

Other Agencies

There are other agencies that may have regulations affecting a building that is proposed for a change of use. This includes the local Planning and Zoning office, Development Review office, the Health Department and the Fire Department. If the project is located in the Town of Vinton that office will need to be consulted. (540-983-0601)

Owners are advised to check with each of these agencies before proceeding with their project.

Where do I find information regarding the building evaluation and change of use?

The Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code references the 2006 International Building Code. Chapter 34 of the IBC contains the information regarding code compliance for existing buildings and the methods used to evaluate a building for a change of use. The 2006 International Existing Building Code also provides an alternative for compliance. Copies of the codes are available at all local library branches or may be ordered from the International Code Council (800-786-4452).

In Roanoke County and The Town of Vinton it is our policy to provide excellent customer service. If you have any questions or need consultation, please contact the Roanoke County Building Commissioner.



ROANOKE COUNTY

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ROANOKE COUNTY REQUIREMENTS FOR CHANGE OF USE OF AN EXISTING BUILDING



This pamphlet is to provide help in explaining the necessary building code requirements that must be met when converting an existing building to a use other than that for which it was originally constructed.

What is a Change of Use?

The Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC) designates every building according to its intended use. The uses are divided into specific categories based on several factors including fire hazard, number of persons and general public safety. Therefore, a building that is considered perfectly safe as a residence may not meet the minimum safety requirements for use as a public building. This can be attributed to the higher number of persons occupying a public building as well as storage and use of materials and equipment that pose a greater risk of fire than what is normally found in a residence.

What code requirements must be met when changing the occupancy of a building?

Building codes in Virginia are not retroactive in most situations. Buildings are required to be maintained under the code that was in effect at the time of original construction. This remains true as long as the building is used for its original purpose. However, a change in the use of the building at a later time subjects the building to the requirements of the current edition of the building code. The code gives the owner several alternatives for achieving code compliance. The owner may apply the complete current code to the building just as if it were being constructed in the present day.

Alternatively, the code has a specific chapter (34) which can be used to evaluate an existing building and determine what, if any, improvements are required. The 2006 edition of the USBC also allows the owner to utilize the 2006 International Existing Building Code as another alternative. The determination of which method to use is chosen by the owner. Potential building owners are advised to seek assistance from someone familiar with the codes, such as an architect or knowledgeable contractor, to determine which approach best suits their given situation.

The building is also required to have a structural evaluation to determine if the building is structurally adequate for the proposed use. Because every building is different, it is impossible to prepare a list of required changes that would apply in all situations. The only exception to this is the requirement for access for disabled persons. All buildings or portions of buildings undergoing a change of use are required to be made accessible per current code requirements. Most buildings undergoing a change of use will require an accessible parking space, an accessible route from the parking space to the building and an accessible building entrance. Please note that compliance with local building codes does not relieve a building owner from compliance with federal accessibility regulations.

Will the building inspector visit the building and let me know what changes will be required?

Building inspectors and other code enforcement personnel may not perform design services. This is a matter of both policy and law. Design of buildings and structures is required to be performed by licensed design professionals such as

engineers and architects. State law also requires specific types of buildings to be designed by a licensed professional. You may refer to our handout on professional licensing to determine if a licensed architect or engineer is required for your particular project.

Who must perform the evaluation of the building?

The building code requires that the owner cause the building to be evaluated for both structural adequacy and code compliance. The structural evaluation must be performed by a registered professional engineer. The code compliance evaluation should also be performed by a design professional such as an engineer or architect or someone familiar with construction methods and terminology. Once these evaluations are performed, they are submitted to the building department for approval. Once approved, a building permit can be issued, allowing the work to proceed.

If no alterations are needed, is a building permit still required?

The process of changing the use of a building is considered to be an alteration. Even though no actual work may be involved, the code requires a permit to be issued to allow the change of use to proceed. A new Certificate of Occupancy is also required before occupying the building under its new use. A site plan may also be required thru the Roanoke County Development Review Office (540-772-2065) or the Town of Vinton (540-983-0601) Please call to inquire.