CODE ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

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🏛️2021Code Existing Commercial Occupancy Guideline

Supporting Safe, Compliant, and Successful Commercial Transitions

This guideline is designed to help business owners, property managers, and investors navigate the process of occupying or modifying existing commercial spaces. Whether you're opening a storefront, leasing an office, or revitalizing a service station, our goal is to ensure your transition is smooth, safe, and code compliant. Remember commercial codes change and update every three years.

🔑 1. Move-In / Move-Out – No Change of Use

Purpose: Life safety and basic compliance.

What to Expect:

- Inspections focus on **life safety** and **code compliance**.
- Key items include:
  - Clear and accessible exits
  - Exit signage and lighting
  - Electrical panel safety
  - Fire alarms (if applicable)
  - Smoke & CO detectors
  - Fire extinguishers (tested & tagged)
  - Visible address numbers (minimum 4")
  - Exterior maintenance
  - Accessibility compliance
  - Plumbing, electrical, and HVAC safety

Note: This is a general list. Additional items may be noted during inspection.

🏚️ 2. Vacant Properties – No Change of Use

What to Know:

- If the space is in good condition, inspections will follow the same criteria as above.
- If conditions are questionable, a **licensed PA Design Professional (Architect or Engineer)** may be required.
- Inspectors **cannot** provide design advice or interpret structural standards.

🔄 3. Change of Use

When the use of the space is changing (e.g., office to restaurant):

- A **Pennsylvania-licensed Design Professional** must be engaged.
- They will guide you through:
  - Code requirements
  - Layout changes
  - Occupancy classifications & Occupancy Limits

Important:
CEA and local officials **cannot** provide design or consulting services. This protects both your investment and public safety.

🛠️ 4. Alterations / Additions to Existing Buildings

Scope Includes:

- Vacant or occupied spaces
- Owner-occupied with no employees or public
- Small-scale renovations

Reminder:
The **PA Uniform Construction Code (UCC)** governs all commercial code work. There are **very few exemptions**. All alterations must meet commercial code standards, regardless of project size or budget.

⚠️ Important Reminders

🚪 Exiting Requirements Are Case-by-Case

Exit compliance is based on **existing conditions** and **intended use**. Inspectors cannot design or suggest compliant layouts.

💸 Budget & Timelines & Real Estate Closings

While we understand time and financial constraints, **code compliance cannot be waived**. Our role is to help you move forward **safely and legally**.

✅ Due Diligence is Key

Before signing a lease or purchase agreement:

- **Engage a Design Professional** or **Certified Commercial Inspector**
- Request a **walk-through** to identify potential code issues
- Allow time for permitting, inspections, and corrections based upon conditions

Why?
Most delays and complications arise when decisions are made without proper guidance. A small investment in due diligence can prevent costly setbacks.

💬 Our Commitment to You

We are here to:

- Support your business goals
- Provide clear, timely code communications
- Ensure your space is safe and compliant for EVERYONE!

Your success is important to us. Let's work together to build a thriving, safe, and vibrant community.

🏗️ Guidelines for 2021 Code Compliance Existing Commercial Plans Examination for Design Professionals & Applicants

Based on PA UCC §403.21(10) – IEBC 2021 Adoption

This guide is intended to help applicants, design professionals, and property owners prepare complete and compliant plan submissions for existing commercial buildings. Following these steps will help avoid delays and ensure a smooth review process.

✅ Required Submissions Checklist- **Declare Group Use, Type of Construction and Occupant Load.**

✅

1. 📝 **Declare Level of Alteration**
   - Clearly indicate the **intended level of alteration** on the application or sealed plans:
     - **Level 1** – Minor alterations (e.g., repairs, finishes)
     - **Level 2** – Reconfiguration of space, systems, or means of egress
     - **Level 3** – Work area exceeds 50% of the building affected area
2. 📐 **Declare Design Method**
   - Specify whether the design follows the **Prescriptive** or **Performance or Work Area Method (Chapter 6-8)**.
3. 📊 **Provide Scope & Cost**
   - Include the **affected area (in square feet)** and a **cost projection** (excluding MEP systems).
4. ♿ **Accessibility Compliance (IEBC 410.7 & 705)**
   - Submit documentation showing how the project meets the **20% accessibility improvement requirement**.
5. 🚪 **Exiting & Fire Safety Review**
   - Provide a detailed review of **existing exit conditions** and compliance with **IBC/IFC Chapter 9** (fire alarms, panic hardware, etc.).
   - Include **drawings or narrative descriptions** of any fire safety features.
6. 🔧 **MEP Plans (Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing)**
   - Submit all **IMC, NEC, and IPC** plans and details **with the sealed design package**.

🔥 Fire Protection Responsibility – PA UCC 105.4.3

- The **applicant is responsible** for ensuring all fire protection requirements are included in the construction documents.
- **Shop drawings must be complete** and compliant with applicable codes and standards.

Fire Safety Design Opinion Required

For **any CHANGES existing commercial building**, regardless of use:

- A **Design Professional** must provide a **sealed opinion** on review of:
  - Fire safety
  - Panic hardware
  - Compliance with **IBC/IFC Chapters 7, 8, and 9**

🔄 Change of Use / Occupancy

- Any application involving a **change of use or occupancy** must:
  - Clearly describe the **intended new use**
  - **Declare Group Use, Type of Construction and Occupant Load.**
  - Follow all the same submission requirements listed above

🏚️ Vacant / Unoccupied Structures / Spaces

- Applications for **vacant or unoccupied commercial buildings** must also:
  - Follow **all the same guidelines**
  - Include a full review of fire safety, exiting conditions and accessibility
  - Provide proper supportive load calculations / details for structure or areas

📌 Helpful Tips for a Smooth Review & Permit

- **Start early**: Engage a licensed PA Design Professional at the beginning of your project.
- **Be thorough**: Incomplete submissions, improper scope of project area / work and undefined notes or plans are the most common cause of delays.
- **Ask questions**: While code officials cannot provide design advice, they can clarify procedural requirements. They will also work directly with any PA Design Professional.
- **Plan for accessibility**: The 20% rule is mandatory and must be addressed in all alterations.
- **Include all systems**: MEP plans are not optional—they must be submitted with the initial package. Design Professional may divert sealed plans BUT must declare in writing in the (A) sheets and all diverted submittals must be approved by Designer of record.
- **All submitted documents & plans**- Must be SEALED by a Pennsylvania Design Professional and LEGIBLE for proper plans examination.
- **Commercial Code Interpretations or Conflicts**- complex matters arise, these may only be discussed between the Building Code Official or Plans Examiner and the Design Professional.
- **NO Forward Progress or Permissions** – are ever granted or permissible without proper authorized written documentation on file. No verbal agreements, acknowledgements or assumptions are permitted.