

**STEUBENVILLE PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION
BUILDING INSPECTION DIVISION
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

1. *What work does the Steubenville Planning & Zoning Commission's Building Inspection Division regulate?*

One, two and three family dwellings and their accessory structures, commonly referred to as “**Residential Construction**”. Per state law and local ordinance, the City of Steubenville regulates new construction, additions and alterations of these dwellings and their accessory structures, including work such as finishing basements, converting basements to living spaces, deck construction and swimming pools. Enforcement extends to both structural and non-structural construction and includes mechanical, electrical and plumbing work as well.

All commercial and multi-family (4 or more) residential structures, commonly referred to as “**Commercial Construction**”. Per state law, this construction is regulated by the Ohio Board of Building Standards and is enforced locally by the City of Steubenville. This includes new construction, additions, structural and non-structural alterations and changes of occupancy. Enforcement also covers mechanical, plumbing and electrical work, fire suppression and alarm systems.

In addition to the above we also check for compliance with zoning regulations.

2. *Where can I obtain copies of the codes you enforce?*

The current Ohio Building Code; Ohio Residential Code; and other related Ohio codes may be viewed at the International Code Council's website:

<https://codes.iccsafe.org/codes/ohio>

3. *Do contractors have to be licensed to work in the City of Steubenville?*

The Ohio Construction Industry Licensing Board (OCILB) (614-644-3493) requires that electrical, HVAC, hydronics, plumbing and refrigeration contractors be licensed. State licensing is not required for general contractors that do not perform the above work.

In addition, Steubenville Building Regulations require that all contractors register with the City prior to obtaining permits or doing any work.

4. *I am the homeowner; do I need to register to perform work on my own property?*

Homeowners do not need to be registered to work on their own property. They may do their own work on their primary residence with their own labor without being registered. Work on non-primary residences, or work that is hired out requires contractor registration.

5. *Why does Steubenville enforce the State Building Codes?*

The Steubenville Planning & Zoning Commission's Building Inspection Division is certified by the State of Ohio to administer and enforce Ohio Building Codes. This means that the Building Inspection Division has those employees on staff that have been properly trained and certified by the State to run a building inspection division and to inspect both commercial and residential construction. Inspectors are required to attend classes each year and obtain a minimum number of

CEU's to maintain their certifications and to attend meetings of all building inspectors to be sure that the codes are being applied equally and consistently across the state.

Building codes are minimum standards to ensure a structure is safe for human occupancy. Inspections ensure that structural, electrical, mechanical and plumbing systems are properly installed and safe for occupants.

6. *Is any construction exempt from building permits?*

Maintenance and repairs may be made without building permits, but such repairs cannot include any structural work, mechanical or electrical work or construction or removal of non-structural walls or partitions. Permits are not required for cosmetic changes such as painting or carpeting, but such work must still comply with applicable codes, such as not exceeding applicable flame spread requirements.

Some work is exempt from local code enforcement, such as state or federal projects built on state or federally owned land, used for governmental purposes. In those cases, the state or federal government oversees code compliance. Other buildings such as those used for agricultural purposes are also exempt. If you have questions about whether your project is exempt, be sure to check with the Building Inspection Division before proceeding.

7. *When are plans required?*

All residential and commercial construction or alterations require the submission of plans and/or manufacturers specifications. Residential construction involving structural work such as, but not limited to, roof trusses, bearing walls, footers, foundations and retaining walls requires the submission of plans prepared by a State-licensed architect or engineer. Residential construction involving other work may be completed by the owner or contractor.

Plans for work involving commercial construction must be completed by a State-licensed architect or engineer.

8. *Who reviews the plans?*

Plans for residential work are reviewed in house by the Building Official who is also a State licensed residential plan reviewer. Plans for commercial work are reviewed by the City's third party contracted master plans examiners. In order to become a State licensed master plans examiner, an individual must be a State licensed professional architect or engineer who has passed the State's test for plan reviewers.

