general description of the

structure and all necessary specific information to reasonably facilitate a determination by the Chief Building Official of conformance with all applicable codes, including the provisions of this chapter. The plans may include a simplified diagram of the single-item floor plan and site evaluation in order to determine the appropriate dimensions of structural members. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984)

331.5-9. Waiver of Plans.

The Chief Building Official may waive the submission of plans required under the provisions of Section [331.5-8](#) which he/she determines are not necessary to obtain compliance with this chapter, based upon the nature of the work for which application is made. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984)

331.5-10. Plan Modification.

Modifications to be design materials and methods of construction may be allowed provided that the building continues to conform to the provisions of this chapter and the Chief Building Official has approved the modification in writing. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984)

331.5-11. Permit Issuance.

When the Chief Building Official determines that the planned work will comply with all applicable codes, including provisions of this chapter, the permit shall be deemed. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984)

331.5-12. Permit Validity.

Permits issued for initial construction of dwellings shall be valid, without renewal, for a period of five (5) successive years. Extension of a permit beyond five (5) years without payment of an additional fee may be approved by the Chief Building Official upon a supplemental application being filed with the Chief Building Official before expiration of the five (5) year term of validity. The application shall contain a statement of facts in support of the extension including an explanation of why the work was not completed within the five (5) year period. If the Chief Building Official determines that there is sufficient reason for the construction not having been completed by the applicant during the five (5) year period, he shall issue an extension of the permit for an appropriate period within which the work can be completed, but in no event to exceed one (1) year for an extension. Application may be made for additional extensions.

Permit extensions may not be granted if building requirements applicable to the permit have changed since issuance of the permit or any prior extension thereof to the extent that allowing the work without modification will present a danger to health and safety of occupants or persons around the premises unless:

- (a) The applicant agrees to comply with the new requirement, or

(b) The project can be altered so as to avoid the additional requirements. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984)

331.5-13. Permit Review.

(a) *Basis of Approval.* Pursuant to Section 218 of Title 26 of the California Administrative Code, except as otherwise provided by this chapter, dwellings and appurtenant structures constructed in compliance with this chapter need not conform with the construction requirements prescribed by the latest applicable editions of the Uniform Building, Plumbing, and Mechanical Codes, the National Electrical Code, or other applicable technical codes.

(b) *Mechanical Requirements.* Fireplaces, heating and cooking appliances, and gas piping installed in buildings constructed pursuant to this chapter shall be installed and vented in accordance with the requirements of Chapter 37 of the Uniform Building Code, Chapter 9 of the Uniform Mechanical Code, and Chapter 12 of the Uniform Plumbing Code. Alternate materials and methods of venting shall be permitted if substantially equivalent in safety and durability.

(c) *Heating Capacity.* A heating facility or appliance shall be installed in each dwelling subject to the provisions of this chapter. The use of solid fuel or solar heating devices shall be deemed to comply with the requirements of this section. If nonrenewable fuel is used in the dwelling, rooms so heated shall meet current insulation standards.

(d) *Electrical Requirements.* No dwelling or appurtenant structure constructed pursuant to this chapter shall be required to be connected to a source of electrical power, or wired, or otherwise fitted for electrification, except as set forth in this subsection.

If electrical wiring or appliances are installed, the installation shall be in accordance with the provisions of the National Electrical Code for single-family dwellings.

In structures where electrical usage is to be confined to one or more rooms of a structure, the remainder of the structure shall not be required to be wired or otherwise fitted for electrification unless the Chief Building Official determines that electrical demands are reasonable expected to exceed the wiring capacity of the area that is to be wired. In such instances, the Chief Building Official may require such further electrification of the structure as may be necessary to meet the excess anticipated demand.

The provisions of this subsection apply to buildings which include a workshop, kitchen, or other single room which may require electrification if there is no expectation of further electrical demand.

(e) *Room Dimension Requirements.* The only room dimension or other room requirements for a structure constructed pursuant to this chapter shall be as follows:

Bedrooms shall be equipped with either a door to the outside or an exterior window with 5.7 square feet of openable area for emergency exit. The window shall have a minimum width of 20 inches, a minimum height of 24 inches, and the window sill shall not be more than 44 inches above the bedroom floor.

(f) *Sanitation Facilities.* A bathtub or shower and a lavatory, or alternate bathing and washing facility shall be provided at the dwelling site.

A water closet shall not be required when an alternative system is provided and has been approved by the County Health Department. Where an alternative to the water closet is installed, a system for the disposal or treatment of greywater shall be provided to the dwelling. Greywater systems shall be designed according to water availability, use and discharge.

