



CITY OF LANCASTER  
Certified Building Department  
121 East Chestnut Street, Suite 102  
Lancaster, Ohio 43130-3825  
(740) 687-6649  
Fax (740) 681-5030  
Web site: [www.ci.lancaster.oh.us/dept/building](http://www.ci.lancaster.oh.us/dept/building)

## **CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY FAQs**

### **What is a certificate of occupancy?**

- An official document issued by the Building Department verifying that a space is in compliance with building and fire codes. It proves that the space has been inspected and is approved to be occupied by the general public.

### **Change of occupancy vs. change of use**

- When a new tenant needs a certificate of occupancy to use a space in a similar way to its previous use the new tenant will still need to apply for a *change of occupancy*. For example, if a space was previously a deli and now will be an ice cream parlor this would be considered a *change of occupancy*.  
If a space previously was used to sell electronics and now will be a restaurant this would be considered a *change of use* because the space has changed from mercantile use to an assembly use.
- Some older businesses opened prior to the establishment of the Building Department. This would be treated as a *change of occupancy*.

### **Do I need to work with an architect or engineer?**

- If you are considering a change of use it is strongly recommended that you consult an architect or engineer prior to the purchase of a building or the signing of a lease. This is because a change of use can result in required alterations. These unforeseen changes can become very costly.
- If you are applying for a change of occupancy and no structural, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, or fire safety alterations are being done you do not need to work with an architect or engineer. You do need to submit a floor plan with your application. It does not need to be perfectly to scale, but it does need to show all rooms and doors. Rooms must be labeled describing their use.
- If any alterations will be done you need to submit documentation of the proposed work sealed by an architect or engineer.
  - Exception: Discuss with the building official the types of work that do not require permits.

### **How do you get a certificate of occupancy?**

- Fill out the "Application for Minor Building Permit" form which can be picked up at the Building Department or printed from the website at:  
[www.lancaster.oh.us/DocumentCenter/HomeView/71/](http://www.lancaster.oh.us/DocumentCenter/HomeView/71/).
  - There might be questions or spaces on the application that do not apply to your project. For example, your space might not require a fire-alarm system. Write *N/A* in sections that do not apply.
  - Once you have submitted the application and floor plan to the Building Department and you have prepared the building for the inspection then you will need to call the automated phone system at **740-681-5018** and leave the required information for the inspection. Please include a phone number to confirm the inspection time with you. The Building Department will contact the Fire Department to confirm that they will be able to attend the inspection.
  - During the occupancy inspection, you will be made aware of any building and/or fire violations. If violations cannot be immediately corrected the inspectors will need to come back out. You may be charged a \$75.00 re-inspection fee. Once all violations have been corrected the Building Department will contact you to pick up your Certificate of Occupancy. It can take one to two business days to generate your certificate after your inspection passes.

### **How to prepare for your occupancy inspection**

- Make sure there is at least one fire-extinguisher present. If you are not sure where to mount it the fire inspector can make a suggestion during the inspection. If you have an older fire-extinguisher make sure it does not need servicing by checking the attached tag. You may need more than one extinguisher based on the proposed use and size of your space.
- Make sure that all of your exit signage and emergency egress lighting is working properly. Often in older buildings the batteries have died and the bulbs have burned out. You can check this by pressing the test button on the light or shutting off the power at the electrical panel. When power is cut all exit lights and emergency egress lights should automatically turn on.
- You cannot permanently use extension cords to get power from one area to another. Any power strips shall be surge protected. Your electrical panel must be labeled.
- Make sure nothing is piled up blocking exits or pathways to exits.

### **What do I need to do once I receive my certificate of occupancy?**

- The certificate lists your occupant load. You must post that occupant load in a readily visible area of any assembly space.