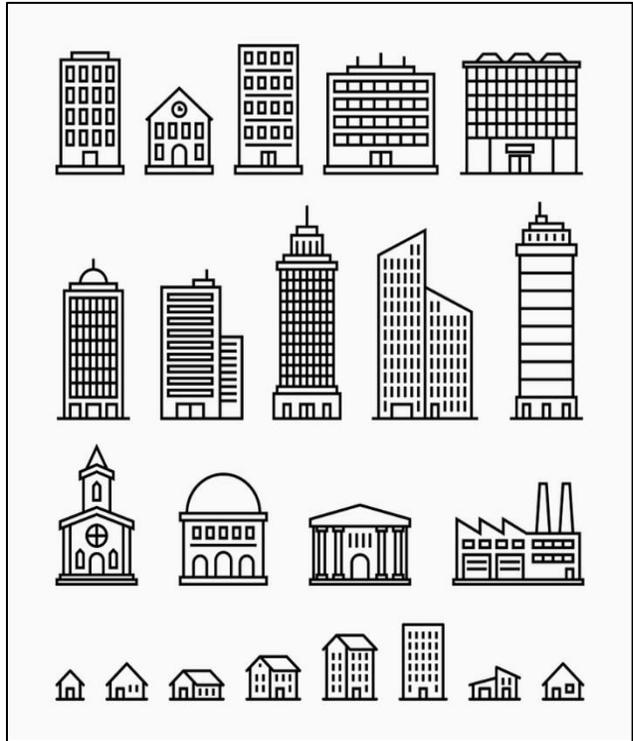


Verify Your Building Classification

Once you determine that the location you are interested in has the appropriate zoning designation, the next step is to find out if the building will require renovations to meet the safety standards set by the North Carolina State Building Code. When the use or occupancy of a building or portion thereof changes, it is necessary to bring the building into compliance with codes and ordinances for the new use and/or occupancy. It is important to know all building code requirements for your occupancy prior to purchasing a property or signing a lease. In some cases, required renovations to the building may make your project cost prohibitive. In these cases, many business owners choose a building that closer fits their needs.



Public health, safety and general welfare standards are maintained through the following standards and these standards differ based on occupancy classification:

- The proper use of building materials.
- Regulating the size and the height of buildings.
- Ensuring a minimum number of exits.
- Limiting the maximum distance one would have to travel to safely exit the building in an emergency.
- Determining when a sprinkler system or fire alarm system is required.
- The Building Code also sets the minimum requirements for lighting, ventilation, number and type of plumbing fixtures, (i.e. bathrooms, water fountains) and energy conservation measures.

Many of the minimum requirements in the building code are based on the type of business that will occupy a building. The Building Code refers to this as the occupancy classification(s) of the business. Once the occupancy classification is determined, the other portions of the code can be applied.

Occupancy Classifications

While there are ten occupancy classification groups, the three most common for small businesses are Assembly (Group A), Business (Group B), and Mercantile (Group M).



Assembly Group A

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) used for the gathering of persons for purposes such as civic, social, religious, recreation or for the consumption of food or drink. Examples include theaters, restaurants, churches, martial arts studios, dance halls or sporting areas.



Business Group B

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) used for office, professional or service transaction or the storage of records and accounts. Examples include banks, beauty shops, dry cleaners, laboratories and professional offices.



Mercantile Group M

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) used for the display and sale of merchandise and involves stocks of goods or merchandise accessible to the public. Examples include department stores, drug stores, motor fuel-dispensing facilities and sales rooms.

Application of the Building Code on Occupancy Classifications

The North Carolina Existing Building Code allows buildings to change occupancy classifications without conforming to all requirements of the building code, provided the new use is less hazardous than the previous use. This is based on life and fire risk, and goes in this order:



Business-Least Hazardous



Mercantile-More Hazardous



Assembly-Most Hazardous

While all new businesses in the Town of Kernersville require a safety inspection prior to occupancy, a proposed business that was previously a business occupancy (such as an office), but changing to a mercantile occupancy (such as a retail store) would be subject to additional provisions of the Building Code.