



## **CHANGE OF OCCUPANCY (USE)**

A change of occupancy classification or use of any building requires the approval of the Building Inspector according to the International Building Code.

In order to secure that approval, several areas of the building may need structural changes, additional fire protection, or zoning code upgrades as required by the code for the proposed occupancy. This occurs most frequently when a residence is converted to a commercial use or any other commercial use is converted to a different occupancy [[link to occupancy class table of IBC](#)].

Subject to the approval of the building inspector, the use or occupancy of existing buildings shall be permitted to be changed and the building is allowed to be occupied for purposes in other groups without conforming to all the requirements of this code for those groups, provided the new or proposed use is less hazardous, based on life and fire risk, than the existing use.

***A BUSINESS LICENSE CANNOT BE APPROVED UNTIL THIS PROCESS IS COMPLETED.***

### **PROCEDURES FOR CHANGE OF OCCUPANCY OR USE**

#### **Proponent Responsibilities:**

1. The proponent must secure the services of a person or firm familiar with the IBC, IMC, UPC, IFC, IFGC, NEC (including pertinent State amendments), and the Washington State Energy and Ventilation Codes to inspect the building and prepare plans showing compliance with current code requirements for the proposed use.
2. The proponent will apply for a change of use permit for the proposed change of use. If no construction is required for the conversion, only plans demonstrating compliance are required. If construction is required to convert the building for the proposed change of use, a complete set of construction drawings are required as well as plans demonstrating compliance with all current codes for the proposed use in the unmodified areas of the building and other items as listed on the submittal checklist.
3. Each proposed change of use is unique. The information that is provided in this handout is not exhaustive. A pre-application meeting should be scheduled with appropriate staff if a change of occupancy is desired.

#### **City Process:**

1. A permit application for a change of use will be routed to all City departments normally involved in processing permit applications. The change of use must be compatible with land use requirements of the zone in which it is located and must comply with all Building Code requirements. The City will review the request and issue a determination based on information provided.
2. The change of occupancy may be requested concurrently with a request for other improvements to the building (see reverse).
3. Appropriate permits will be issued for improvements required by the change of occupancy.
4. When all work conducted under such permits has been inspected and approved, the Building Inspector will issue a new Certificate of Occupancy for the new use.

## **Additional Information**

Buildings undergoing a change of use frequently require upgrades in the following areas:

Barrier Free Access	Minimum Sanitary Facilities
Exit Facilities (life and fire safety)	Parking Requirements
Landscaping Requirements	Signage
Fire Resistive Elements (fire and life safety)	

**Barrier Free Access:** Changes that allow access to the new use by those in wheel chairs or otherwise physically challenged is required under state and federal law. Upgrades could include ramps, wider doors, restroom upgrades, parking areas, signage.

**Minimum Sanitary Facilities:** The minimum number of sanitary facilities is determined based on the number of square feet in the occupancy. Additional restroom facilities must meet the requirements for new construction.

**Exit Facilities:** The exiting system may require upgrading to meet life safety requirements, submitted plans should clearly detail the exiting system.

**Parking Requirements:** The zoning code contains specific requirements for the amount and location of parking required for each occupancy. Paving of parking areas or adding additional parking may be required.

**Landscaping Requirements:** Required landscaping must be installed to meet the criteria established by the zoning code.

**Signage Regulation:** Review of all signage is required. Proposed signs should be submitted with the application for improvement.

**Fire Resistive Elements:** Depending on the location of the building on the site, exterior walls and opening in exterior walls *may* require fire protection that was not previously required. In addition, a fire suppression system (sprinklers) may be required or modified to fit the proposed use and a fire alarm system may also be required.

**Wastewater Discharge:** Changes to the characteristics of wastewater discharged to the system will need to be reviewed to determine the level of pretreatment or grease, oil and sand interceptors required as determined by SMC 13.08.

Please contact the Building, Planning and Public Works Department at  
(509) 427-5970 for an appointment to discuss your proposal.