

The Building Official has authority under the code to make interpretations, approve equivalent alternate methods (AM) requests, and for existing buildings to allow modifications of the current building code based on practical difficulties for project specific applications. The Building Official is not authorized to grant waivers to or variances from the code. All requests must be in writing. The following information shall be provided for each building and each issue in the request, where applicable.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

ALL request letters shall include, but not be limited to, the following minimum information:

- Nature of request (alternate method, interpretation, modification)
- Project address and suite number
- City permit / project number
- Use and occupancy group(s)
- IBC defined type of construction
- Total building area and, when applicable, lease square footage
- Pertinent dimensions
- Specific code requirements(s)
- Applicable code section(s)
- Description of the issue/problem
- Details of the proposed solution

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS EACH TYPE OF REQUEST

Depending on the type of request the following specific information shall be included.

- 1. Code Interpretations (CI) (Section 104.1, 2015 IBC)** - based on the intent of the applicable code(s).
 - Describe how the common CI applies to the field application of the intended design, and
 - Describe the quality, strength, effectiveness, fire resistance, durability, and safety of the alternative CI
- 2. Alternate Methods (Section 104.11, 2015 IBC)** - Proposed alternate method of construction design(s) shall include details showing how the proposed design is equivalent to that prescribed in the applicable code based on quality, strength, effectiveness, fire resistance, durability and safety.
 - Describe the substituted alternate method design, and
 - Demonstrate how it is equivalent to the prescribed code required design
- 3. Modification to Existing Buildings Due to Practical Difficulties (Section 104.10, 2015 IBC)** - Provided the *Building Official* first finds that an existing buildings site condition or project specific circumstance makes the construction associated with the strict letter of the code impractical, a request for a code modification based on practical difficulties may be submitted for consideration.
 - The submittal package shall describe how the existing construction creates a practical difficulty, and
 - Demonstrate how the modification is compliant with the intent and purpose of the current code and how such modification does not lessen the health, accessibility, life- and fire-safety, or structural requirements.

SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

- Plans and plan details required for alternate method or code interpretation review shall be fully dimensioned scalable documents and submitted in PDF format via email to: HPC-RA@houstontx.gov.

REVIEW FEE

Standard Request – Applies to city forms created for specific requests requiring minimal research. Example: Form **CE-1131 Reduced Occupant Load Request - TEA Educational** \$50.13

Moderate Request – Limited to construction on a single-floor level and containing a maximum of 30-pages of justification requiring moderate amounts of research or consultation (< 4 hours)..... \$125.32

Extensive Request – Contain engineering evaluations, tests reports, or requests for construction located on multiple floor levels requiring several plan sheets and/or details to clearly document the location and scope of the proposed work. Including submittals containing more than 30-pages of justification or information or requires extensive research, documentation and data collection. (4 Hours Base Charge) \$626.61
Plus, each additional hour exceeding 4 hours \$156.64

CONTACT INFORMATION

For additional information contact Code Development Group at: HPC-RA@houstontx.gov.

ADDRESS LETTERS TO: Byron King, Building Official, P. O. Box 2688, Houston, TX 77252-2688

INTERPRETATIONS, ALTERNATE METHOD OR MODIFICATIONS

The following are examples of common requests with specific requirements needed in addition to the general requirements identified on Page 1.

CODE OF RECORD (COR) REQUEST (Sections 102.6, 116.1 and Appendix D of the 2015 IEBC)

Alternate method requests may be authorized for use of the COR for existing buildings where documentation demonstrates the occupancy classification has not changed and the existing structure was designed to all code requirements under the COR for the existing use and occupancy and the structure complies with the most restrictive provision of IBC 2015 Sections 102.6.1, 116 and Appendix D of the 2015 IEBC.

All COR requests must include the alternate method request letter addressed to the *Building Official*. The letter shall include the project specific information listed on Page 1 and include, but not be limited to, the following additional specific documentation:

- One photocopy of the COR letter to the Building Official along with a copy of:
 - the Harris County Real Property Account Information
 - the current Certificate of Occupancy (CO) for the building or lease space
 - a dimensioned site plan drawn to scale showing the building footprint in relation to all property lines or other structures. The extent of any subsequent building additions. Labels incorporating the square footage, permit number and application dates for the primary structure and each addition into the footprint and additions. Location of access roads, fire hydrants, HFD access doors, exits and smoke and heat vents
 - appropriate Houston permit archive research with summarized building permit history, including but not limited to, the originally permitted use and occupancy classification, the square footages of the originally permitted building, and subsequent additions including permit numbers and application dates

REDUCED OCCUPANT LOAD (ROL) REQUEST (Sections 104.11 and 1004.1 of the 2015 IBC)

Texas Education Agency (TEA) regulated educational occupancies with a proposed ROL resulting in (maximum 33%) reduction from the 2015 IBC calculated design occupant load (DOL) based on the OL factors of Table 1004.1.2 for the function of the space may utilize Houston ROL Form CE-1131.

Form CE-1131 Request for Reduced Occupant Load / Educational

Other Educational Occupancies

- ROL requests for TEA regulated occupancies resulting in greater than 33% reduction from IBC DOL
 - Requires a letter on school letterhead signed by the principle of the school detailing all occupant load restrictions and describing in detail the use of all areas identified as NSU areas.
- Alternate method/ROL request for private schools.
 - Requires letter on school letterhead signed by the principle of the school detailing all occupant load restrictions and describing in detail the use of all areas identified as NSU areas.
 - One copy of the schools' published/teacher's manual identifying class size restrictions and curriculum.

Daycare Occupancies

- For daycares, if the requested reduction is based on State Law, include related licensing applications

IMPORTANT: (All educational and care facilities shall provide form: **CE-1108 Care Facility Worksheet**)

NOTE: ALL REQUESTS REQUIRE ONE COPY OF THE FOLLOWING

- Code analysis sheet – including but not limited to the IBC occupancy group(s) based on specific use(s), type of construction, the allowable building area calculations, height and number of stories along with the actual area, height and stories, the calculated design occupant load and minimum egress requirements.
- Floor Plan – Include a building plan layout identifying the seating plan with all fixed seats & pews, or fixed machines (if applicable) clearly labeled, and showing the means of egress.
- Occupant Load Calculations – Include OL calculations showing the proposed ROL as well as the OL calculations based on OL factors of Table 1004.1.2 of the IBC 2015.