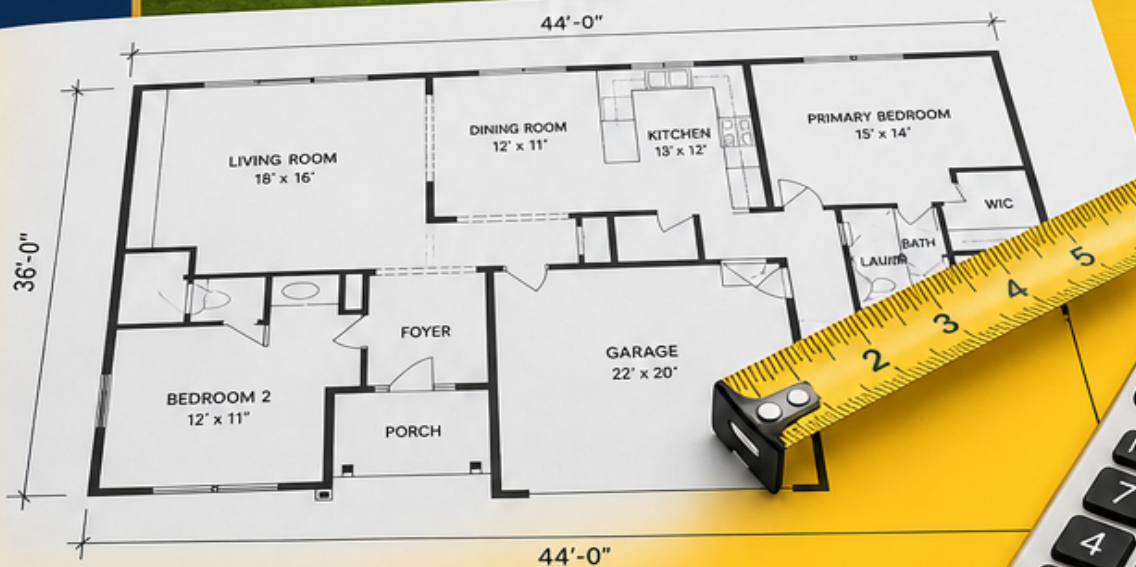


2026 RESIDENTIAL SQUARE FOOTAGE GUIDELINES

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North Carolina Real Estate Commission

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Introduction

It is often said that the three most important factors in making a buying decision are “location,” “location,” and “location.” Aside from “location,” another important factor is the size or “square footage” of the dwelling. Not only is it an indicator of whether a particular dwelling will meet a buyer’s space needs, but it also affords a convenient (though not always accurate) method for the buyer to decide on the offer price of the dwelling and be able to compare it more easily to others.

Although real estate agents are not required by the Real Estate License Law or Real Estate Commission rules to report the square footage of properties offered for sale (or rent), when they do report square footage, the information they give prospective buyers (or tenants) must be accurate. At a minimum, information about square footage should include the amount of *living area* in the dwelling. The following *guidelines* and accompanying illustrations are designed to assist real estate agents in measuring, calculating, and reporting (both orally and in writing) the *living area* contained in detached and attached single-family residential dwellings. When reporting square footage, real estate agents should carefully follow these *Guidelines* or any other current standards comparable to them, including the current standard approved by the American National Standards Institute, Inc. (ANSI), which is recognized by the North Carolina Real Estate Commission as comparable. Agents should be prepared to identify, when requested, the standard used.

Agent Responsibilities

Real estate agents are expected to measure and accurately calculate the square footage of most dwellings. When reporting square footage, whether for a party to a real estate transaction, another real estate agent, or others, a real estate agent is expected to provide accurate square footage information compiled in accordance with these *Guidelines* or other comparable standards.

While an agent is expected to use reasonable skill, care and diligence when calculating square footage, the Commission does not expect absolute perfection. Because all properties are unique and no *guidelines* can anticipate every possibility, minor discrepancies in the calculation of square footage do not, in the Commission’s

view, constitute negligence on the part of the agent. Minor variations in tape readings and small differences in rounding off or conversion from inches to decimals, when multiplied over distances, will cause reasonable discrepancies between two competent measurements of the same dwelling.

In addition to differences in measurement and calculation, discrepancies between measurements may also be attributable to reasonable differences in interpretation. For instance, two agents might reasonably differ in their assessment of whether an addition to a dwelling is sufficiently finished under these *Guidelines* to be included within the measured *living area*.

Differences that are based upon an agent’s thoughtful judgment, appropriately documented, and reasonably founded on these or other similar *guidelines* will not be considered by the Commission to constitute error on the agent’s part. Deviations in calculated square footage of less than five (5) percent will seldom be cause for concern unless an agent intentionally overstates the square footage, has a history of square footage errors, or uses an unacceptable source of square footage.

As a general rule, the most reliable way for an agent to obtain accurate square footage is to personally both measure the dwelling and calculate the square footage. It is especially recommended that listing agents use this approach for dwellings that are not particularly unusual or complex in their design.

An agent acting in an agency capacity may engage another person (for example a competent licensed or certified appraiser or competent licensed contractor) to measure and calculate the accurate square footage of a dwelling in accordance with these *guidelines*, or similar standards. The square footage reported **must be specifically determined in connection with the current listing transaction**. However, the agent who relies on another’s measurements is still be responsible for reporting accurate square footage and assumes full responsibilities for the reported square footage, even when measured and calculated by others, and is expected to recognize an obvious error in the reported square footage and alert all interested parties of such an error. The listing agent must also be prepared to specify which square footage method any third-party utilized.

A buyer agent (or seller subagent) may generally rely

on the listing agent's reported square footage unless there is an error that should be obvious to a reasonably prudent agent. In such circumstances, the buyer agent (or seller subagent) **must** promptly point out the suspected error to the buyer and the listing agent. The listing agent **must** then verify the square footage, correct any errors in the reported information, and inform any previous prospective buyers of the corrected error. However, when there is such a **"red-flag"** situation, under the law of agency, the agent working for a buyer has a fiduciary duty to verify the square footage if the buyer continues to have concerns about it.

It is also appropriate for an inexperienced agent to rely upon measurements and calculations performed by other professionals with greater expertise in determining square footage. A newly licensed agent acting in an agency capacity who may be unsure of his or her own measurements and calculations should seek guidance from a more experienced agent, or a competent professional.

Some sources of square footage information by their very nature are unreliable and therefore unacceptable. For example, an agent should NOT rely on square footage information provided by:

- the owner;
- previous appraisals;
- prior listings;
- prior survey; or
- real property tax records.

The listing agent will be held accountable for the accuracy of square footage information the listing agent reports to prospective purchasers, including information obtained by purchasers from property data sheets and MLS data banks. Under certain circumstances, the BIC and the brokerage may also be held accountable for the accuracy of square footage.

In areas where the prevailing practice is to report square footage in the advertising and marketing of dwellings, agents (or brokerages) who do **not** measure, calculate and report square footage **must** disclose this fact to prospective buyer and seller clients before entering into any form of an agency agreement with them.