The County Health Department shall prepare regulations which shall specify:

- (1) The type, design and number of sanitation and bathing and washing facilities to be provided at each dwelling site. Such facilities shall not be required to be placed within the dwelling; and
- (2) The design, use and maintenance standards for greywater disposal and treatment systems.

(g) *Plumbing Specifications.* Where conventional plumbing, in all or in part, is installed within a dwelling, it shall be installed in accordance with the Uniform Plumbing Code. Alternative materials and methods shall be permitted if the design complies with the intent of such code, and such alternatives shall perform to protect health and safety for the intended purpose.

(h) *Water Supply.* Potable water shall be available at the dwelling site as required by Humboldt County Code § [331-11.5](#). However, such water need not be pressurized. There shall be a minimum reserve of fifty (50) gallons of potable water available. Where water delivery is pressurized, piping shall be installed in accordance with the provisions of this chapter.

In addition to the domestic water supply, a firefighting water supply of at least 2,500 gallons (pond, tank or equivalent) shall be maintained on the property. If access to the supply is by pipe, such pipe shall be at least 1-1/2 inches in diameter and shall have at least one hose outlet no less than fifty (50) feet from the primary dwelling. If the water storage facility is below the fire equipment access level, then the firefighting equipment must be able to get within fifteen (15) feet of a water supply which is not piped to the primary dwelling.

(i) *Fire Safety.*

(1) *Access.* If a dwelling has access by road, such road should be wide enough for fire equipment, should provide turnouts long enough for fire equipment where the terrain permits, and should contain a turnaround space for fire equipment. This turnaround space may be part of the firebreak. The maximum load of any bridge on the access road should be determined, and this information should be posted and maintained at the bridge, by the occupant of the premises. Bridges should support at least a 20,000-pound load.

(2) *Firebreaks.* Flammable undergrowth shall be removed for thirty (30) feet around each structure on the property or on the property line, whichever is nearer. However, single specimens of trees, ornamental shrubbery or ground cover plants which do not form a means of rapidly transmitting fire from the native growth to any structure may be maintained within the firebreak.

(3) *Chimney Clearance.* The portion of any tree which extends within ten (10) feet of the outlet or any chimney or stovepipe shall be removed. Chimney clearances shall comply with the requirements as set forth in the Uniform Mechanical Code.

(4) *Overhanging Deadwood.* Dead or dying wood shall be removed from any tree adjacent to or overhanging any structure.

(5) *Rooftop.* The roof of any structure shall be maintained free of leaves, needles or other dead vegetable growth. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984)

331.5-14. Inspections.

All construction or work for which a permit is required under this chapter shall be subject to inspection by County inspectors. Structures of conventional or simple construction shall be inspected at a single inspection.

Additional inspections shall be conducted under the following circumstances: An inspection shall be conducted where there is reason to believe that the footing of the structure will be subjected to abnormal vertical or lateral movement due to unstable soil conditions; or in cases where interior wall coverings or construction elements will conceal underlying construction, electrical or mechanical systems; or where an unconventional construction method is to be employed which would preclude examination at a single inspection. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984)

331.5-15. Inspection Requests and Notices.

It shall be the duty of the holder of a building permit issued under this chapter to notify the Building Official, Health Department, Fire District, or California Department of Forestry, as appropriate, that the construction is ready for inspection and to assure that the premises will be accessible at the time scheduled for inspection. Inspections shall be requested by the applicant at least forty-eight (48) hours in advance of the intended inspection. The inspector shall notify or inform the permit holder of the day during which the inspection is to be conducted and shall notify the permit holder if the inspection cannot be made as scheduled. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984)

331.5-16. Temporary Occupancy.

An owner-builder and his/her immediate family may use and occupy a portion or portions of a dwelling or appurtenant structure prior to the completion of the entire structure if approved sanitary facilities are available and functioning at the site and if the work completed does not endanger life, health or safety. Neither the County nor any official or employee thereof shall be responsible for any injuries to anyone, occupants or otherwise, which are attributable to the unfinished structure. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984)

331.5-17. Changes in Occupancy.

The occupancy of a structure constructed in accordance with a permit issued pursuant to this chapter by anyone other than the owner-builder of that structure constitutes a change in occupancy.

Upon a change in occupancy, no new occupancy of the structure shall occur until either:

- (a) Each new adult occupant files with the Chief Building Official a statement under penalty of perjury stating that he/she is occupying the structure with the knowledge and understanding that the structure was not built pursuant to Uniform Building Codes and that this may create risks of injury or damage which the occupant freely assumes and from which the occupant holds the County, its officers, employees and agents harmless. The occupant shall also agree, as a condition of the new occupancy permit, to abide by all applicable conditions of the building permit under which the structure was constructed; or
- (b) The building is brought into compliance with the provisions of Title 25, Article 10, of the California Administrative Code or the appropriate Uniform Building Code standard.

