

Tenant Improvements (TI)

A Tenant Improvement (TI) is an alteration made to the interior of a commercial or industrial building to accommodate the needs of a tenant, such as adding or altering floor and wall coverings, ceilings, partitions, air conditioning, fire protection, and security. For all TIs, the permit requirements depend on the scope of work proposed.

BUILDING PERMIT

A TI permit application includes review of the following: (A design professional should prepare the floor plan.)

- **Use:** see [Title 13 - Land Use Regulatory Code](#)
- **Occupancy classification:** see [Title 2 - Buildings](#)
- **Type of construction:** wood frame, steel, etc.
- **Allowable Area:** determined by occupancy
- **Accessibility:** restrooms, doors and hallways, ADA parking and ramps, etc.
- **Exiting:** number of exits, travel distance between rooms and emergency routes, etc.
- **Fixtures:** toilets, sinks, water fountains, etc.
- **Energy code:** lighting, windows, roofing, and insulation



Major remodels may require that the entire building be brought up to current Building Code standards. Review the Land Use Design Standards (L-501) as well to determine if the Level of Alteration will also require compliance with Land Use Standards for façade design, landscaping, and parking.

LEVEL OF ALTERATION

Existing buildings are evaluated using the *International Existing Buildings Code (IEBC)*. The valuation of the existing building, work area of the project, and value of proposed work will need to be evaluated before requirements can be determined.

- **“Work area of the project”** is the portion of a building consisting of all reconfigured spaces. Any proposed additions to an existing building would also count as part of the work area. Work area does not include areas where incidental work must be done that require portions of the building to be touched where work was not initially intended.
- **“Value of proposed work”** should include all finish work, painting, roofing, electrical, plumbing, heating, air conditioning, elevators, fire extinguishing systems, site work, and any other permanent work or permanent equipment.

IEBC LEVELS OF ALTERATION

- **Level 1** - Alterations include the removal and replacement or the covering of existing materials, elements, equipment, or fixtures using new materials, elements, equipment, or fixtures that serve the same purpose.
- **Level 2** - Alterations include the reconfiguration of space, the addition or elimination of any door or window, the reconfiguration or extension of any system, or the installation of any additional equipment.
- **Level 3** - Alterations apply where the work area exceeds 50 percent of the aggregate area of the building.

For building alterations that do not trigger these thresholds all new work shall meet current Code.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN “USE” AND “OCCUPANCY”

A “use” refers to the nature of the business. A building’s “occupancy” refers to how a building is utilized. For example, “restaurant uses” are typically located within buildings that are “Group A occupancies”, however, limiting the size of the space could allow a restaurant to be located within a building with a Group B occupancy.

CHANGE OF OCCUPANCY

A change of occupancy triggers review of the building for seismic, energy, and accessibility upgrades (parking,



Note: This Tip Sheet does not substitute for codes and regulations.

The applicant is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.

More information: City of Tacoma, Planning and Development Services | www.tacomapermits.org (253) 591-5030

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accessible exits and restrooms, etc.). A professional evaluation of the building for compliance with seismic/structural, energy code, allowable area, occupancy, exiting, restrooms, and accessibility is required when:

- The valuation of proposed work within any cumulative 2-year period is 50% or more of the valuation of the existing building,
- The proposed interior project area + building addition area exceeds 50% of the aggregate floor area of the existing building, or
- A “greater risk” change of occupancy is proposed.

COMMON TI BUILDING CODE REQUIREMENTS

- **Door Swing:** Doors that swing out need to be on private property when fully open. If any portion projects into the right-of-way a Street Occupancy Permit (SOP) will be required.
- **Ramps/Walkways:** Less than a 5% slope is allowable without handrails. If the slope is between 5% - 8.33%, then the walkway is considered a ramp and handrails are required. Ramps cannot have slopes exceeding 8.33%.
- **Exiting Distance:** When more than one exit is required, exit separation is also required. The distance between exits must be equal to at least half the diagonal distance of the floor. For example, if the floor area measured diagonally is 100 feet, and two exits are required on that floor based on building occupancy, the exits must be at least 50 feet apart. If sprinklers are proposed, this distance could be less, subject to staff review.
- **Mechanical:** Consider where mechanical venting will discharge on the exterior of the building prior to submitting drawings for review. The concept will need to meet zoning design standards included in Title 13 as well as Mechanical and Building Code requirements included in Title 2.
- **Structural Changes:** If more than 30% of the building is proposed to undergo structural changes, a full seismic analysis of the building will be required.

OFF-SITE IMPROVEMENTS

Off-site improvements, or “frontage” improvements, include sidewalk, curb, gutter, ADA accessible ramps,

driveways, and alley approaches next to the property. Regardless of whether a project includes a change of occupancy, existing off-site improvements that are in disrepair or damaged, will need to be repaired to current City Public Works standards. For example, replacement of a portion of sidewalk that is cracked and not safe for pedestrians may be required.

ALTERNATIVE MEANS AND METHODS

A request for “alternative means and methods” is a request to the Building Official for approval of an alternative from the prescriptive requirements to achieve compliance with the Building Code. The request may include an alternative that is not clearly outlined as an option in the Building Code language.

LAND USE

Review to the Land Use Design Standards [Tip Sheet L-501](#) to determine if the TI will also require compliance with Land Use Standards for design, landscaping, and parking. Land use thresholds are based on building valuation. If your project is a Conditional Use, you may also have applicable conditions of approval ([Tip Sheet L-640](#)).

RESTAURANTS

A TI to convert a building into a restaurant will have additional requirements. Refer to [Tip Sheet G-105](#) Restaurants and Food Service and [Tip Sheet S-102](#) Grease Interceptors.



E-9 Restaurant, an example of a TI conversion from a fire station to a restaurant use.



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