Agents must retain for at least three years all sketches, calculations, photos, and other documentation used and/or relied upon to

determine square footage, regardless of their origin.

Living Area

Real estate appraisers and lenders generally adhere to more detailed criteria when reporting the *living area* or "gross living area" of residential dwellings. Fannie Mae & Freddie Mac require appraisers to adhere to the ANSI Standard. This normally includes distinguishing "above-grade" from "below-grade" areas, which is also required by many multiple listing services. "Above-Grade" is defined as space on any level of a dwelling which has *living area* and no earth adjacent to any exterior wall on that level. "Below-Grade" is space on any level which has *living area*, is accessible by permanent interior stairs, and has earth adjacent to any exterior wall on that level (see Figure #4). If earth is adjacent to any portion of an exterior wall, the entire level is considered "below-grade." Space that is "at" or "on grade" is considered "above-grade."

While real estate agents are strongly encouraged to provide the most complete information available about properties offered for sale, the *Guidelines* recognize that the separate reporting of "above-grade" and "below-grade" areas can be sometimes impractical in the advertising and marketing of dwellings. For this reason, *real estate agents are permitted under these Guidelines to report square footage of the dwelling as the total "living area" without a separate distinction between "above-grade" and "below-grade" areas. However, to help avoid confusion and concern, agents should alert purchasers and sellers that the appraisal report may reflect differences in the way living area is defined and described by the lender, appraiser, and the North Carolina Building Code, which could affect the total amount of living area reported (See Figures #1, #4, & #5).*

Living Area Criteria

Living area (sometimes referred to as "heated living area" or "heated square footage") is space that is intended for human occupancy and is:

1. Heated by a conventional heating system or systems (forced air, mini-split heating unit, radiant, solar, fireplace connected to a thermostat, or conditioned space, etc.) that are permanently installed in the dwelling, and which generate heat sufficient to make the space

suitable for year-round occupancy not a portable heater or fireplace that is not connected to a thermostat;

2. Finished, with walls, floors and ceilings of materials generally accepted for interior construction (e.g., painted drywall/sheet rock or panelled walls, carpeted, hardwood flooring, or polished concrete floors, etc.) and with a ceiling height of at least seven feet, except under beams, ducts, etc. where the height must be at least six feet four inches. In rooms with sloped ceilings (e.g., finished attics, bonus rooms, etc.) you may also include as *living area* the portion of the room with a ceiling height of at least five feet if at least one-half of the finished area of the room has a ceiling height of at least seven feet; and

3. Directly accessible from other living area (through a door or by a heated hallway or permanent stairs).

Determining whether an area is considered *living area* can sometimes be confusing. Finished rooms used for general living (living room, dining room, kitchen, den, bedrooms, etc.) are normally included in *living area*. For other areas in the dwelling, the determination may not be so easy. For example, the following areas are considered *living area* if they meet the criteria (i.e., heated, finished, directly accessible from *living area*):

- **Attic** - but note in the listing data that the space is located in an attic (Figure #2). If the ceiling is sloped, remember to apply the “ceiling height” criteria.
- **Basement (or “Below-Grade”)** - but note in the listing data that the space is located in a basement or “below-grade” (Figure #1). For reporting purposes, a “basement” is defined as an area below the entry level of the dwelling which is accessible by a **full** flight of permanent internal stairs and has earth adjacent to some portion of at least one wall above the floor level. A full flight of permanent stairs is a flight of stairs connecting two main floors where the ceiling height for the lower level is at least seven (7) feet, except where ductwork provides clearance of at least 6’4”. [See Illustration in Figure #1, page 8.] Crawlspace areas are not included in basement areas, as a crawlspace is typically accessed from the outside of the dwelling.
- **Bay Window** - if it has a floor, a ceiling height of at least seven (7) feet, and otherwise meets the criteria for living area (Figure #2).

- **Bonus Room - (e.g., finished room over garage) (Figure #3)**. If the ceiling is sloped, remember to apply the “ceiling height” criteria.
- **Breezeway (if enclosed)**.
- **Chimney** - if the chimney base is inside *living area*. If the chimney base is outside the *living area* but the hearth is in the *living area*, include the hearth in the *living area* but not the chimney base (Figure #1).
- **Closets** - if they are a functional part of the *living area*.
- **Dormers** - (Figure #6).
- **Furnace (Mechanical) Room** - Also, to avoid excessive detail, if the furnace, water heater, etc. is located in a small closet in the *living area*, include it in *living area* even if it does not otherwise meet other *living area* criteria (Figure #4).
- **Hallways** - if they are a functional part of the *living area*.
- **Laundry Room/Area** - (Figure #6).
- **Office** (Figure #1).
- **Stairs (permanent)** - that meet the criteria and connect to *living area* (Figures #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6). Include the stairway with the level from which it descends, **not to exceed the area of the opening in the floor**. If the opening for the stairway exceeds the length and width of the stairway, deduct the excess open space from the upper-level area. Include the space beneath the stairway as part of the lower level area, regardless of its ceiling height (Figure #2). Drop-down or ladder stairs are not permanent stairs.
- **Storage Room** - (Figure #6).

Other Area

Note in the listing data and also advise purchasers of any space that does not meet the criteria for *living area*, but which contributes to the purchase price of the dwelling; for example, unfinished basements and unfinished attics (with permanent stairs), unfinished bonus rooms, and other unfinished rooms. Decks,

balconies, porches, garages, and carports should not be included in any category of finished or unfinished area.

Helpful Hints

Concealed in the walls of nearly all residential construction are pipes, ducts, chases, returns, etc. necessary to support the dwelling's mechanical systems. Although they may occupy *living area*, to avoid excessive detail, do **not** deduct the space from the *living area*.

When measuring and reporting the *living area* of a dwelling, be alert to any remodeling, room additions (e.g., an enclosed porch), or other structural modifications to assure the space meets all *living area* criteria. **Pay particular attention to the heating criteria because the heating system for the original structure may not be adequate for the increased square footage.** Although agents are not required to determine the adequacy of heating systems, they should at least note whether there are heat vents, radiators, or other heat outlets in the room before deciding whether to include space as *living area*.

The square footage of unpermitted additions or improvements may be included in the living area, but it **must be separately identified and disclosed** when making representations concerning square footage. Agents must inform prospective purchasers if there is no permit for the addition.

When an area that is not part of the *living area* (e.g., a garage) shares a common wall with the *living area*, treat the common wall as the exterior wall for the *living area*; therefore, the measurements for the *living area* will include the thickness of the common wall, and the measurements for the other area will not.

Interior space that is open from the floor of one level to the ceiling of the next higher level (such as a two-story foyer) is included in the square footage for the lower level only. However, any area occupied by interior balconies, lofts, etc., on the upper level, or by permanent stairs that extend to the upper level, is included in the square footage for the upper level.

