

Obtain a CO for An Existing School Building

Information Sheet

Scope

This document describes the process to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy for an existing school without plans.

Background

Certificates of Occupancy (CO) were not required in Philadelphia until a revision of the Philadelphia Building Code became effective on June 30, 1969. That code, and subsequent codes, only required that a CO be issued for the erection of a new building, an addition to a building, or a change in occupancy group.

[Code Bulletin No. A-1301, Certificates of Occupancy for Existing Uncertified Buildings](#), outlines the requirements to obtain a CO for a building or use legally established prior to 1969.

This Department receives frequent requests for COs for existing school buildings that were erected and established prior to 1969. Complete floor plans are typically required for a CO application; however, the owner may not have complete floor plans for these older buildings and given the size, it can be challenging to reproduce. The Department will waive the requirement for construction documents for these buildings provided that it can be demonstrated that the requirements of the Philadelphia Construction and Occupancy Code are satisfied.

Permit Application Procedure

1. Determine if there is a CO on file for the school building. Refer to the Department's [web page](#) for information on getting a copy of a CO. If no CO exists, proceed to Step 2.
2. Verify the official Office of Property Assessment (OPA) address used for permit records through the City's property search tool, [Atlas](#). The mailing address of the school may be different from the OPA address used for Department records.
3. Prepare a building summary that includes the following information:
 - [Building Information](#). The following information must be provided:
 - Construction Type, as defined under Chapter 6 of the International Building Code
 - The number of floors in the building
 - The gross floor area per floor
 - [Fire Protection Systems](#). Identify existing fire protection systems:
 - Sprinkler systems (and location)
 - Standpipes
 - Fire Alarm Systems
4. Initiate a Certificate of Occupancy permit application through [eCLIPSE](#) or complete a [paper application](#).
 - If filing electronically, do not SUBMIT the application. Once all of the required fields have been completed, schedule an appointment to make application.

5. [Make a virtual or in-person appointment](#) with Permit Services to file the application. The permit application includes a \$100 filing fee.

Review Times & Permit Fees

The application will be reviewed within 5 business days. Upon approval of the permit application, the applicant will be notified to pay the balance of the [CO fee](#).

Permit Inspection Requirements

Once the application is approved and the permit fee is paid, the permit holder must follow the instructions on the permit to schedule an inspection.

The Building Inspector will verify that the conditions are consistent with the approved permit documents and the applicable requirements of the Philadelphia Fire Code.

A CO will be issued after the building passes final inspection.

Additional Notes

Assembly spaces with more than 50 people (i.e. auditoriums, gymnasiums, cafeterias) require a [Lawful Occupancy](#) (LO) posting. If an LO is not available in Atlas, a separate application and plans will be required. Please refer to the [Code Solution - Reissue of Lawful Occupancy Signs](#) for more information.