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Construction Terminology

About this publication

The following glossary refers to construction terminology. However, this is not a complete listing for all building terms. Furthermore, the definitions and abbreviations reflect local usage as applied to building construction. Use the glossary only as a guide to better identify and understand the items.

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The information in this publication is current as of the date of the publication. The contents of this publication are informational only and do not take the place of statutes, rules, or court decisions. For many topics covered in this publication, we have provided a reference to the Illinois Property Tax Code for further clarification or more detail at 35 ILCS 200/1 *et seq.*

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Terms

Acoustical plaster - Sound absorbing plaster applied to walls and ceilings applied either by pneumatic spray or manual application.

Acoustical tile - Square or rectangular ceiling and wall covering units composed of material with an inherent property to absorb sound; usually made up of mineral fiber or insulated metal material.

Actual age - Number of years elapsed since an original structure was built.

Adverse land use - An incompatible land use that detrimentally affects other properties in its vicinity (i.e., an industrial land use in a residential neighborhood).

Anodized aluminum - Aluminum that has had a hard, corrosion resistant, oxide film applied to it by an electrochemical process. A color anodizing process may be used to produce a number of colored finishes.

Ashlar stone - Rectangular or square shaped stone.

Attic - Space between the top of the ceiling joists and the roof.

Backfill - Material used to refill an excavation.

Backup - The inner, load-bearing or structural portion of a masonry wall, usually finished with face brick, stone, stucco, or other decorative or protective veneer.

Baseboard heating - A system in which the heating element, usually an electric resistance or circulating hot water, is located at the base of an outside wall.

Base plate - Horizontal member at the bottom of a column or post which transmits the column load to its foundation.

Batten - Narrow strip of wood used to cover the joints of parallel boards or plywood when used as siding. The resultant pattern is referred to as a board and batten.

Beam - Principal horizontal load-carrying structural timber, concrete, or steel member of a building.

Bearing wall - Wall that supports the floors, roof or any vertical load in a building in addition to its own weight.

Bench marks - Locations indicated on a durable marker by surveyors.

Beveled wood siding - Siding board of varying widths, with lower edge thicker than upper edge which is covered by lower edge of board above.

Bituminous paving - Mixture of bitumen or asphalt with graded aggregate used as a paving material for roadways and parking lots.

Board and batten - Vertical wood siding with narrow wood strips used to cover joints between boards.

Box girder - Girder having a hollow cross-section similar to that of a rectangular box.

Bridging - Bracing members between joists to keep them in place and give lateral rigidity.

BTU - British Thermal Unit. The amount of heat required to raise one pound of water one degree Fahrenheit. A common measurement of heat used to rate the capacity of building heating units.

Built-up roofing - Roof covering consisting of layers of saturated asphalt-felts cemented together with hot asphalt roofing cement.

Buttress - Masonry projection from wall to add strength.

B X wiring - Electrical wire in spiral formed flexible metal conduit; often called armored cable.

Cantilever - Beam or slab supported at one end only, or which projects beyond its support.

Casement - Window sash that opens on hinges that is fixed along either side.

Cast stone - Mixture of paste or mortar, with an aggregate of stone chips or fragments, which has the appearance of stone when cast into the desired form or structural shape.

Catch basin - In a drainage system, a chamber designed to intercept solids and prevent their entrance into the system.

Cavity wall - Masonry or concrete wall consisting of two wythes with air space between them; the inner and outer wythes are tied together with metal ties.

Cellular concrete - Construction with concrete components that have been cast with voids for sound and thermal insulation and to decrease weight.

Ceramic coating - Coating made of nonmetallic mineral such as clay. These pieces of clay are attached to walls with cement or other adhesive, creating durable, decorative and dirt-resistant surfaces.

Clear height - Distance between top of a finished floor and lowest part of ceiling or truss above.

Common brick - Local inexpensive clay brick, no uniform face or precision mold.

Common wall - Shared wall between two distinct sections of a building or buildings. Not a partition.

Concrete tilt-up panels - Method of concrete construction in which wall sections are cast horizontally at a location adjacent to their eventual position and tilted into place after removal of the molds.

Conduit - Channel or tube to convey water or other fluid, as a pipe, canal, aqueduct, or flume. A protective pipe or tube for electric wires or cables.

Coping - Top capping or covering of a wall.

Corbel - Supporting bracket of stone, brick, or wood projecting from side of wall.

Cornice - Horizontal molding along top of wall or building; ornamental.

Corrugated metal - Sheet metal that has been rolled into a parallel wave pattern for stiffness or rigidity.