Measuring

The amount of living area and “other area” in dwellings

is based upon exterior measurements, except for condominiums, which use interior measurements. A one-hundred-foot-long tape measure is recommended for exterior measurements, and a thirty-foot retractable tape for measuring interior and hard-to-reach spaces.

A tape measure that indicates linear footage in “tenths of a foot” will greatly simplify your calculations. For best results, take a partner to assist you in measuring. If you do not have someone to assist you, a screwdriver or other sharp tool can be used to secure the tape measure to the ground at either end.

Agents may have access to a variety of measuring tools, including various technologies. It is the agent's choice as to which measuring device(s) they elect to use. Regardless of the device(s) used, agents remain responsible for the accuracy of the square footage reported in all marketing materials.

Begin at one corner of the dwelling and measure each exterior wall. Double-check each measurement. **Round off your measurements to the nearest inch** (or tenth-of-a-foot if your tape indicates footage in that manner). Sketch the structure. Record each measurement as you go on your sketch. A clipboard and graph paper help you to sketch the dwelling and record the measurements. You may also use electronic devices to create sketches. Be sure to print the electronic sketches for your records or save them in a format that allows you to retrieve and print them for at least three years. Measure the *living area* and “other area,” but identify them separately on your sketch. Look for offsets (portions of walls that “jut out”) and adjust for any “overlap” of exterior walls or “overhang” in upper levels (Figure #5).

When you cannot measure an exterior surface (such as in the case of attics and below-grade areas), measure the perimeter walls of the area from the inside of the dwelling. Remember to add **six inches** for each exterior wall and interior wall that you encounter in order to arrive at the exterior dimensions (Figure #2, #3, #4, #6).

Measure all sides of the dwelling, ensuring that the lengths of the front and rear sides are equal and that the ends, are equal. Then, inspect the interior to identify spaces which cannot be included in *living area*. You may also find it helpful to take several photographs of the dwelling for later use when you return to your office.

Calculating Square Footage

From your sketch of the dwelling, identify and separate living area from “other area.” If your measurements are in inches (rather than tenths-of-a-foot), convert your figures to a decimal as follows:

1" = .10 ft.	7" = .60 ft.
2" = .20 ft.	8" = .70 ft.
3" = .25 ft.	9" = .75 ft.
4" = .30 ft.	10" = .80 ft.
5" = .40 ft.	11" = .90 ft.
6" = .50 ft.	12" = 1.00 ft.

Calculate the *living area* (and other areas) by multiplying the length times the width of each rectangular space. Add your subtotals and round the total square footage to the nearest square foot. Double-check your calculations. When in doubt, re-check them and, if necessary, re-measure the house.

Attached Dwellings

If there is a common wall (i.e., a wall separating the subject dwelling from an adjacent one), measure to the inside surface of the wall and add **six inches**.

In the case of a condominium, measure from inside surface to inside surface of the exterior walls. Do not include the thickness of exterior or common walls. Do not include any “common areas” (exterior hallways, stairways, etc.) in your calculations.

Proposed Construction

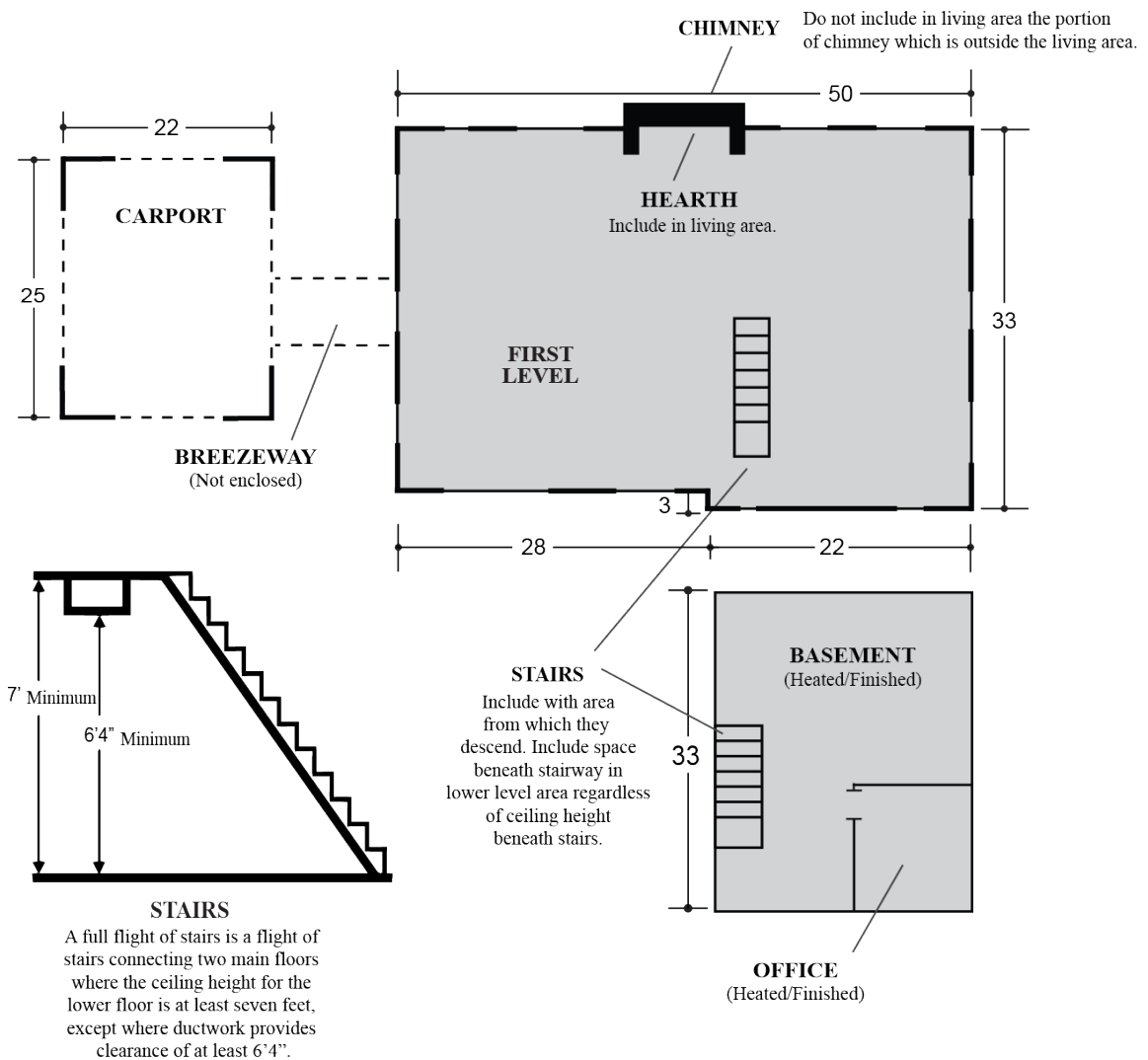
For proposed construction, your square footage calculations will be based upon dimensions described in blueprints and building plans. Agents should not assume the square footage represented by the architect/builder is correct. An agent should calculate the square footage independently. When

reporting the projected square footage, be sure to disclose that you calculated it based upon plan dimensions. The square footage may differ in the completed dwelling. Once the dwelling is completed, do not rely on any measurements printed on the plans. The agent should measure and report the actual square footage of the completed dwelling.

