

# CONVERTING A GARAGE TO AN ANCILLARY DWELLING

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Converting a garage into an ancillary dwelling is a popular request, but it's not as straightforward as it seems. Garages are built to store vehicles, not people, so they often don't meet residential standards. Issues like poor insulation, inadequate foundation strength, and low ceilings can make the conversion more complex and costly. In some cases, it might be more practical to rebuild the structure

## The Appeal of Garage Conversion

A garage conversion is an excellent way to unlock the hidden potential of unused space without the need for major construction. Whether you're creating a comfortable ancillary dwelling for multigenerational living or seeking to boost the value of your property through rental income, a garage conversion offers a cost-effective solution. Unlike building a new structure, a garage conversion repurposes existing space, making it a more sustainable and efficient choice. However, it's important to navigate the planning and building code requirements to ensure compliance with local regulations, so you can convert your garage into a liveable, functional area with minimal hassle.

## Compliance with the Building Code of Australia (BCA)

Under the Building Code of Australia (BCA) a garage is deemed as a Class 10(a) Building and is defined as a "non-habitable building". Converting the garage into a secondary dwelling (ancillary dwelling) changes the use to a "habitable building" which becomes a Class 1(a) Building.

Additional requirements under the BCA will apply if the garage is situated underneath the existing dwelling as it is then classified as a Class 2 Building and fire separation between the two levels is required.

**BCA Report** - To determine if the existing building structure can meet the BCA requirements for a Class 1(a) or Class 2 Building, a suitably qualified person will need to prepare a BCA Report. Examples of matters that will be listed in the BCA Report will be:

- The ground floor slab of a habitable structure must be constructed in accordance with Australian Standard (AS) 2870, be at least 150mm above the adjacent ground level and the underside of the slab must be provided with a damp proof membrane.
- The structure is to be provided with Termite Risk Management measures.
- Floor to ceiling heights.
- Is the existing structure located in a Bushfire Prone Area.
- The walls of the building must have a minimum boundary setback of 900mm. (Note: A current survey plan showing side and rear setbacks, natural ground levels and finished floor levels will be required).
- The building must be provided with sufficient natural light and natural ventilation.

Whilst this is not an exhaustive list of the matters for consideration in 'changing the use of a garage' it is representative of the key matters to be considered in assessing the feasibility of the proposal and should an existing structure not meet any of these requirements, an upgrade of the existing structure would be required.

## Planning Regulations

When converting a garage, it's important to consider local planning regulations, especially regarding car parking requirements. Generally, for residential properties they require a minimum number of parking spaces. The standard requirement is typically:

- 2 parking bays for the main dwelling, to ensure that the property has adequate parking for the primary occupants.
- 1 additional parking bay for any ancillary dwelling occupants.

These requirements are meant to maintain the availability of on-site parking and ensure that the conversion does not negatively affect traffic flow or parking availability in the surrounding area.

## Building Codes and Regulations

If planning requirements are met, the next step is ensuring compliance with the Building Code of Australia (BCA), which introduces additional considerations for garage-to-ancillary dwelling conversions:

- It will require a toilet, bathing facilities, laundry and a kitchen for cooking and food storage.
- Ceiling Heights: The minimum ceiling height for an ancillary dwelling is 2.4m. If the existing structure does not meet this, the roof will need to be removed and rebuilt.
- Slabs and Damp-Proof Membrane: Older garage slabs may not have the required damp proof membrane. This could necessitate adding a topping slab to ensure compliance.
- Since garage floors are not elevated, you'll need to consider how the proposed works will prevent the ingress of water into the new room, this is where you may need a licensed plumber/drainage expert.
- The walls of the new addition must maintain a continuous cavity with the existing dwelling.
- Termite Barriers: Alternate solutions might be required to ensure termite protection under the BCA.
- Natural Light and Ventilation: Additional windows or mechanical ventilation may be needed to meet natural light and ventilation requirements.
- Energy Efficiency requirements to comply with the applicable and current version of the BCA.
- If located in a Bushfire Prone Area a Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) Report is required along with a Bushfire Construction Plan demonstrating compliance with AS3959-2018 to the determined BAL.
- Hard wired smoke alarms must be installed to protect all existing and proposed bedrooms of the house.
- Fire Separation Measures: If the proposed ancillary dwelling is within 900mm of the boundary or 1.8m of the existing dwelling, fire separation measures must be installed to ensure compliance.
- Fire Wall Requirements: If the ancillary dwelling is within the envelope (outer walls) of the existing house, a fire wall is typically required to separate the two areas, or if situated beneath the existing building fire separation between the two levels is required.

Garages typically don't have the same utility infrastructure as the rest of the house. Converting the garage might require new plumbing, electrical work, or even the installation of heating and cooling systems. These upgrades can be expensive and could require the services of professionals to ensure they meet code.

In conclusion, while converting a garage into ancillary dwelling seems like a cost-effective and simple way to create more living space, the practicalities involved can often make the process far more complicated and expensive than anticipated. In some cases, rebuilding the structure from scratch may be the more efficient and cost-effective solution.

### NEED MORE INFORMATION?

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