Course - Continuous horizontal layer of structural units - brick, stone, slate, or shingles.

Craneway - The steel column, girder support beams and rails on which a crane travels.

Curtain wall - Non-bearing wall between columns or supports that is supported at each story.

Dead load - Weight of the structure itself plus any permanent fixed loads.

Dividing wall - Wall between units of a multi-family dwelling.

Double-glazed window - Window with two panes of glass with an air space between for increased thermal and sound insulation.

Drain tile - Tile laid with loose joints around footing to collect drainage water and carry it away from a building.

Dressed and matched - Planed, faced boards or planks with a machined groove on one edge, corresponding tongue on the other edge (D & M).

Drilled caisson - Hole drilled into the ground then filled with concrete. Depending on soil conditions, a pipe lining may be included.

Drywall - Type of interior wall surface (plasterboard, gypsum board).

Eaves - Lower edge of a roof, overhanging the side walls of a building.

Economic life - Estimated period over which it is anticipated that a property may profitably be used. The period over which a property will yield a return on and of the investment, over and above the economic rent due to land. This period can never exceed the physical life of the property and generally is shorter than physical life or endurance.

Effective age - Age in years that is indicated by the condition of a building. If a building has been maintained better than average, its effective age is less than the actual age; if there has been inadequate maintenance, it is greater. A 60-year old building may have an effective age of 20 years due to rehabilitation or modernization.

Elevation - Drawing of the front, side, or rear of a building. The height above surface of the earth or the vertical distance from a given reference point.

Epoxy type floor - Strong, hard, resistant, adhesive, resin floor covering.

Exposed aggregate - Mineral fragments or small stones imbedded in concrete in such a manner as to expose the upper surface to give a pleasing visual effect.

Face brick - Generally, a hard baked brick with either smooth or rough texture face in various colors and sizes, used to finish the exterior walls of a building and some interior walls.

Fascia - Flat finishing board, band, or face used in combination with moldings; also used on cornice face.

Fenestration - Design and disposition of windows or other openings in a building wall.

Fiberboard - General term referring to any of various panel products, such as particleboard, hardboard, chipboard, or other type formed by bonding wood fibers by heat and pressure.

Fill - Material, usually earth, sand or gravel, used to raise the ground level up to a desired grade.

Fireproofing - Use of noncombustible materials to protect structural components so that the building can withstand a complete burnout of contents without losing structural stability.

Fire wall - Wall with qualities of fire-resistance and structural stability that subdivides a building into areas to control the spread of fire.

Fluorescent light - Low-pressure mercury electric discharge in which a phosphor coating on the inside of a tube transforms some of the ultraviolet energy generated by the discharge into invisible light.

Footing - Wide projecting base of a foundation, pier, or column that transmits the building load to the ground.

Foundation wall - Wall below the floor level and usually below or partly below grade providing support for the exterior perimeter wall or other structural parts of a building.

Framing - Wood, steel, or concrete load-bearing skeleton of a structure.

Furring - Strips of wood or metal applied to a wall or other surface to make it level, to form an air space, or to provide fastening surface for a finish covering.

Galvanize - Process of protectively coating iron or steel with zinc, either by immersion or electrolyte.

Gambrel roof - Roof whose slope on each side is interrupted by an obtuse angle that forms two pitches on each side, the lower slope being steeper than the upper (red barn roof).

Girder - Long, heavy beam spanning from one foundation wall to the other. The girder may be supported at intervals by bearing posts on foundation piers.

Girt - Horizontal secondary framing member extending between columns or studs; stiffens frame, provides support for siding or sheathing.

Grade - Indicates plane of ground surface; also denotes established street and sidewalk planes.

Grade beam - Concrete beam laid at ground level on piers rather than on foundation wall and footing.

Granolithic topping - Finishing material composed of concrete and pea gravel.

Gravel stop - Ridge on perimeter of roof to retain gravel.

Grease interceptor - Receptacle installed to prevent oil, grease, sand, or the materials from depositing into a drainage system.

Ground area - Area computed from exterior dimensions of ground floor.

Gunite - Concrete blown into place by compressed air.

Gypsum - Common mineral, hydrated calcium sulphate, white in color, soft, and easily crumbled.

Gypsum board (also called drywall) - Prefabricated sheet of paper-covered gypsum, used as plaster substitute; allows paint, texture, or wallpaper finishing.

H column - Structural member of rolled steel whose cross section resembles the capital letter “H” and is cast in a concrete column.

Hardboard - Boards formed by combining shredded wood chips and glue with pressure.