Illustrations

For assistance with calculating and reporting the area of dwellings, refer to the following illustrations showing the *living area* shaded. In reviewing the illustrations, assume that for those dwellings with basements, attics, etc., the exterior measurements shown have been derived from interior measurements taking into account walls and partitions (*see page #6 & #7*). Where there is a common wall between *living area* and other area (*see page #6 & #7*), the measurements shown in the illustrations include the thickness of the common wall in *living area* except in the condominium example, where wall thickness is not included.

ONE STORY WITH BASEMENT AND CARPORT (Figure 1)



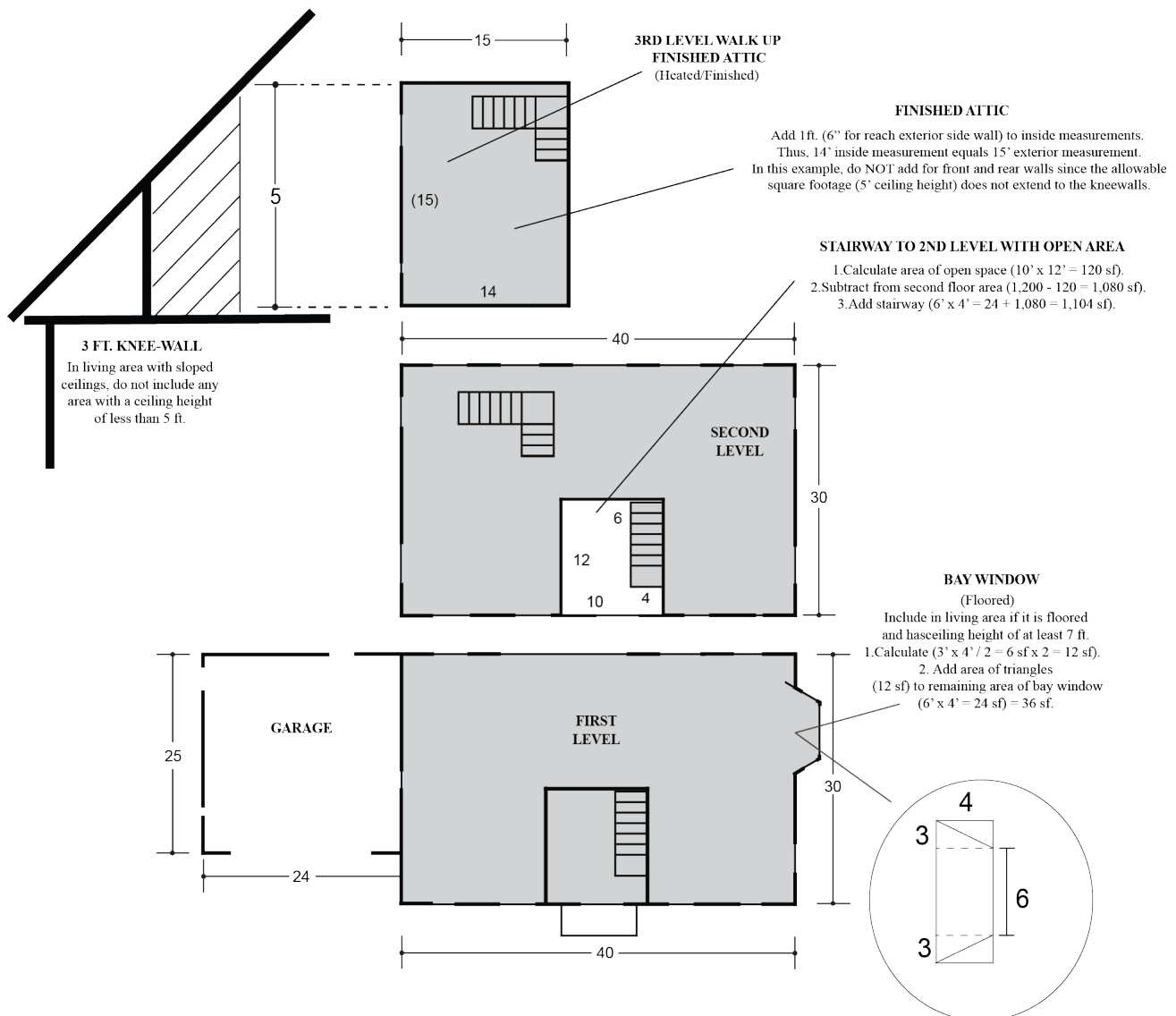
ONE STORY WITH BASEMENT AND CARPORT WORKSHEET

LIVING AREA			
AREA	DIMENSIONS	SUBTOTAL	TOTAL
1ST LEVEL	50 X 30	1,500	
	3 X 22	+ 66	
BASEMENT	22 X 33	726	
TOTAL			2,292

DIMENSIONS OF CARPORTS, DECKS, STORAGE SHEDS, GARAGES, ETC.,
CAN BE INCLUDED IN MLS AND OTHER ADVERTISING, BUT CANNOT BE INCLUDED IN THE
LIVING AREA.

REPORT: ONE-STORY DETACHED HOUSE WITH 2,292 SQUARE FEET OF LIVING AREA OF WHICH
726 SQUARE FEET ARE IN A FINISHED BASEMENT.

TWO STORY WITH OPEN FOYER AND WALK-UP FINISHED ATTIC (Figure 2)



