

TOWNHOUSE vs TWO FAMILY DWELLING

DEFINITIONS

According to the 2021 IRC, a **townhouse** is a building that contains attached townhouse units. In order to qualify as a townhouse, each unit extends from foundation to roof - townhouses cannot be stacked and cannot be more than three stories. Each unit has to open to the exterior on at least two sides providing some degree of independence from other units. Each unit must have independent egress to the exterior. Each unit is considered to be a separate building and separated from the other units by a 2 hour fire wall with out penetrations. Each unit is served with its own water, sewer, gas and electrical services.

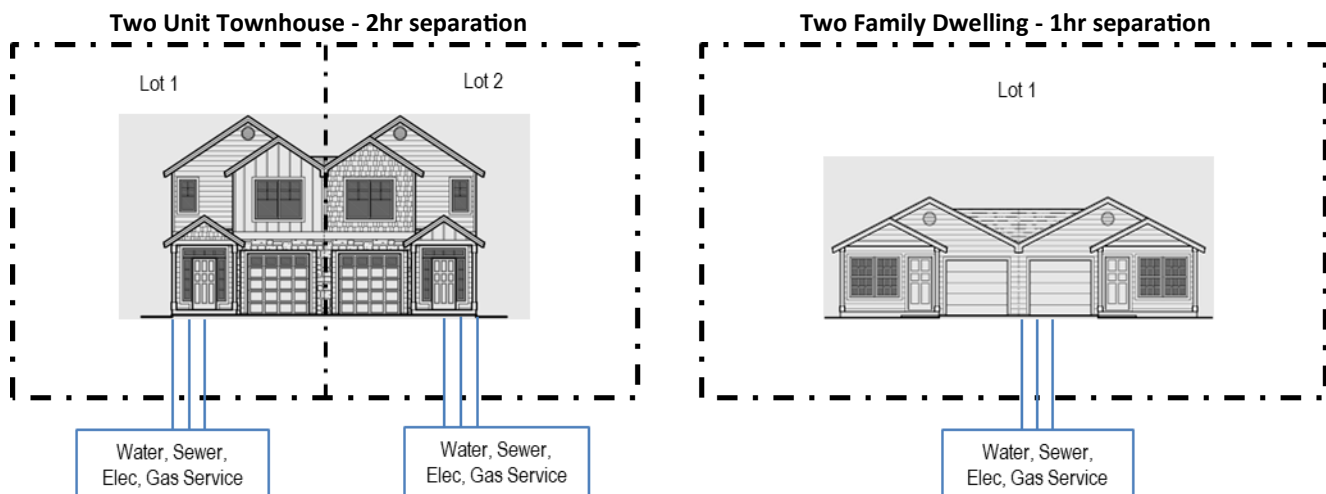
The code states that walls separating townhouses shall be assigned a 2 hour fire resistance rated wall assembly for the common wall shared by two townhouses. It further states that the common wall shall be constructed without plumbing or mechanical equipment, ducts or vents in the cavity of the common wall. The fire wall assembly shall be continuous from the foundation to the underside of the roof sheathing, deck or slab. Fire retardant treated wood for a distance of 4' is required on each side of the separation wall at the roof deck. It further states that each individual townhouse shall be structurally independent except for foundations and exterior wall/roof coverings. A two-unit townhouse is sometimes marketed to as a "twin-home". Each individual dwelling unit and the land adjacent to it can have separate ownership with an approved property split or approved site plan prior to construction.

Two-family dwellings are commonly referred to as a "duplex" and are located on a single lot with a single land owner. Typically the two sides share one service entrance each for water, sewer, gas and electric. One or both sides are typically rental units or condominium units. These occupancies are required to be separated by a 1 hour fire wall and can be separated vertically or horizontally. Penetration regulations apply for utilities located through any common wall.

DISTINCTIONS.

Following are the primary differences between a two-unit townhouse and a two-family dwelling:

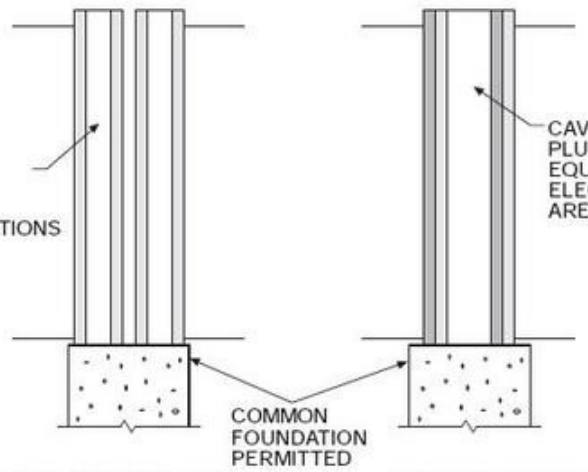
- **Property** – A Two-Unit Townhouse can be located on two separate individual lots with a property line running between them whereas both units of a Two-Family Dwelling can only be located on the same single lot.
- **Separation** - The two hour separation wall, or two one hour separation walls, of a Two-Unit Townhouse must extend from the foundation to the roof. One hour separation required for Two-Family Dwellings shall extend to and be tight against the exterior wall for wall/ceiling assemblies, and shall extend from the foundation to the underside of the roof sheathing for wall assemblies.
- **Services** - Each Townhouse unit must maintain separate utilities meaning that sewer and water lines along with heating and cooling ductwork and any gas lines are prohibited from being located in the cavity of the common wall.



This brochure is intended to explain some of the requirements for residential townhouses. If you have further questions, please contact the Waterloo Building Department.

CAVITY IN EACH WALL
CAN BE USED FOR
PLUMBING OR
MECHANICAL INSTALLATIONS

CAVITY MAY NOT BE USED FOR
PLUMBING AND MECHANICAL
EQUIPMENT, DUCTS OR VENTS.
ELECTRICAL INSTALLATIONS
ARE PERMITTED



COMMON
FOUNDATION
PERMITTED

TWO SEPARATE 1-HR
EXTERIOR WALLS IN
ACCORDANCE WITH
SECTION R302.1

ONE COMMON WALL

Figure R302.2
DWELLING UNIT SEPARATION FOR TOWNHOUSES