Header - In masonry, a brick or building stone laid across the thickness of a wall with one end toward the face of the wall. In carpentry, a wood beam set at right angles to joists to provide a seat or support; a wood lintel.

Heat pump - Refrigeration unit with a reversible cycle so that it may function to cool the building or be reversed and heat the building.

Homogeneous - In real estate, a term used to describe an area or neighborhood in which the property types and uses are similar and harmonious and the inhabitants have similar cultural, social, and economic backgrounds.

Incandescent light - Electric discharge light created by heating a tungsten filament until light is produced.

Inner wall - Load-bearing wall dividing areas within a building.

Jalousie window - Window having stationary or adjustable slats angled so as to permit ventilation while simultaneously preventing the entrance of rain.

Jib crane - Crane having a swinging hoisting arm with a cable pulley at its end, as opposed to a travelling overhead crane, which does not.

Joist - One of a series of parallel beams to support floor and ceiling loads, supported in turn by larger beams, girders, or bearing walls. Members supporting roofs with slopes, not exceeding 3 feet of rise in 12 feet of run, are roof joists (compare to rafters).

Lap siding - Board of varying widths with lower edge that is covered by lower edge of board above (also beveled siding).

Lath - Building material of wood, metal, or gypsum on which a plaster cover is spread.

Lattice - Openwork panel of crossed strips, rods, or bars of wood or metal used as a screen.

Light well - Open area to provide light and air within building or around basement window subsurface.

Linoleum - Inexpensive composition material made up of solidified linseed oils, gums, cork dust, and pigments, laid on burlap as a backing and possesses a low resistance to staining, dents, and abrasions.

Lintel - Horizontal structural member spanning a door, window, or opening to support weight of above walls.

Live load - Any moving or variable load applied to a structure, expressed in pounds per square foot of floor and roof areas for various types of building occupancy (e.g., weight of people, merchandise, or stock on a floor; snow load or wind pressure on a roof).

Load-bearing (L/B) wall - Weight of wall and portion of floor/roof load are supported by the wall, remainder is supported by the interior framing.

Mansard roof - Roof type with two slopes (pitches) on each of four sides; lower slopes are steeper than upper.

Mercury vapor light - Electric discharge light that produces a blue-white light by creating an arc in mercury vapor enclosed in a globe or tube. These lamps are classified as either low-pressure or high-pressure.

Metal lath - Metal grill-like material to form a base for plaster.

Mezzanine - Intermediary floor having less area than the regular floors.

Mill type construction - Type of building construction using a heavy timber frame of bearing wall supports, floor posts and beams, and laminated wood floor.

Monitor - Raised structure on a roof having windows or louvers for ventilating or lighting the building, as a factory or warehouse.

Mud sill foundation - Foundation constructed of heavy wood timbers laid on the ground.

Non-bearing wall - Wall that supports only its own weight; also a curtain wall.

Normal life - Reasonable life expectancy of new building based on average experiences, normal wear, obsolescence; estimates derived from mortality data and study of properties operating under average conditions.

On-center - Center-to-center distance from one structural member to another; term used for spacing studs, steel columns, posts, joists, rafters, etc.

Overhang - Upper level projection of a building; extends beyond the lower structure.

Overhead door - Door constructed of a single leaf that is swung up from the ground level and assumes a horizontal position above the entrance way it serves.

Pan construction - Type of concrete floor in which pan forms are used to create intersecting ribs and resulting in a waffle-like under surface.

Panel wall - Pre-fabricated wall section erected in one piece.

Parapet - Portion of a wall that projects above the roof line.

Partition - Wall that subdivides spaces within any story of a building; usually non-load bearing.

Party wall - Wall built along the dividing line between adjoining buildings for their common use; also common wall.

Perimeter - Total length of the periphery of a given area; the distance around the outside of a building.

Pilaster - Upright column or pillar forming part of a masonry or similar exterior wall providing added strength, particularly at point of load concentration such as for a truss support.

Piling - Columns, driven below the ground area to bear the foundation of a structure when the surface soil cannot.

Pitch - Angle of a roof; expressed in inches of rise per foot of run, or by ratio of the rise to the span.

Plate glass - High quality glass of the same composition as window glass but thicker, up to 1 ¼ inches, with ground and polished faces, usually used for large areas in a single sheet.

Ply - Term indicates number of thicknesses or layers of roofing felt, veneer in plywood, or built-up materials.

Porcelain enamel - Coating of silicate glass bonded to metal by fusion.

Polystyrene - Low-cost foamed plastic weighing about one pound per cubic foot with good insulating properties and resistance to grease.