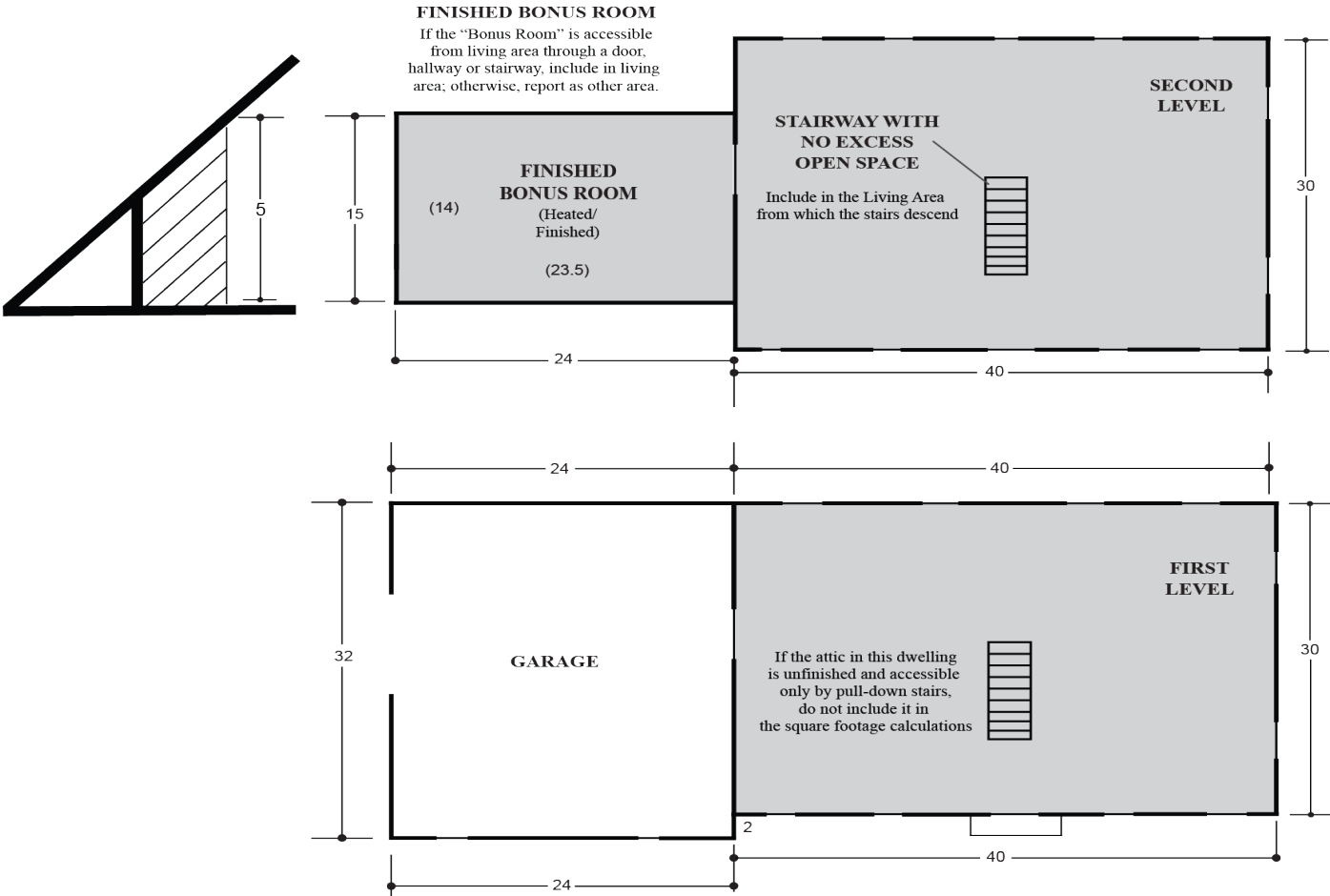
TWO STORY WITH OPEN FOYER AND WALK-UP FINISHED ATTIC WORKSHEET

LIVING AREA			
AREA	DIMENSIONS	SUBTOTAL	TOTAL
1ST LEVEL	40 X 30	1,200	
BAY WINDOW	SEE BAY WINDOW NOTE	+ 36	
2nd LEVEL	40 X 30	1,200	
OPENING AROUND STAIRS	-10 X 12	-120	
	4 X 6	+24	
FIN. ATTIC	15 X 15	225	
TOTAL			2,565

DIMENSIONS OF CARPORTS, DECKS, STORAGE SHEDS, GARAGES, ETC.,
CAN BE INCLUDED IN MLS AND OTHER ADVERTISING, BUT CANNOT BE INCLUDED IN THE
LIVING AREA.

REPORT: TWO-STORY DETACHED HOUSE WITH 2,565 SQUARE FEET OF LIVING AREA OF WHICH
225 SQUARE FEET ARE IN A FINISHED ATTIC.

TWO STORY WITH “FINISHED BONUS ROOM” OVER GARAGE
(Figure 3)



TWO STORY WITH “BONUS ROOM” OVER GARAGE WORKSHEET

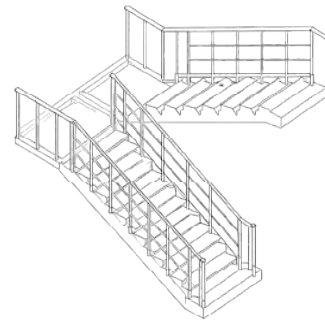
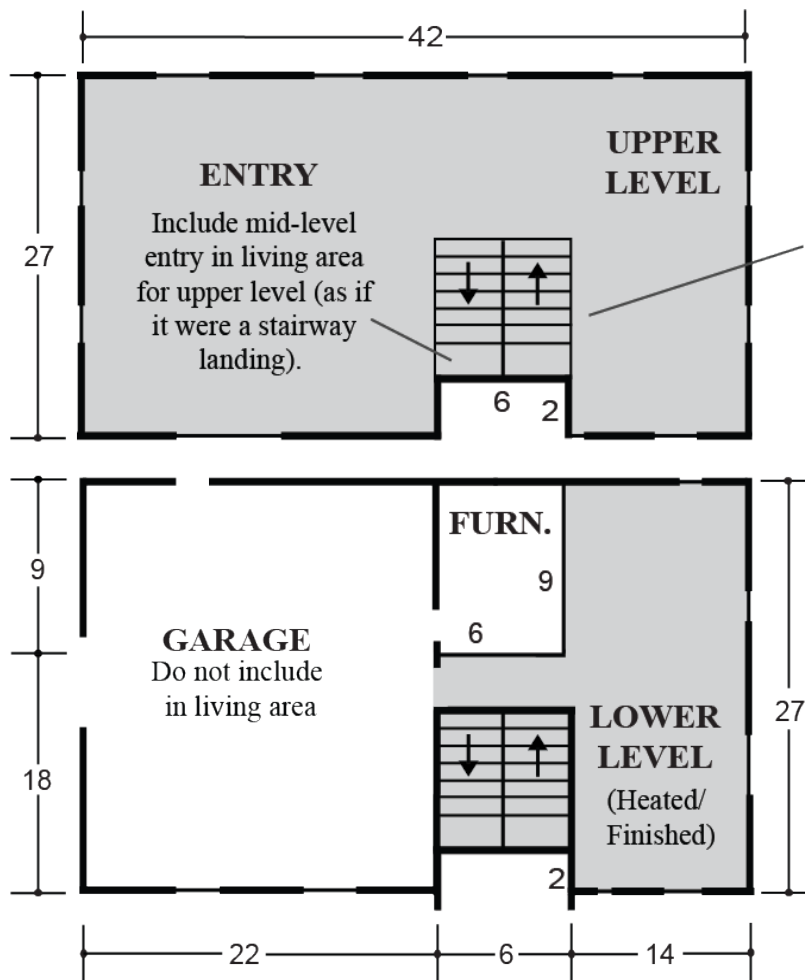
LIVING AREA			
AREA	DIMENSIONS	SUBTOTAL	TOTAL
1ST LEVEL	40 X 30	1,200	
2nd LEVEL	40 X 30	1,200	
FINISHED BONUS ROOM	15 X 24	360	
TOTAL			2,760

DIMENSIONS OF CARPORTS, DECKS, STORAGE SHEDS, GARAGES, ETC.,
CAN BE INCLUDED IN MLS AND OTHER ADVERTISING, BUT CANNOT BE INCLUDED IN THE
LIVING AREA.