9. *What permits do I need if I'm just moving into an existing space and doing no remodeling?*

Continuation of existing uses. To use a building in the same manner as previously approved, such as a dress shop occupying a former men's clothing store, and the former use had been legally approved, no new Certificate of Occupancy is needed. C/O's are issued for a specific use of a building or space, not a specific tenant, and do not expire if the use does not change.

New use of an existing space. Some proposed occupancies are considered a change of use and may increase the amount of people using the building enough that additional exits, toilet facilities, ventilation systems and fire suppression systems are required, such as locating a church in a space previously approved for a business use. Also when a new use goes in a building, specific code

requirements for that use must be met, such as installing alarm systems in churches or daycare centers. If a space is vacant for more than 30 days, regardless of the prior use, the procedures are the same as if a new use was to occupy the space.

10. *What do I need to submit in order to get a permit?*

Residential permit applications must include three copies of drawings that describe the proposed work and how it will meet applicable code requirements, along with a completed application. Upon approval of a permit, we will return one set with approval marks and notes and keep one set on file in our offices.

Commercial permit applications must initially be submitted digitally via Dropbox. After plan approval, three copies of Ohio certified drawings and specifications prepared by a State licenses architect or engineer describing the work for which the permit is sought, and how it will meet applicable code requirements, along with a completed application form.

Upon approval of a permit, we will return two sets with approval marks and notes and keep one set on file in our offices.

11. *How long does it take to get a permit?*

Commercial permits are processed within thirty working days after receiving sufficient information to do a plan review. Turnaround for some partial permits is fourteen to twenty-one working days. Most **residential permits** are processed within fourteen working days after receiving enough information to do a plan review.

When submittals are found to be deficient, either because the submittal is incomplete or the work proposed is code deficient, the applicant is notified of the need to submit additional or corrected information and the “turnaround clock” stops until a response is received. Time spent waiting for such responses is not counted against turnaround goals.

12. *Can I get a partial permit to get construction more quickly?*

A variety of partial permits are available to expedite construction. The most common is the issuance of a footing/foundation permit. Shell permits are processed in the same time frame as complete construction permits, but allow expedited construction since work can proceed before all interior detailing is completed. These permits are separate, standalone permits.

Some over the counter permits are available for residential windows, shingle roofs, siding, gutters and downspouts, hot water tanks and furnace or air-conditioning in-kind replacement are generally issued within a few days of application.

Applications for sub-permits such as electric or gas piping may be grouped similar to the primary building permits discussed above. Additional plan review fees may need to be paid for, however.

13. *What other permits might I need?*

Zoning approval must be obtained for all new work and most changes of use of buildings. Other agencies issue permits that may be required for your work, such as food service permits issued from the Jefferson County Health District.

14. *What else should I know before I start construction?*

READ ALL NOTES RETURNED WITH YOUR PERMIT BEFORE YOU START CONSTRUCTION! Too many small issues become big problems because the applicant/builder/designer did not read the code review comments as soon as the permit was issued. There may be notes about submittals that still need to be made or cautions about our expectations for work not fully described on the drawings. If you have questions about such remarks, it is best to raise them at the beginning of the job, not when the inspector turns you down.

CHECK YOUR TRUSS DRAWING SUBMITTAL INFORMATION BEFORE TURNING IT IN! While the actual truss shop drawings are often submitted for review *after* the primary building permit has been issued, they must still be legible, complete and sealed by a State licensed architect or engineer. Incomplete submittals clog up our system and slow you down, especially when you submit them very close to the time you are expecting a rough framing inspection (which includes inspecting the truss installation).

15. *Once I obtain a permit, what inspections are required?*

Both commercial and residential work must have rough inspections of construction progress before work is covered up, and final inspections after work is complete. Typically all sub trade inspections such as electrical, mechanical and plumbing must be approved before the main permit (general construction) inspection will be done. Approved plans must be on the job site for each inspection.

NOTE: Footings, slabs and gas, electric and water/sewer trenches must be inspected before concrete is poured or backfill material is placed. REMEMBER TO CALL FOR AN INSPECTION BEFORE YOU COVER THE WORK. FAILURE TO CALL FOR AN INSPECTION COULD RESULT IN YOU HAVING TO UNCOVER WORK SO IT CAN BE VIEWED BY AN INSPECTOR.

