

INTRODUCTION

To convert existing buildings into multi-unit residential development, you must submit a complete set of plans electronically to the Houston Permitting Center. These plans need to show that they meet the current Houston Construction Code and any other city department requirements related to the occupancy. The following guideline summarizes information each department requires for the complete review of an existing building conversion to multi-unit residential.

PRE-DEVELOPMENT MEETINGS

During the planning phase, applicants should be aware of two critical risks inherent in any project:

- The potential inability to meet required standards.
- The possibility that compliance costs may exceed the allocated budget or timeline.

For this reason, the Houston Permitting Center offers pre-development meetings upon request. Through these meetings applicants can ask questions to Houston Permitting Center staff about the scope of their project. The pre-development meetings can cover most aspects of the project and include representatives from each reviewing department. To schedule a meeting, contact the [Houston Permitting Center](#) at (832) 394-9000, or Luis Villasana directly at (832) 394-9169.

DEED RESTRICTIONS

Before submitting building plans for review it is strongly recommended that applicants verify compliance with all deed restrictions that may be applicable. To determine if the proposed land use classification is not in violation of deed restrictions, the applicant must perform due diligence on deed restrictions for the property and sign a declaration form indicating that no deed restrictions are being violated with this project. The deed restriction “Declaration” must be provided during the permit application process. Permits may be revoked, and paid permit fees forfeited for deed restriction violations.

CITY OF HOUSTON DEPARTMENTS

The following outline summarizes the information each department requires for a complete review of an existing building conversion to a multi-unit residential development.

- 1. Building Code Enforcement | (BCE)**
 - a) Life Safety/Egress
 - b) Fire Protection
 - c) Structural changes
 - d) HVAC, Electrical, and Plumbing reviews
- 2. Fire Marshal’s Office | (FMO)**
 - a) Fire lanes
 - b) Access gates
 - c) Buildings over 30’ in height

d) Fire suppression

3. Floodplain Management Office

a) Floodplain compliance

4. Planning and Development Department (PD)

- a) Land use requirements, restrictions, and legal property description usually found on the recorded subdivision plat or survey.
- b) Site plan showing compliance with Chapter 42, Article 3, Division 6 “Multifamily Residential Developments”. This review is conducted in coordination with the Fire Marshal’s office.
- c) Parking
- d) Sidewalks
- e) Landscaping
- f) Parks and open space
- g) Transit Oriented Street (TOD) optional

5. Right-of-Way Traffic and Mobility

- a) Driveways, approaches/culverts, and 6” curbs
- b) Parking layout and dimensions
- c) ADA parking stalls and access aisle
- d) Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA)

6. Stormwater

- a) Stormwater drainage review

7. Water and Wastewater Review

- a) Water and wastewater capacity letter

PLAN SUBMITTALS

A complete set of plans must be submitted electronically via [ProjectDox](#), documenting compliance with all applicable requirements. When submitting plans, a [Commercial Prerequisite Checklist \(CE-1105\)](#) and all applicable information and documentation listed on it must be provided with the submittal package. To increase the probability of plan approval in the shortest time plans should be as complete and detailed as possible.

Buildings converted to multi-unit residential development requirements:

1. Building Code Enforcement | (BCE) **Main # 832.394.8810**

[Building Code Enforcement](#) will review any structural alterations or additions to the interior or exterior of the building for structural life safety requirements. Multifamily structures must meet different and often

more stringent life-safety standards. Other items, such as fire rated corridors, will need to be updated to meet current code. With that in mind, the Houston adopted Existing Building Code will specify which items will need to be updated to meet current building codes and which items may remain as is.

Items identified as needed to be updated shall be in accordance with the Houston adopted Building Code. Remaining items will either need to be altered to meet the minimum requirements of the Houston adopted Existing Building Code or may remain in their current state as determined by Commercial Plan Review. In some cases, when updates are required but existing conditions make carrying out the provisions of the code impractical, an [alternate method or modification](#) may be proposed and submitted to the Building Official for review. All electrical, plumbing, and HVAC changes must be submitted by a licensed professional engineer and reviewed by staff for code compliance.

2. Fire Marshal's Office | (FMO) **Main # 832.394.8853**

Any proposed apartment building or condominium development that requires a 28 feet driveway or garden style layouts will need to meet with the [Fire Marshal's Office](#) and provide the necessary access to accommodate for a fire truck.

If the property is gated, the size of the gate must meet code requirements and be provided with a "911" box for Fire Marshal access.

Any building over 30 feet in height containing residential units will be required to meet the fire truck ladder clearance requirements.

Fire suppression system review is required.

3. Floodplain Management Office **Main # 832.394.8854**

A [Floodplain Management Office](#) review is required for existing buildings, site improvements, or change in elevations if site is located within floodway.

4. Planning Department **Main # 832.394.8849**

When a building is being converted to residential units, the Planning Department will review the subdivision plat or survey to ensure that the proposed change in use complies with platted restrictions. Multifamily uses are allowed on unrestricted lots, unrestricted reserves, and reserves restricted to residential purposes. If the plat indicates a commercial reserve, a replat will be required to remove the restriction.

Apart from the Fire Marshal's review, the Planning Department will review for multifamily code

requirements under [Chapter 42, Article III, Division 6](#). These requirements may pose a challenge due to the existing location of the building and the need for fire protection access.

Other requirements such as parking, landscaping, and sidewalks are triggered with building improvements.

Planning and Development’s [Development Regulations](#) and expedited review process by emailing pd.expeditedreview@houstontx.gov.

Parking: For a change of use to multi-unit residential development, parking requirements are based on the number of bedrooms in each unit as detailed below:

1.250 parking spaces for each efficiency dwelling unit
1.333 parking spaces for each one-bedroom dwelling unit
1.666 parking spaces for each two-bedroom dwelling unit
2.0 parking spaces for each dwelling unit with 3 or more bedrooms

Landscaping: If there are no proposed parking lots or building additions over 1,000 square feet, no landscape is required.

Sidewalks: New sidewalk standards are required for additions over 25% of the total building area, or the proposed construction of a sidewalk or reconstruction of over 20 linear feet of sidewalk.

If a sidewalk is not feasible due to site limitations the applicant may request a sidewalk modification through the modification committee. Email sidewalk modification applications to pd.sidewalkandrealm@houstontx.gov

Transit Oriented Development (TDO) Streets: If the building is located along a TOD street, the applicant can take advantage of parking reductions when all TOD performance standards are met. TOD Streets [Houston Map Viewer](#).

Parks/Private Parks Fees for Multifamily: Parks fees are required for proposed residential units. See Code of Ordinances, [Sec. 42-253](#), Fees in lieu of land dedication.

5. Right of Way - Traffic and Mobility **Main # 832.394.9513**

An access form is required to determine if a Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) is required.

For all commercial conversions with land use changes, building or parking lot additions, the Right of Way - Traffic and Mobility group will require all driveways, approaches, and curb cuts to come into compliance with the current standards per [2023 Infrastructure Design Manual \(IDM\)](#). Also, all existing and proposed parking layouts must meet current code requirements.

6. Stormwater **Main # 832.394.9402**

Any site improvements that create additional impervious areas will require a detail calculation of the impervious area and must provide for drainage mitigation in compliance with the [2023 Infrastructure Design Manual \(IDM\)](#).

7. Water and Wastewater Review **Main # 832.394.9125**

Any changes in size or location of utility service or easements will require a review for compliance with the [2023 Infrastructure Design Manual \(IDM\)](#) requirements. Buildings that require additional service units such as a multi-unit residential development will have to submit a request for a water/wastewater reservation letter.