REPORT: TWO-STORY DETACHED HOUSE WITH 2,760 SQUARE FEET OF LIVING AREA OF WHICH
360 SQUARE FEET ARE IN A “ FINISHED BONUS ROOM” OVER THE GARAGE.

SPLIT FOYER WITH BUILT-IN GARAGE

(Figure 4)



FURNANCE ROOM

(Unfinished)
Do not include in living area unless it is heated, finished, and accessible from living area. If furnance is located in a closet in a living area, include in living area.

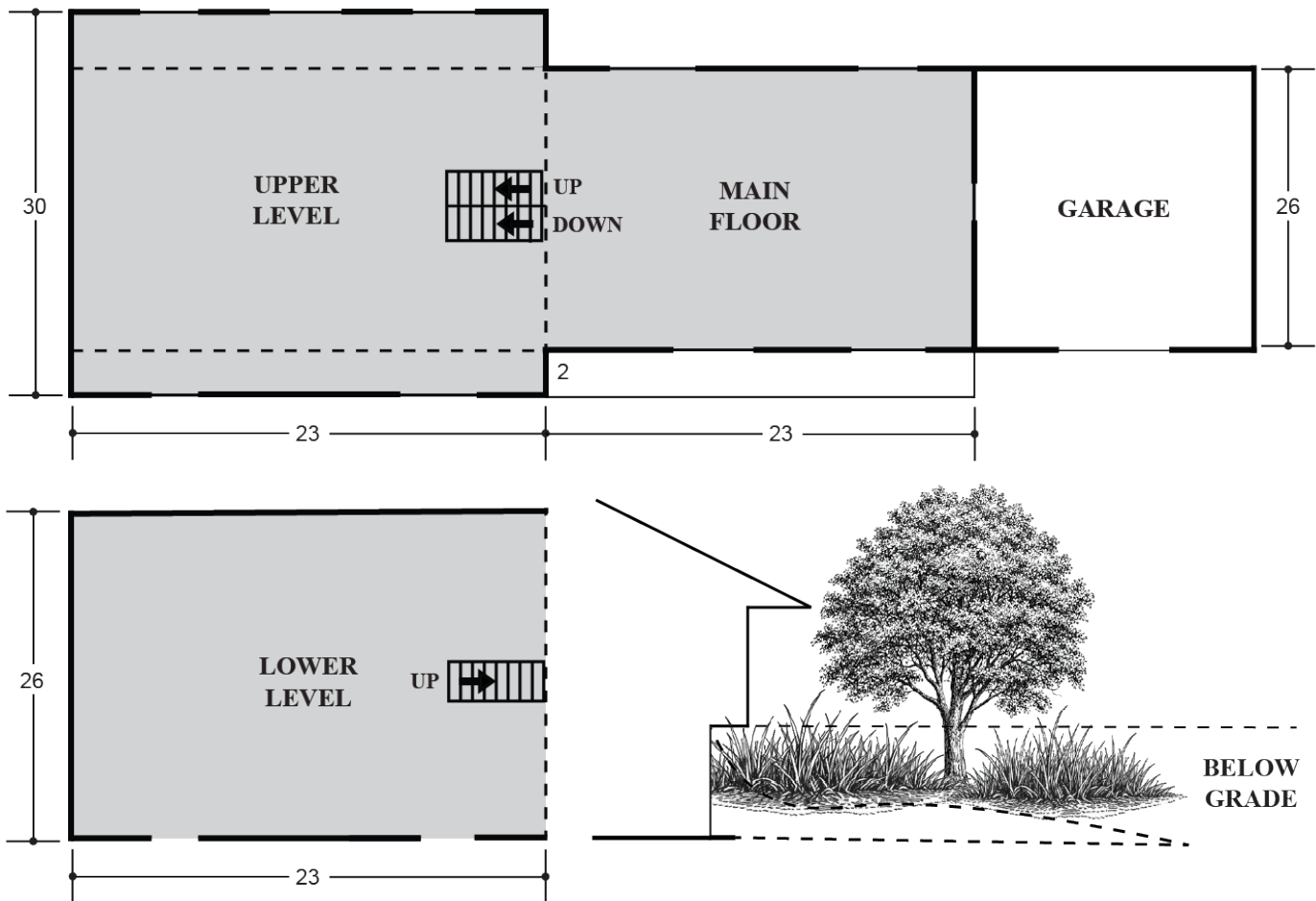
SPLIT FOYER WITH BUILT-IN GARAGE WORKSHEET

LIVING AREA			
AREA	DIMENSIONS	SUBTOTAL	TOTAL
UPPER LEVEL	27 X 42	1,134	
OPEN AREA ABOVE ENTRY	-6 X 2	-12	
LOWER LEVEL	14 X 27	378	
ENTRY LEVEL	16 X 6	96	
TOTAL			1,596
OTHER AREA			
AREA	DIMENSIONS	SUBTOTAL	TOTAL
FURANCE ROOM	9 X 6		54

DIMENSIONS OF CARPORTS, DECKS, STORAGE SHEDS, GARAGES, ETC.,
CAN BE INCLUDED IN MLS AND OTHER ADVERTISING, BUT CANNOT BE INCLUDED IN THE
LIVING AREA.

REPORT: SPLIT-FOYER WITH BUILT-IN GARAGE DETACHED HOUSE WITH 1,596 SQUARE FEET
OF LIVING AREA AND 54-SQUARE-FOOT UNFINISHED FURNANCE ROOM.

SPLIT LEVEL WITH OVERHANG
(Figure 5)



SPLIT LEVEL WITH OVERHANG WORKSHEET

LIVING AREA			
AREA	DIMENSIONS	SUBTOTAL	TOTAL
MAIN LEVEL	23 X 26	598	
LOWER LEVEL	23 X 26	598	
UPPER LEVEL	23 X 30	690	
TOTAL			1,886

