



Certificate of Occupancy Checklist and Process

The purpose of the Certificate of Occupancy (C of O) is to ensure that the use of a building, structure or land in the District of Columbia conforms to the Zoning Regulations, DCMR Title 11, provisions of the DC Construction Codes, and the Green Building Act. In most cases, no person can use a building, structure or land in the District of Columbia for any purpose other than a single family dwelling, until a valid C of O has been issued. There are six (6) types of C of O applications: ownership change, use change, occupant load change, revision, temporary occupancy, and new building. For new buildings, there are three (3) C of O subsets: conditional, completion of core and shell, and establishment of a new occupancy.

To apply for a C of O, please complete the C of O Application and follow the directions listed below. If you propose to operate an eating establishment, please also submit the Eating Establishment Questionnaire with your Certificate of Occupancy application.

Applications seeking a change of ownership only may be applied for online here. All other applications must be submitted in person at DCRA's Permit Center that is located at 1100 4th Street SW, 2nd floor. For applications other than ownership change, please allow 10 business days for the review of your application.

If the applicant used a Third Party Agency to perform inspections, s/he must have the Third Party Agency submit inspection reports to DCRA's Third Party Program staff to review and accept. An inspection may be required prior to the approval of the C of O.

A C of O does not take the place of any license that may be required to permit you to conduct your business at the premises for which the C of O is requested. For information concerning license requirements, contact the Business Licensing Center at 1100 4th Street SW (2nd floor), by phone at 202-442-4311, via email dcra@dc.gov or visit the Business Licensing & Corporate Registration website.

Ownership Change:

Apply online and upload the following documents via the DCRA Citizen Portal.

- Copy of the current C of O for the building or lease space
- C of O Authorization Form (Required if you are starting a business in a building or on a property that already has a C of O.)
- Copy of the deed
- Copy of signed lease (In cases where a lease has not been executed, the Zoning Administrator may accept a signed letter from the property owner authorizing the applicant to secure a C of O to facilitate the transfer of the business.)

In most instances, a zoning inspection is required for nonconforming uses, apartment buildings, rental units, eating establishments, and if the current C of O was issued greater than 10 years ago. Call (202) 442-9557 and use code #745 to schedule a zoning inspection. After the inspection, it normally takes 24-48 hours before the inspection results are entered into the Department's computer system.

New Construction, Use Change, Occupant Load Change:

If a new building or addition is constructed or there is a change of use, a building permit application with plans is required to be approved, constructed and inspected prior to the approval of a C of O. A building permit may also be required to change the occupant load, as determined by the Permit Operations Division.

C of O for a new construction and load occupancy change (over 5,000 square feet) will be reviewed by District of Energy and Environment (DOEE) Stormwater Management. Failure to request a final inspection of storm water management facilities, and submittal of as-built plans of the completed storm water facility, may result in the denial of the C of O application.

Revision: If a typographical error was made in a previously issued C of O, the applicant should apply for a revision to the issued C of O. Note that no substantive changes to the use or occupancy are permitted as a revision to an issued C of O.

Temporary: For use of a building or outdoor event on a temporary basis. Conditions may be imposed as necessary and will include an expiration date. A building permit may be required prior to the issuance of a temporary C of O.

Completion of Core and Shell: A means to recognize that the core and shell of a building have been substantially and materially completed in accordance with the DC Construction Codes. It does not allow occupancy of a building. A core and shell must be obtained prior to a Conditional Certificate of Occupancy for a new building.

Conditional Occupancy: A conditional certificate of occupancy may be issued for part of the building before completion of the entire work covered by the building permit. Review the Issuance of Conditional Certificates of Occupancy Guidelines [insert link] and related checklist for more information about the application submission, review and approval process.

Follow these steps to obtain a C of O certificate:

1. Submit fully completed Application for Certificate of Occupancy (items #1-24 with the following supporting documents:
 - Copy of existing C of O Permit (does not apply for new buildings applying for the first time).
 - Copy of issued Building Permit.
 - C of O Authorization Form (required if you are starting a business in a building or on a property that already has a C of O).

2. Bring completed application, supporting documents, and application filing fee to the DCRA Permit Center (1100 4th Street SW, 2nd floor) to file the application. Upon arrival, the Permit Review Coordinator will highlight the disciplines that must review the C of O application prior to issuance.
3. Once Zoning and other disciplines review and approve, the inspections have been successfully completed and entered into DCRA's computer system, and the Third Party Program staff have accepted all inspection documents, the C of O certificate will be ready for issuance.
4. Pay issuance fee and obtain C of O certificate.