

Changing a Residential House to a Commercial, Industrial or Institutional Use



Question

What do I need to do if I want to change a residential house into a commercial, industrial or institutional use?

Answer

You need to apply for a building permit to change the *major occupancy* (as defined in the National Building Code of Canada, NBC) from a *residential occupancy* to the intended use. Minor to extensive renovations may be required based on the existing house and desired new use. A development permit will also be required to ensure the new land use is permitted within the zone as determined by the Zoning Bylaw.

Background

The NBC is an occupancy (use) based code, meaning that there are specific rules for each use. When there is a change in use (i.e. from a residential house to a commercial business), the current NBC requirements for the intended use need to be assessed by a competent or professional designer.

The City of Regina Building Bylaw states that an occupancy permit is required when the occupancy of a building is changed. This occupancy permit is obtained once all work related to the approved building permit is completed.

Why a designer is required for a change in use

A designer will evaluate the project and determine what upgrades need to be made in order to change the use from residential. The design plans are created and proposed by the building designer on behalf of the owner. The City of Regina is the regulatory authority responsible for evaluating the design during the building permit process.

If the new occupancy is an *assembly* use (i.e. institutional, day care or restaurant, etc.), drawings must be completed by a design professional (a licensed architect or professional engineer registered in Saskatchewan). If the new occupancy is of retail, office, or industrial use, drawings must be completed by a competent designer. It is important to note that commercial NBC requirements are vastly different from residential. The owner should ensure the designer is familiar with the applicable requirements for the intended use. See the City of Regina advisory link called “When a Professional Designer is Required” for more information.

Potential Required Upgrades to House

At a minimum, these are the typical upgrades that are required to meet current NBC:

- Structural evaluation and upgrades,
- Exiting and egress requirements,

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- Required floor, wall and supporting member fire ratings (including firestopping and rated *closures* for penetrations of fire separations),
- Emergency lighting and signage,
- Required handrails and guards, and
- Spatial separations (allowable windows, exterior wall ratings and cladding requirements).

At a minimum, the typical upgrades that are required for the current technical standards are:

- Upgrading the water connection,
- Replacing any water connections made of lead or another material that do not meet current standards,
- Disconnecting and capping any redundant connections at the water main
- No changes are required to drainage provided the property meets the same discharge rate as before (depending on what the change may be, a storm water plan may be required), and
- No changes are required to the sanitary service.

At a minimum, the typical upgrades required for compliance with the Zoning Bylaw are:

- Additional parking requirements must comply with the zoning bylaw (number of stalls, surfacing, drainage, curbing, etc), and
- Note that if any additions are occurring there are other extensive requirements.

Designated heritage properties must submit a Heritage Alteration Permit application.

What changes will apply to taxes?

A change in use will most likely result in a change in either the property's assessed value and/or the property taxes. Please contact 306-777-7000 for more information.

Conclusion

Every project is unique - there may be other requirements based on the project and existing conditions. It is important to consult with a designer prior to purchasing and planning your project to ensure the house you are considering is a suitable choice to meet your needs.

For more information on Building Permits, Building Safety or Zoning Information, please visit Regina.ca or contact [Service Regina](#).