THE CITY OF HARRISONVILLE
WHERE TRADITION MEETS INNOVATION
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Opening a Business in an Existing Building – When Are Plans Required?

If you are moving into an existing commercial building, you might be wondering:

Can I just move in and start operating?
Do I need a permit or plans?
What triggers code compliance updates?

The answers depend on whether the business type is changing, if renovations are needed, and whether the building already meets code requirements.

Scenario 1: No Change in Use, No Major Work – No Plans Required

A business owner can move in and start operating without submitting plans if:
✔ The previous business was the same type (e.g., retail-to-retail, office-to-office).
✔ No structural, mechanical, plumbing, or electrical changes are needed.
✔ The building already meets the required codes for occupancy, accessibility, fire safety, and restrooms.

Example:
A boutique clothing store is closing, and another clothing retailer is taking over the space. Since both businesses fall under the same occupancy classification, no major work is needed, and the new tenant can operate after obtaining an Occupancy Permit and a Business License.

What's Required?
• Occupancy Inspection & Business License – The city does require an inspection before approving occupancy to ensure fire safety, exits, restrooms, and accessibility are compliant. No inspection will be conducted for home occupations.
• Fire Department Approval

****Important Note**: Even if no construction is needed, some older buildings may still need minor upgrades (e.g., new exit signs, emergency lighting, or ADA-compliant door hardware) before occupancy is approved.

Scenario 2: Change of Use or Occupancy Classification – Plans Required
When the business type is different from the previous tenant, plans and permits are required. This is because the new use may have different building, fire, plumbing, electrical, or accessibility requirements.

Examples of a Change of Use:

Previous Business	New Business	Why Are Plans Needed?
Office	Salon	Increased plumbing for sinks, ventilation requirements
Retail	Restaurant	Additional fire suppression, commercial kitchen exhaust, grease trap
Warehouse	Gym	Higher occupancy load, additional exits, structural review for gym equipment

Why Are Plans Required?
A change in use can trigger code compliance updates for:
• Occupancy classification (e.g., from a low-risk office to a high-occupancy gym).
• Fire protection (e.g., adding sprinklers, alarms, or additional exits).
• ADA compliance (e.g., installing ramps, accessible restrooms, or modifying doorways).
• Plumbing, electrical, or mechanical systems (e.g., commercial kitchen hood ventilation, additional sinks).
• Reconfiguration of space.

What's Required?
• Code Analysis Report – Prepared by an architect or engineer to determine required upgrades.
• Plans & Permit Application – Plans must be submitted for review under the 2018 IEBC and applicable codes.
• Inspections – City inspectors will verify compliance before issuing the final Occupancy Permit.

Example:
A retail clothing store is being converted into a coffee shop. This triggers:
• A higher occupancy classification (public seating area).
• The need for ADA-compliant restrooms.
• A requirement for a grease interceptor for coffee grounds.
• Ventilation and fire suppression for any cooking equipment.

Since these changes affect safety, plumbing, and fire code compliance, plans must be submitted and approved before work begins.

Scenario 3: Renovations, Alterations, or Additions – Plans Required
Even if the business type stays the same, plans must be submitted if the building is being modified.

Examples of Work That Requires Plans:
• Structural Changes – Moving or adding walls, modifying the roof, or expanding the building.
• Plumbing & Electrical Upgrades – Adding restrooms, sinks, new electrical panels, or outlets.
• HVAC & Ventilation Changes – Installing new ductwork, exhaust fans, or mechanical equipment.
• Fire Safety Upgrades – Adding fire alarms, sprinklers, or emergency exits.
• Reconfiguration of space.

What's Required?
• Architectural & Engineering Plans – Required for significant alterations.
• Building Permit – Must be approved before any construction begins.
• Trade Permits – Separate permits are required for electrical, plumbing, and mechanical work.
• Inspections – City inspections throughout the construction process.

Example:
A hair salon moves into a former office space. Even though the use is similar, the salon requires:
• Additional plumbing for shampoo stations.
• Ventilation for chemical fumes.
• ADA-compliant restrooms and doorways.
These modifications require plans, permits, and inspections before opening.

Scenario 4: Minor Work – May Not Require Full Plans

If the business is only making cosmetic changes or small-scale updates, full plans may not be necessary, but a permit may still be required.

Examples: Minor Work That May Only Require a Permit,
• Replacing flooring, paint, ceiling tiles, or non-structural finishes.
• Installing or replacing light fixtures, outlets, or switches.

What's Required?
• Permit Application – Required for electrical, plumbing, or HVAC work.
• Inspection – Required to ensure compliance.

Example:
A new office tenant wants to replace flooring, install new light fixtures, and repaint the space. Since no structural work is involved, they only need an electrical permit for the light installation, but no full plans are required.

Quick Summary: Do I Need Plans?

Scenario	Plans Required?	Permit Required?	Notes
Moving in, no changes, same use	❌ No	✅ Occupancy	Building and Fire will conduct an occupancy inspection.
Changing business type/use	✅ Yes	✅ Yes	Code compliance updates may be triggered.
Renovating, removing, or adding walls, plumbing, electrical, or mechanical work	✅ Yes	✅ Yes	Full review and permits required.
Minor interior updates (paint, flooring, light fixtures, small partitions)	❌ No	✅ Possibly	Some trade work may need a permit

Review Municipal Ordinance Article XXIII Land Use Applications and Procedures for sitework and exterior updates to existing buildings. https://ecode360.com/28052326#28052326