16. *What are Special Inspections and why are they required?*

The Ohio Building Code requires “Special Inspections” for twenty categories of construction work. Special Inspections involve the evaluation of materials, workmanship and the interpretation of contract documents. Special Inspections are in addition to City inspections and construction testing services. The Ohio Building Code requires inspectors and testing agencies to be hired by the owner, not the contractor to avoid a conflict of interest. These “third party” inspections provide a means of quality assurance. City inspectors cannot be on the job site at all times, therefore these inspections act as the “eyes in the field” for the owner and architect or engineer. They provide assurance that the owner is getting what he or she paid for.

17. *How will ADA requirements affect my project?*

All new commercial construction and many types of commercial remodeling projects trigger compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regarding handicapped accessibility. Restrooms, parking, entryways, accessible routes thereto, and others such as countertop heights, cabinets, etc. are key components of ADA compliance. There is zero tolerance in the building code for any deviation whatsoever from ADA requirements.

18. What is firestopping and why is it important?

Firestopping is an important part of fireproofing. It refers to the process of filling openings between walls and floors with fire-resistant materials, inhibiting the spread of fire between sections of a building. Remember that openings made by a contractor or subcontractor, for work such as HVAC ducts, plumbing, electrical, cables, conduit, refrigeration lines and any other penetration may require firestopping with UL System numbers and specific details regarding installation.

19. Do I have to register my property if it has been vacant?

Owners of property vacant for more than 90 days are required to register their property with the City. For vacant residential buildings, the annual fee is \$200.00 for the first year of vacancy. For every consecutive year a building remains vacant, the annual fee is increased by \$50.00 over the previous year's fee amount, for a maximum annual fee equaling the 5 year fee of \$400.00 for the fifth and consecutive, subsequent years of vacancy. For vacant commercial and other buildings, the annual fee is \$400.00 for the first year of vacancy. For every consecutive year a building remains vacant, the annual fee is increased by \$75.00 over the previous year's fee amount, for a maximum annual fee equaling the 5 year fee of \$700.00 for the fifth and consecutive, subsequent years of vacancy. A statement explaining the reason for the building's vacancy, along with a plan for the buildings future must accompany the submitted registration form. The fee covers an annual inspection (both interior and exterior) of the property when requested by the owner and an inspection report.

20. What must be done before I can get power turned on at a building?

Electric reconnects will be authorized after an electric safety inspection is done by the Building Inspection Division to ensure no electrical hazards are present. AEP will not connect power without the Building Inspection Division's approval.

Gas reconnects will be authorized after a gas piping inspection is done to ensure that no hazards are present.

21. Explain C/O's, P/C/O's, T/L/C/O's and T/C/O's

Certificates of Occupancy (C/O's) are issued after all work has been completed and inspections (including inspections by other agencies such as County Health and City Fire Department) for the main building permit have been approved. In the event no new work is proposed, just a request to occupy an existing space, the Building Inspection Division conducts one final inspection after the Fire Department conducts a final inspection.

Partial Certificate of Occupancy (P/C/O's) may be granted for part of a building before construction of the entire building is completed if the work in part of a building is 100 percent complete, but work on other parts of the building still needs to be completed. All spaces to be occupied must be inspected per normal procedures, and must be deemed safe to occupy. In other words, all matters relating to life safety, such as exit signs, door hardware, alarm and suppression systems must be installed and functioning properly. All permits must have been obtained before a P/C/O will be considered.

Time Limited Certificate of Occupancy (T/L/C/O's) can be issued when the occupancy of all or part of a building changes from one use to another, but only for a limited time. An example of this may be a “haunted house” at Halloween or a “Santa’s workshop” at Christmas. The time limited occupancy may be approved provided there are no code violations pending and it has been established after inspection that the proposed use will not endanger public safety. A T/L/C/O may then be issued indicating any special conditions under which the building can be used for the alternative purpose within the time period specified.

