

QUESTION: We need more space but have zero yard to build into. I'm thinking of building a room or two on top of our 2-car garage, which shares one wall with our 2-story house. Is there any reason that building on top of the garage would be more problematic or costly than a regular addition? Are we going to have to change the garage at all?

ANSWER: This is a common addition for creating more bedrooms, a bonus room, or a master suite without increasing the footprint of the home, according to Jim Pitzen, ALA, CR of Pitzen Design Ltd. in Brookfield.

“This option may appear to be easier and less costly because a new foundation is not needed, but depending on the existing conditions, design issues, and framing, it may be more complex and similar in cost to a first floor addition.”

Some conditions affecting the design are the existing framing and rooflines for the exterior, and the location of the staircase and second floor hallway for the interior. “Can the addition be entered from the landing of the existing staircase along the garage common wall, or does a bedroom closet need to be relocated to extend the hallway from a central staircase?” Issues beyond the footprint of the garage may impact the scope of work and budget.

Because the garage space is unconditioned, the new living space and mechanicals

(ductwork and plumbing) will require additional insulation. A chase to run mechanicals from the existing basement into the new addition could take up some space within the garage.

“Structurally, you should be able to build on the existing garage walls, but that should be verified by a professional,” he said. “You may have to replace headers at the garage overhead door, and any garage windows due to the additional load above.” Depending on the new floor framing system and layout, the garage ceiling may have to drop in areas with beams and ductwork, or all of it will drop for deeper floor trusses.

“As long as it is done correctly, creating an addition above the garage is a great way to pick up additional living space without increasing the home's footprint,” Pitzen said. He recommended investigating all of the options and details with a professional who has expertise and experience with a project of this scope and complexity. □