Pre-cast panels - Concrete members cast to a desired shape prior to the time that they are placed in a structure. They are attached to the structure, either by bolting or welding of the reinforcement and then grouting being laid in a bed of mortar, or by combinations of these methods.

Pre-stressed concrete - Concrete in which the reinforcing is pulled before concrete sets; then tension released after concrete sets. This gives the item more tensile strength.

Purlin - Horizontal beam in a roof structure that may rest on trusses or posts supporting the common rafters.

Radiant heat - Heating system in which heat is transmitted by radiation and convection from surfaces heated by hot water in pipes or electric wires embedded in the surfacing material.

Remaining economic life (REL) - Appraiser's projected estimate of date that a property can no longer perform economically. Also, remaining serviceable life or remaining useful economic life.

Ridge - Horizontal line where the two sloping roof surfaces meet. Also designates the highest horizontal roof member.

Rise - Distance a rafter extends in a vertical direction. Also, measurement of height of an individual step.

Riser - Vertical board closing the space between stairway treads.

Rolling door - Door constructed of a single leaf that rolls open parallel to the opening on ball-bearing rollers and a metal track.

Roll-up door - Device consisting of horizontal interlocking metal slats that ride along wall guides. When the door is opened, the slats coil around a barrel assembly located above the door.

Romex wiring - Electrical wire in flexible nonmetallic sheathing such as plastic.

Rubblework - Masonry made with irregular pieces laid without uniform courses or joints.

Sandwich panel - Core of insulation covered on both sides with such materials as concrete, metal, or asbestos.

Sash - Framework of a window that holds the glass.

Sawtooth roof - Roof with a profile similar to the teeth in a saw composed of a series of single-pitch roofs, whose shorter or vertical side has windows for light and air.

Shake shingles - Wood roofing shingles with at least one surface having a split-faced grain.

Sheathing - First covering of boards, plywood, or wallboard placed over exterior wall studding or roof rafters.

Sheet rock - Trade name for drywall sheets with a gypsum base and paper covering.

Sleeper - Timber laid horizontally, as on the ground, to support something above it. A strip of wood anchored to a concrete floor or nailed to subflooring and to which the finished floor is nailed.

Sodium light - Orange-yellow light produced from a lowpressure sodium vapor lamp.

Span - Horizontal clear distance between supports, as those of a bridge, or between columns of a structure.

Split-face block - Concrete masonry block with one or more faces produced by purposeful fracturing of the block to provide architectural effects in masonry wall construction.

Structural glass - Rectangular panels of glass used as finish for walls.

Stucco - Cement plaster used for coating exterior wall and other exterior surfaces of buildings.

Stud - Inner parallel vertical wood or steel framing of walls and partitions.

Subfloor - Floor laid on top of the floor joists, to which the finished floor is fastened (also floor sheathing).

Tectum - Tongue and groove sheathing board with layered fiber and cement enclosing a foam core.

Terra-cotta - Units of hard, unglazed, fired clay, used for ornamental masonry.

Terrazzo - Type of venetian marble mosaic in which portland cement is used as a binding substance.

Transite - Building material made of asbestos fibers and cement under pressure.

Traveling overhead crane - Lifting machine carried on a horizontal girder, reaching between rails above each side of a workshop. It consists of a hoisting cab that can travel from end to end on the girder. The whole area between the rails can be traversed by the cab.

Truss - Structural component composed of a combination of members, such as beams, bars and ties, usually arranged in triangular units to form a rigid framework for supporting loads over a span.

Unit heater or space heater - Complete heating unit, without ducts, for heating the area in which it is located, such as a room or other part of a building less than the complete area.

Vertical lift panel door - Door constructed of panels that roll open from the ground level and assumes a horizontal position above the entrance way it serves.

Vinyl-asbestos tile - Resilient semi-flexible floor tile, composed of ground limestone, plasticizers, pigments, PVC binder, and asbestos fiber reinforcing. This product is being replaced by vinyl composition tile.

Vinyl tile - Floor tile similar to vinyl-asbestos floor tile except the asbestos has been replaced by glass fiber reinforcing.

Wainscot - Lower part of an interior wall covering that is finished with a different material than the upper part.

Wall-bearing construction - Structural system in which the floor and roof systems are carried directly by the walls rather than by a structural framing system (load bearing walls).

Yard improvement - Construction items on the building site that are not part of the main structure, such as a driveway, walks, fences, retaining walls, etc.