Temporary Certificates of Occupancy (T/C/O's) may be granted if either part of the work is 100 percent complete, or all the work is mostly complete. All spaces to be occupied must be inspected per normal procedures, and must be deemed safe to occupy. In other words, all matters relating to life safety, such as exit signs, door hardware, alarm and suppression systems must be installed and functioning properly. All permits must have been obtained before a T/C/O will be considered.

NOTE: Zoning approval only signifies compliance with zoning ordinances for land use approval. It does not take the place of a building permit or certificate of occupancy for building use approval.

22. *Explain your fees*

Plan review fees for residential work are based upon the value of construction. See section 1327.02(b) of the City Building Code for specific plan review fees.

Plan review fees for commercial work are established in the Ohio Building Code. See the Ohio Building Code for specific plan review fees.

Plan re-review fees are assessed for incomplete or incorrect submittals. If submittals lack basic levels of adequacy, such as not being drawn to scale or not having rooms labeled as to proposed use, a re-review fee may be assessed immediately, before any plan review is conducted. (It is important to review the plan submittal requirements listed on the back of the application forms.) Typically, however, this fee will only be assessed after a plan review has been done, a correction letter has been sent out and the resubmittal has been reviewed and found to still be deficient or incorrect regarding the need to show a code complying solution. When assessed, fees must be paid at the time of any subsequent resubmittal.

Reinspection fees are assessed after an inspection is done once, turned down, and then any of the same items are found to be lacking or improperly installed on the follow-up inspection. In other words, you get one free inspection per phase of work, but subsequent re-inspections must be paid for.

Lockout, not ready - No approved drawings on site. These situations cause us to assess a re-inspection fee immediately. Lockout means we could not gain access to the work through a normal route. This could also be assessed if the building had personal belongings in it but no adult was there to escort us on our inspection. Not ready means that it was obvious during the course of our inspection that the work had not been completed sufficiently for us to inspect all that we were requested to. Typically, we allow up to six deficiencies to be noted on an inspection before we say it's apparent that the work is not ready. Approved drawings need to be on site to conduct a proper inspection.

Unsafe jobsite if access to the work is not possible due to unsafe conditions such as inadequate ladders or lack of backfill combined with inadequate walkway planks, inspection may be postponed.

Permit fees require submission of an application fee of \$10.00 for residential work, \$20.00 for commercial work. Any general construction work with a value of under \$1,000.00 does not require submission of an application or payment of fees. General construction work with a value of between \$1,000.00 and \$5,000.00 requires submission of an application and payment of application fee, but no payment of permit fees is required. Most electrical, mechanical and plumbing work requires submission of an application and payment of fees regardless of work value.

Certificate of Occupancy for residential work requires a payment of a \$25.00 fee. Fees for certificates of occupancy for commercial work are based on the Ohio Building Code.

NOTE: Fees can be viewed on the City's website at:

https://www.cityofsteubenville.us/government/departments/building_inspection_and_property_maintenance.php#outer-4

23. *What do I do if my building is damaged by fire, wind, rain, snow or vehicles?*

When requested, the Building Inspection Division staff will conduct a damage assessment inspection as soon as possible after being notified of damage to a structure or building system. Our inspectors will determine either:

- Damage was minor, no repair permit or inspection is necessary;
- Damage repair may proceed with the understanding that items damaged will be replaced with like material. A permit must be obtained and all work must be inspected before being concealed, but no drawings or plans are required; or
- Extensive repairs are necessary, a permit must be obtained, drawings/plans must be submitted detailing the work to be done and all work must be inspected before being concealed. An assessment by a structural engineer may be needed.

24. *How can I appeal a decision, interpretation or order of the Building Inspection Division?*

All decisions, interpretations and orders of the Building Inspection Division are appealable. Upon written request for an appeal, a written Adjudication Order will be prepared. It will detail the code issues involved and will indicate to whom and how you file an appeal. The City of Steubenville administers a residential appeals board. Commercial appeals are heard by the Ohio Board of Building Appeals, administered by the State of Ohio.

25. *Explain your refund policy*

Up-front fees paid are not refundable, unless the fee is assessed mistakenly, in which case we will refund the entire amount. No refunds are available after the work has commenced.

NOTE: This document is intended to act as a general guide only and does not take the place of building codes or code interpretations.