TECHNICAL BULLETIN

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Source Document: 19 NYCRR 1220, Residential Code of New York State (RCNYS)

Topic: Fire separation distance for two buildings on the same lot

This document provides clarification on fire separation distance to a lot line and to other buildings on the lot. Residential Code of New York State (RCNYS) Section R302.1 requires exterior walls that have a fire separation distance of less than 3 feet to have at least a 1-hour fire-resistance rating and no openings. The term “fire separation distance” is defined in Section R202 as:

...the distance measured from the building face to the closest interior lot line, to the centerline of a street, alley or public way, or to an imaginary line between two buildings on the property.

Since Section 302.1 establishes the fire separation distance as 3 feet, and there is normally no lot line between a dwelling and an accessory structure, such as a detached garage or shed, the distance to an imaginary line would have to be 3 feet from each wall (6 feet total) for nonrated wall construction to be permitted for the dwelling and the accessory structure.

Connecting a garage and breezeway with any manor of enclosure would create a single building. Since the fire separation distance only applies to separate buildings, it would not apply to a fully or partially enclosed breezeway. However, in accordance with Section R309.2, the garage and residence must be separated horizontally and vertically, as applicable, with rated construction, or appropriately attached type-x gypsum board. Care must be taken to be sure that the prescribed fire separation between the residence and garage is not compromised with the breezeway roof construction.

Ronald E. Piester, AIA, Director
Division of Code Enforcement and Administration