Harris County Fire Code
Procedure Document
Residential to Commercial Conversions

I am considering converting a residential building into commercial use, what items should I consider and what is the review and permitting process like for such a conversion?

Step One – Verify that there are no restrictions in our Regulations that would prohibit your commercial development:

Our Platting Office can verify whether there are any restrictions recorded on the official “Plat” of your subdivision that refer to the use of the land. If the land is restricted to Residential development, then a change of use must be approved by the Municipality in their ETJ and Harris County by submitting a “Replat.” Some properties may be located in a subdivision that does not have an official recorded plat; and any of those private deed restrictions or covenants are not enforced by Harris County.

PLATING DEPARTMENT CONTACT INFORMATION

Phone: 713-274-3932
Email: platting@hcpid.org
Website: http://www.eng.hctx.net/permits/Public-Review/Platting/Welcome-to-Platting

Step Two – Engage an Architect or Engineer and Submit Plans for Permitting

Plans must be submitted, reviewed and approved through our Fire Code Review Group in order to receive a commercial permit for the conversion. During the review, the building and its proposed use will be evaluated for code compliance. Your design professional will be able to provide guidance on any needed upgrades to the building for the proposed use. The design professional will need to submit architectural plans, a site plan as well as a completed Fire Code Review Sheet to our office for review.

IMPORTANT ITEMS TO CONSIDER IN THE PLANNING PHASES

- Do I need an Architect or Engineer? Our Fire Code Review Sheet is required to be stamped and sealed by an Architect or Engineer. Certain types of projects require an Architect. For additional information, please refer to http://www.tbae.state.tx.us/LawsAndEnforcement/BuildingOfficials.
- Is the property served by an on-site sewerage facility (OSSF)? If so, are there any upgrades or improvements needed to that system to accommodate the proposed use?
- Does the use require Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services (HCPHES) review and approval? Visit www.hcphtx.org for additional information.
- Is the project located within a floodplain?
- Does the project qualify as substantial improvement per Harris County Fire Code and the Harris County Regulations for Floodplain Management?
- Is the cost of construction over $50,000? If so, you will be required to provide your project registration number from the Texas Department of Licensing and Registration. Visit https://www.tdlr.texas.gov/ABProjectRegistrationOnline/ for additional information.

EXAMPLE PROJECTS INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO THE FOLLOWING:

Residential Board & Care Facilities
Daycares
Church / Religious Establishments
Retail Businesses
Food Establishments
Repair or Machine Shops
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Verify that the property will allow for commercial use.
Engage a design professional (Architect or Engineer).
Submit plans for review and permitting.

Step Three – Obtain Commercial Permit and Submit for Approval of Any Deferred Submittal Items

Once the plans are approved by our office, a permit can be obtained for the conversion. At that point, if there are any deferred submittals (fire alarm systems, fire sprinkler systems, access control plans, et cetera) those may be submitted for review and approval.

Power Release - For Information on power release, please visit the "Obtaining Permanent Power" document in the "Quick Docs" Section of the Permits website - http://www.eng.hctx.net/permits/

Step Four – Construction, Inspection and Completion

When construction is complete, a final inspection may be requested for the building. The final inspection is conducted by the Fire Marshal's Office and there will be information on the actual permit document for how to request this inspection.

When the project passes its final inspection, a Certificate of Compliance may be requested from the Harris County Permits Office.

OTHER USEFUL LINKS

- Fire Code Regulations and Residential Board and Care Occupancy Codeword
- Fire Code Review Sheet, Commercial Building Application and Food Establishment Procedures Document
- Harris County ePermits Website
- Fire Protection Website (Sprinkler and Alarm Requirements and additional items)
  - http://www.eng.hctx.net/permits/Fire/Fire-Code/Fire-Protection-Systems
- Access Control Website

COMMON DEFERRED SUBMITTAL ITEMS:
- Fire Alarm System
- Fire Sprinkler System
- Underground Fire Line
- Fixed Fire Suppression Systems (commonly used above commercial cooking appliances)
- Access Control (special locks, delayed egress doors, magnetic locks, et cetera)