



## Certificate of Occupancy

*Congratulations on your progress  
toward opening your business in Bellingham!*

To comply with adopted building codes, each building must have a **Certificate of Occupancy** specific to the *type of business or activity* occurring in the space. The Certificate of Occupancy must be issued prior to the new business occupying the space, regardless of whether or not a building permit is required.

### ***Frequently Asked Questions:***

#### ***What is a Certificate of Occupancy?***

The purpose of a Certificate of Occupancy (C of O) is to show that the use of the space substantially complies with code requirements. There are different requirements for each type of business or use. For example, a restaurant may require more restrooms than a warehouse of similar size, or a school may be required to install a fire sprinkler system when an office may not. A C of O provides the tenant and building owner the security of knowing they are safely and legally occupying the building or tenant space and they can easily provide proof of this to insurance companies, lenders, and future business owners. The C of O must be prominently displayed in the building at all times.

#### ***When do I need a Certificate of Occupancy?***

A C of O is required in all non-residential spaces. If no work is being proposed and no C of O is posted in the business, a C of O must be obtained before the business is opened.

If permits are required, an occupancy review will be a part of the permit review and does not require a separate submittal. (See the Tenant Improvement Checklist).

## ***How do I know if the work I'm doing requires a permit?***

Specific questions about whether permits are required should be directed to a Permit Technician at 360-778-8300 or [permits@cob.org](mailto:permits@cob.org).

In general, the following thresholds apply:

**PERMITS REQUIRED FOR:** Any construction, installation, or demolition of any building, mechanical, electrical, or plumbing systems, including such work as: removal or addition of non-structural walls, fixture change outs, and installation of movable cases, counters and partitions exceeding 5'9" in height.

**PERMITS NOT TYPICALLY REQUIRED FOR:** Finish work, such as painting, papering, tiling and carpeting. Cabinets and fixed countertops do not usually require permits (however, please include the location and height of these items on your floor plan to ensure compliance with code requirements).

Any new tenant proposing to prepare or cook food must also receive approval from the Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD). It is recommended you contact WCHD as early as possible, because their requirements may affect your application to the City.

## ***I'm not doing any work to the space and don't need a building permit. What do I need to provide for a Certificate of Occupancy ?***

- Application form
- Site Plan (3 copies). Label streets, property lines, a north arrow and building location.
- Key Plan (3 copies) (if applicable). Show tenant location within the building. If the building contains multiple tenants, label each tenant's business type, address and suite number.
- Floor Plan (3 copies). Label what each room or space will be used for and include location of all exits.
- A detailed, written description of your business (2 copies).
- Fees (as applicable)

**NOTE:** A Certificate of Occupancy review may trigger additional requirements to bring the building into compliance with codes for the specific use.

## ***I'm not doing any work to the space and don't need a building permit. What is the process for reviewing a Certificate of Occupancy, and how long does it take?***

1. **Application Submittal:** Submit a complete Application form to the Permit Center.
2. **City Reviews Plans:** The City occupancy review is typically a 7 calendar day review.
3. **Inspections:** After the occupancy review is complete, an occupancy permit will be issued. You can begin preparing the space and scheduling any required occupancy inspections listed on the permit. Inspections must be scheduled at least 24 hours in advance. Upon receiving all approvals, the Permit Center will issue the Certificate of Occupancy.