For the purposes of this section "occupancy" means actual physical occupation for the premises rather than a change in type of use as typically defined in uniform codes. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984; Ord. 2656, § 1, 10/27/2020)

331.5-18. Fees for Permits and Inspection.

- (a) Any person required to obtain a building, plumbing, electrical, heating or comfort-cooling permit under this chapter, or a combination of any such permits, shall at the time of filing an application therefor pay to the Chief Building Official the fees set forth in the current resolution of the Board of Supervisors establishing fees for permits issued pursuant to this chapter.
- (b) Where work is commenced after the effective date of these regulations and prior to obtaining a permit, a double fee shall be charged.
- (c) The Chief Building Official may refund up to eighty (80%) of the permit fee subject to the following limitations:
 - (1) Fees allocable to plan checking are not refundable after that Building Department has commenced review of the plans;
 - (2) No work shall have commenced on the project for which such permit was issued;
 - (3) The permit must be canceled by the owner or holder, in writing, within sixty (60) days of the date of issuance; and
 - (4) No refund shall be made when the permit fee is Ten Dollars (\$10.00) or less. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984)

331.5-19. Records.

It shall be the duty of the Chief Building Official to keep a permanent record of all pertinent transactions under this chapter and to render a monthly report to the Board of Supervisors concerning such transactions. All fees collected by the Chief Building Official shall be turned over to the County Treasurer and placed in the general fund. The Chief Building Official shall transmit to the County Assessor copies of all applications for building permits and copies of all completion reports pertaining to building permits. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984)

331.5-20. Liability.

This chapter shall not be construed as imposing upon the County or upon any of its officers or employees any liability or responsibility for injury or damage resulting from any building, plumbing, electrical, heating, or comfort-cooling work approved or performed hereunder. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984)

331.5-21. Violations Constituting a Public Nuisance.

Any building or structure erected, constructed, enlarged, altered, repaired, moved, improved, removed, converted or demolished, equipped, used, occupied or maintained contrary to the provisions of this chapter shall be and the same is hereby declared to be unlawful and a public nuisance. Any failure, refusal or neglect to obtain a permit as required by this chapter shall be prima facie evidence that a public nuisance has been created in connection with the erection, construction, enlargement, alteration, repair, movement, improvement, removal, conversion or demolition, equipping, use, occupation or maintenance of a moved, improved, converted or demolished, equipped, used, occupied or maintained contrary to the provisions of this chapter. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984)

331.5-22. Penal Provisions.

(a) No person, firm or corporation, whether as owner, lessee, sublessee or occupant, shall erect, construct, enlarge, alter, repair, move, improve, remove, convert, demolish, equip, use, occupy or maintain any building or premises, or cause or permit the same to be done, contrary to or in violation of any of the provisions of this chapter or any order issued by the Chief Building Official or the Health Officer hereunder.

(b) Any person violating any of the provisions of this chapter shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction thereof shall be punishable by a fine of not more than One Thousand Dollars (\$1,000.00) or by imprisonment in the County Jail of the County of Humboldt for not more than six (6) months, or by both such fine and imprisonment. Each such person shall be deemed guilty of a separate offense for each day or portion thereof during which any violation of the provisions is committed, continued or permitted by such person. (Ord. 2585, § 3, 11/7/2017)

(c) The provisions of subsection (b) shall not apply to an owner of real property building or improving structures thereon of appurtenances thereto who does such work himself, provided that:

- (1) Such structure or structures are not intended or offered for sale, lease or rent; and
- (2) Such structure or structures are one-family dwellings, farm or ranch buildings, which are not more than two (2) stories in height.

In all actions, criminal or civil, brought under this chapter, proof of the sale, leasing or renting, or the offering for sale, lease or rent, of any such structure by the owner-builder within one (1) year after completion of sale if presumptive evidence that such structure was undertaken for purposes of sale, lease or rent. (Ord. 1644, § 2, 7/17/1984)

The Humboldt County Code is current through Ordinance 2698, passed July 19, 2022.

Disclaimer: The Office of the County Counsel has the official version of the Humboldt County Code. Users should contact the Clerk of the Board's office for ordinances passed subsequent to the ordinance cited above.

[County Website: humboldt.gov](http://humboldt.gov)

County Telephone: (707) 445-7236

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