Abbreviations

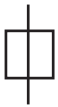

A	Attic	EFP	Enclosed frame porch	P	Paint
A/C	Air conditioning	EGI	Effective gross income	P & B	Post and beam
AEV	Agricultural economic value	EMP	Enclosed masonry porch	Pchs	Porches
Addn	Addition	Excl	Excellent	PI	Productivity index
AP	Appraiser or appraisal	FA	Forced air	Plstr	Plaster
Appr'ch	Approach	Fac	Factor	PRC	Property record card
Apt	Apartment	FF	Front foot	Pre-eng	Pre-engineered
Asmt	Assessment	FP	Fireproof or fireplace	PSF	Pounds per square foot
Assess	Assessed	FPM	Feet per minute	PSI	Pounds per square inch
Att	Attached	Frm	Frame	PSIG	Pounds per square inch gauge
Avg	Average	Frp	Fireproof	PVC	Polyvinylchloride
		Ftg	Footing		
B	Basement	Galv	Galvanized	R	Rate
B & B	Board and batten	Gar	Garage	RCN	Replacement cost new
Blk	Block	GIM	Gross income multiplier	Rein	Reinforced
BPA	Base price adjustment	GPD	Gallons per day	REL	Remaining economic life
BPH	Bushels per hour	GPH	Gallons per hour	Replc	Replacement
BR	Building residual	GPM	Gallons per minute	RFC	Reinforced concrete
Brk	Brick	GRM	Gross rent multiplier	Rnf	Reinforced
Bsmt	Basement	HC	Hollow core	SA	Supported area
BTU	British thermal unit	Hgt	Height	S/A	Supervisor of assessments
BU	Bushel	HP	Hard pan	SF	Square foot
		HVAC	Heating, ventilating, and air conditioning	SFCA	Square foot ceiling area
CB	Concrete block	I	Income	SFDA	Square foot door area
CCAO	Chief county assessment officer	Impr	Improvement	SFFA	Square foot floor area
CDU	Condition, desirability, utility	Ind	Industrial	SFGA	Square foot ground area
CF	Cubic foot	Infl	Influence	SFIA	Square foot insulation area
CIP	Component-in-place	KVA	Thousand volt amperes	SFRA	Square foot roof area
Cntrl	Central	KW	Kilowatts	SFSA	Square foot service or surface area
Col	Column	L/B	Load-bearing	SFWA	Square foot wall area
Comm	Commercial or common	L:B	Land-to-building ratio	Sprd	Spread
Comp	Composition or comparable	L & B	Land and building	SS	Stainless steel
Conc	Concrete	LF	Linear foot	Stl	Steel
Cond	Condition	LR	Land residual	Sty	Story
Condo	Condominium	Metro	Metropolitan	Sz	Size
Cons't	Construction	M/S	Multi-story	TC	Tax code
Corr	Corrugated	MV	Market value	Temp	Temperature
C/P	Carport	NH	Neighborhood	U	Upper or unit
CY	Cubic yard	OC, O/C	On center	Unfin	Unfinished
DA	Door area	OD	Outside diameter	Unt	Unit
Depr	Depreciation	Ofc	Office	V	Value
Dia	Diameter	O/FP	Ordinary or fireproof	VLF	Vertical linear foot
D & M	Dressed and matched	OFFP	Open frame porch	W/	With
DW	Drywall	OH	Overhead	WB	Wall bearing
Dwg	Dwelling	OMP	Open masonry porch	WC	Water closet toilet
E/A	Effective age	Ord	Ordinary	Wd	Wood
EAV	Equalized assessed value	OC, O/C	On center	WH	Wall height
Econ	Economic	OD	Outside diameter	W/O	Without
Eff	Effective	Ofc	Office	WR	Wall ratio
Eff Per	Effective perimeter	O/FP	Ordinary or fireproof	Wrhse	Warehouse
		OFFP	Open frame porch		
		OH	Overhead		
		OMP	Open masonry porch		
		Ord	Ordinary		

Abbreviations

Land Abbreviations

Ac	Acre	SF	Square foot
175 AV	Average depth of lot 175'	Topo	Topography
CI	Corner influence	UD	Undeveloped lot
LF	Linear foot	XD	Excess depth of lot
LI	Land improvement	XF	Excess frontage
R 75'	Real lot frontage of 75'		

Symbol Explanations

<u>15,000</u>	Indicated cost in dollar amount	1S	One side
1,940	Square feet in diagram area - outside measurements	2S	Two sides
#	Number; pounds	16	Wall height ground to eave
1E	One end		Square foot
2E	Two (or both) ends	/	Per
			Diameter

For information or forms

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