



CONVERTING HOUSES TO NONRESIDENTIAL USES

This publication is offered as a general guideline to the permit process involved in converting single family dwellings to offices, retail stores, restaurants or other similar uses.

Actual projects may involve special circumstances not covered here; please discuss the particulars of your project with city staff.

I. PLANNING REQUIREMENTS

Your first inquiries concerning conversions of residential buildings to nonresidential uses should be directed to the Community Development Department at (253) 480-2400.

Planning staff will help you determine if the proposed use is allowed by Zoning Regulations, the required amount of on-site parking and whether landscaping or other site improvements need to be incorporated into the project. Sites with unimproved frontage (curbs, gutters, sidewalks) may be required to include those improvements into the proposal. The Planning Department also administers the City's sign regulations. Prior to issuance of a Building Permit, approval of a Land Use Permit for Site Development will be required. This may also require an environmental review, transportation concurrency review and design review.

If you plan to conduct a business from your home and the residence remains the primary use, you may be considered as a "home occupation". Home occupations do not require a full-use conversion process; please contact Planning staff for additional information.

II. BUILDING REQUIREMENTS

The Building Department (253) 480-2400 is responsible for ensuring that building projects comply with the International Building, International Existing Building and International Mechanical Codes, Uniform Plumbing Code, International Energy Conservation Commercial Code and the International A117.1 Accessibility Code.

Dwellings must usually be altered to one degree or another to make them suitable for commercial use, and permits are required. Handouts explaining the permit process are available at City Hall and on the City website.

Providing accessibility, altering floor live loads and meeting fire protection standards are the Building Code requirements responsible for the majority of necessary building alterations:

BARRIER-FREE STANDARDS

Accessible parking and accessible access to the building must be provided when converting a dwelling to another use. Usually a ramp must be constructed to provide access to the building. New or remodeled restrooms must meet Accessibility standards, as must entry doors and service counters. Information explaining Accessibility requirements is available from the Building Department.

FIRE PROTECTION STANDARDS

Exterior walls may require modifications to provide one- or two-hour fire protection, depending upon both how far the building is from property lines and its intended use. Some fire rated exterior walls require parapets and protected openings; in some circumstances openings in exterior walls must be filled in.

Food service establishments often require special commercial hoods at stoves and other kitchen equipment.

Finally, basements and attics are generally required to be separated from other building areas with one-hour construction.

FLOOR LIVE LOADS

The floor structure may need additional support or reinforcement for the increased floor loads of the intended use. Residences are typically built to a 40 psf foot live load + a 10 psf dead load whereas commercial uses require floor loads of 50 to 125 psf uniform loading.

III. HEALTH DEPT. REQUIREMENTS

Please contact Seattle - King County Department of Public Health (206) 296-9566 for an explanation of pertinent health regulations if you are contemplating serving or preparing food in a converted dwelling. For dwelling conversions involving food service to the public, Health Department approval is required prior to submitting for a Building Permit.

If the property utilizes a septic system or a well, please contact the Seattle – King County Department of Public Health (206) 296-4932 for approval. Health Department approval is required prior to submitting for a Building Permit.

If the property utilizes public utilities, please contact the following for certificates of water and/or sewer availability:

Covington Water District	(253) 631-0565
Water District #111	(253) 631-3770
Soos Creek Sewer District	(253) 630-9900

Certificates are required prior to submitting for a Building Permit.

IV. FIRE DEPARTMENT REQUIREMENTS

The Fire Department will review your application for compliance with the Uniform Fire Code. Please contact King County Fire Marshal at (253) 856-4400 to discuss Fire Code requirements that may apply to your project. At the very least you will be required to install portable fire extinguishers.

V. PUBLIC WORKS REQUIREMENTS

Community Development Engineering, (253) 480-2440, is responsible for reviewing lot drainage, access to the site from streets, and for regulating easements. When dwellings are converted to nonresidential uses the road network needs to be evaluated to ensure that adequate transportation facilities are available to serve the development concurrently with the addition of the added vehicle traffic. Transportation impact fees may be due. Public Works should be consulted to determine if changes to site drainage, driveways, easements or utility services would be necessary for your project.

VI. ELECTRICAL REQUIREMENTS

All electrical permits and approvals are obtained through the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries (206) 835-1111