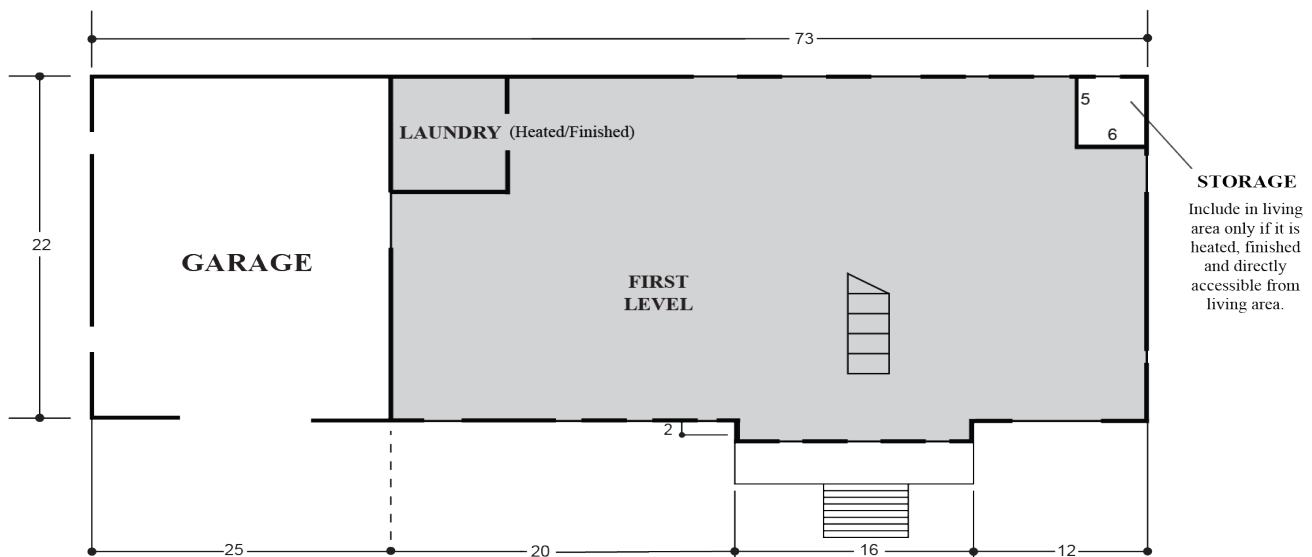
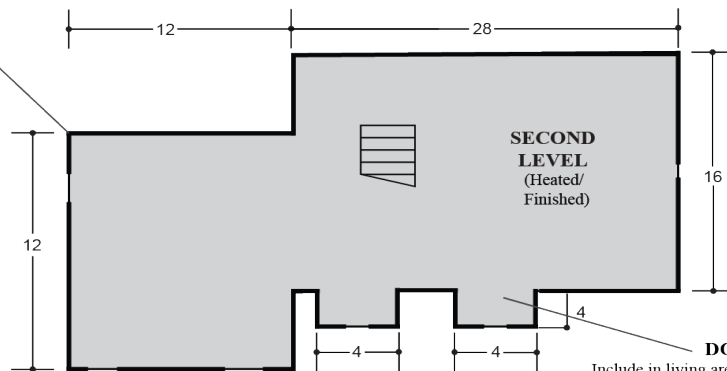
DIMENSIONS OF CARPORTS, DECKS, STORAGE SHEDS, GARAGES, ETC.,
CAN BE INCLUDED IN MLS AND OTHER ADVERTISING, BUT CANNOT BE INCLUDED IN THE
LIVING AREA

REPORT: SPLIT-LEVEL DETACHED HOUSE WITH 1,886 SQUARE FEET OF TOTAL LIVING AREA.

ONE AND ONE-HALF STORY (Figure 6)



Exterior measurement
shown include 6"
for each exterior wall.



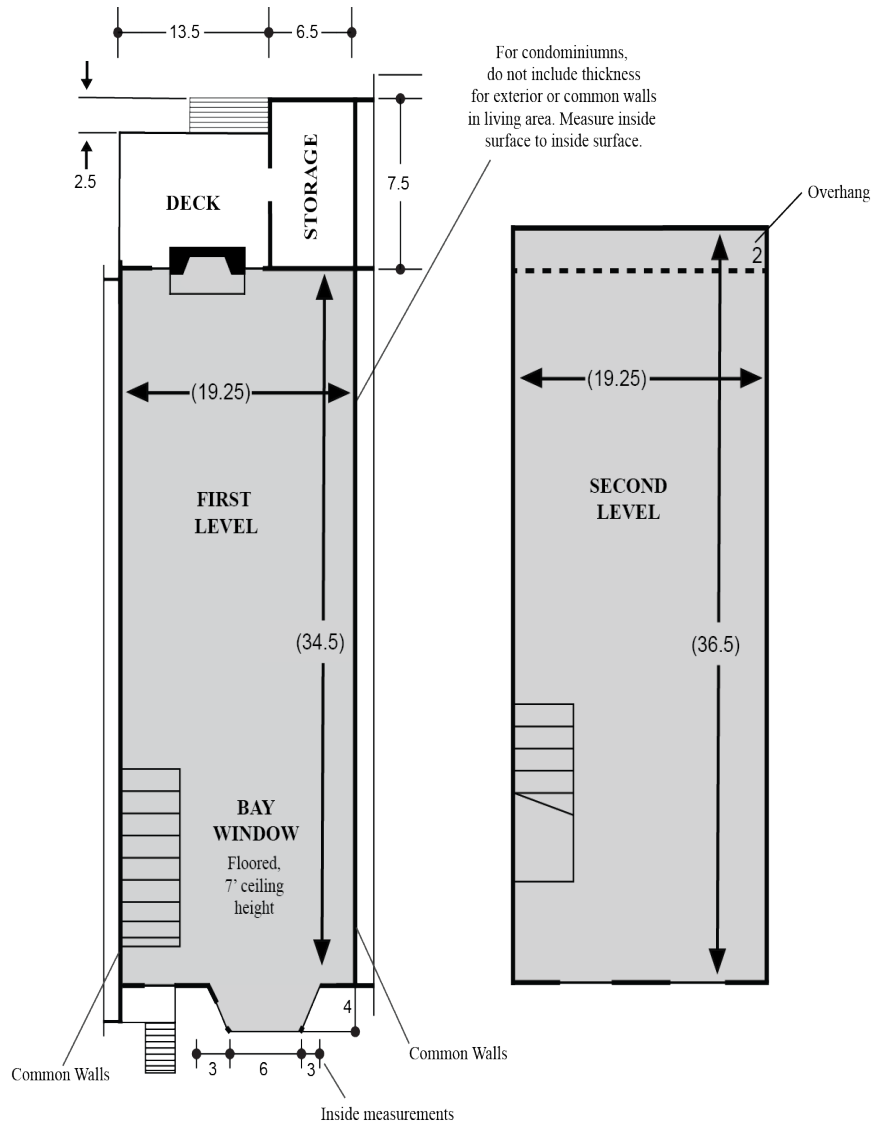
ONE AND ONE-HALF STORY WORKSHEET

LIVING AREA			
AREA	DIMENSIONS	SUBTOTAL	TOTAL
1ST LEVEL	48 X 22	1,056	
	16 X 2	+32	
STORAGE ROOM	-5 X 6	-30	
2ND LEVEL	16 X 28	448	
DORMER	4 X 4	+16	
DORMER	4 X 4	+16	
	12 X 12	+144	
TOTAL			1,682
OTHER AREA			
AREA	DIMENSIONS	SUBTOTAL	TOTAL
STORAGE	5 X 6		30

DIMENSIONS OF CARPORTS, DECKS, STORAGE SHEDS, GARAGES, ETC.,
CAN BE INCLUDED IN MLS AND OTHER ADVERTISING, BUT CANNOT BE INCLUDED IN THE
LIVING AREA.

REPORT: ONE AND ONE-HALF STORY DETACHED HOUSE WITH 1,682 SQUARE FEET OF LIVING
AREA AND A 30-SQUARE-FOOT UNFINISHED STORAGE ROOM.

CONDOMINIUM (Figure 7)



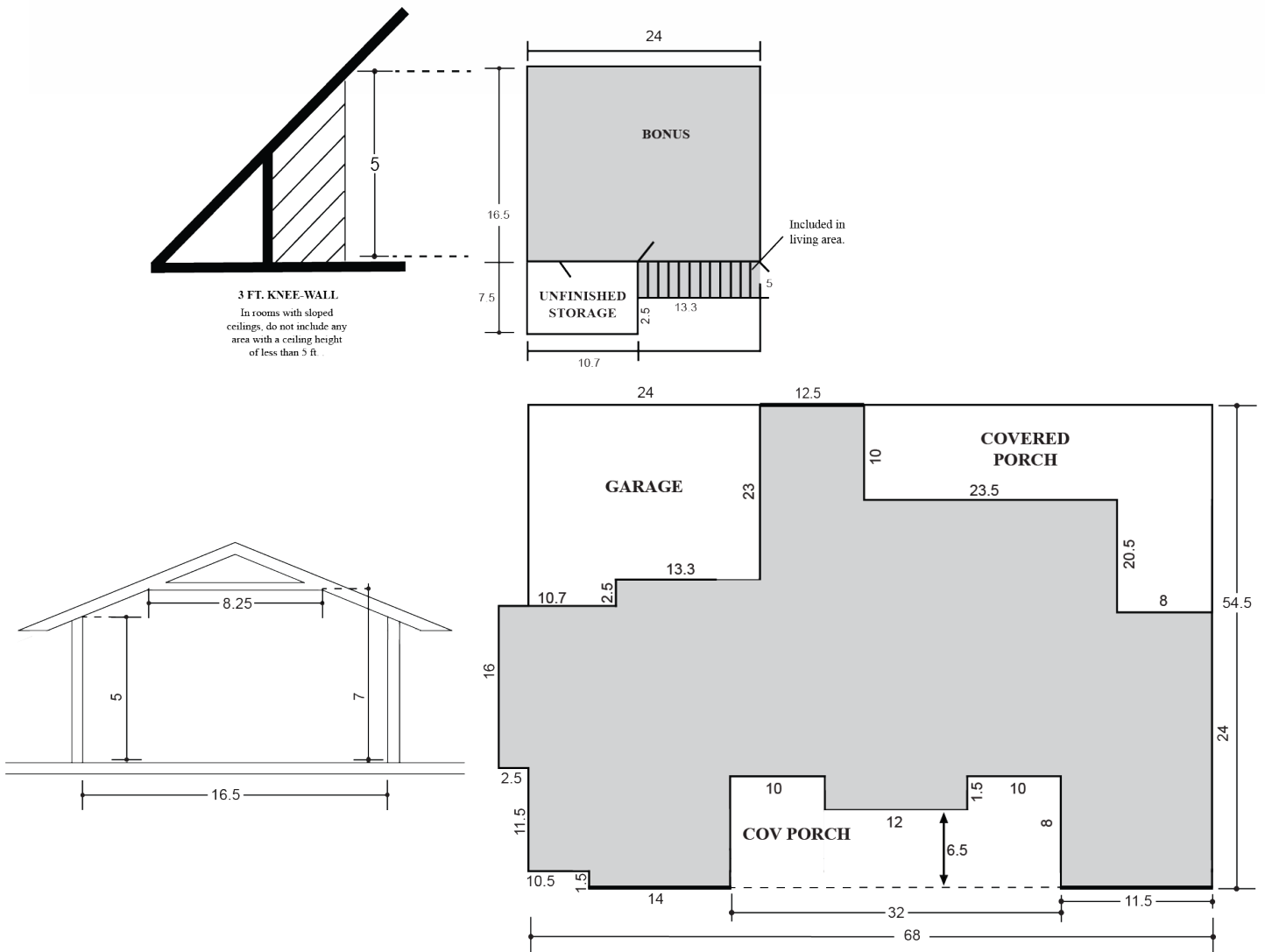
CONDOMINIUM WORKSHEET

LIVING AREA			
AREA	DIMENSIONS	SUBTOTAL	TOTAL
1ST LEVEL	34.5 X 19.25	664.1	
BAY WINDOW	.5 (3 X 4) + .5(3 X 4) + (6 X 4)	36	
2ND LEVEL	36.5 X 19.25	702.6	
TOTAL			1,403
OTHER AREA			
AREA	DIMENSIONS	SUBTOTAL	TOTAL
STORAGE	7.5 X 6.5	48.7	49

DIMENSIONS OF CARPORTS, DECKS, STORAGE SHEDS, GARAGES, ETC.,
CAN BE INCLUDED IN MLS AND OTHER ADVERTISING, BUT CANNOT BE INCLUDED IN THE
LIVING AREA.

REPORT: TWO-STORY CONDOMINIUM WITH 1,403 SQUARE FEET OF LIVING AREA, A 7.5' X 6.5'
UNFINISHED STORAGE ROOM, AND A 13.5' X 5' DECK.

TRANSITIONAL DESIGN WITH BONUS ROOM OVER GARAGE (Figure 8)



TRANSITIONAL DESIGN WITH BONUS ROOM OVER GARAGE WORKSHEET

LIVING AREA			
AREA	DIMENSIONS	SUBTOTAL	TOTAL
FIRST LEVEL	68 X 54.5	3,706	
	10 X 23.5	-235	
	8 X 30.5	-244	
	8 X 32	-256	
	1.5 X 12	+18	
	1.5 X 10.5	-15.75	
	2.5 X 16	+40	
	23 X 24	-552	
	2.5 X 10.7	-26.75	
BONUS	16.5 X 24	396	
	5 X 13.3	66.75	
TOTAL			2,897
OTHER AREA			
AREA	DIMENSIONS	SUBTOTAL	TOTAL
UNFINISHED STORAGE	7.5 X 10.7	80.25	80

DIMENSIONS OF CARPORTS, DECKS, STORAGE SHEDS, GARAGES, ETC., CAN BE INCLUDED IN MLS AND OTHER ADVERTISING, BUT CANNOT BE INCLUDED IN THE LIVING AREA.

REPORT: TRANSITIONAL DESIGN WITH BONUS ROOM OVER GARAGE WITH 2,897 SQUARE FEET OF LIVING AREA, AND A 7.5' X 10.7 UNFINISHED STORAGE ROOM.

[illegible]

[illegible]



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