

**TAYLOR**  
**ARCHITECTS INC**

## ***Navigating Building Codes for Construction Projects***

**Why consulting with an architect early in the process can help your project be completed faster and more profitable.**

### **Introduction:**

Embarking on a construction project can be an exciting experience, as well it should be. Unfortunately, and too often, projects can be interrupted or derailed by lack of planning and lack of understanding the requirements instituted by local and state authorities; especially as related to building codes and laws that impact all projects. We have seen on numerous occasions an owner or developer that knows what they want or need to have constructed and just starts the process without considering the building codes and laws that impact all aspects of any project; only to have the local or state building commissioner shut down the project for either not going through the proper process, or even worse, constructing something that is not code compliant and needs corrective work. Our goal is to help you avoid setbacks or even demolition of new construction so that you can save time, money, and headache related to this type of situation. And in less severe situations, when construction has not started yet, we want to make the planning of your project smoother so that even this early stage, the project moves forward in a positive manner.



### **The Basic Codes:**

Most projects fit into one of two categories; a commercial, class 1 structure that has to comply with the appropriate building code; or a residential project that has to comply with a different and specific code for that type of structure. Though there are a few class 2 structures such as agricultural buildings and small out buildings that are not typically occupied by people, the codes tend to focus on the other classifications in order to protect the people that use them. Each project type has a different process and a different set of requirements needed to obtain a building permit.

A residential project includes structures for the permanent dwelling of one or two families. In fact, the current Residential Code used to be called the One & Two Family Dwelling Code. Though there are code requirements for these structures that dictate things like doors, windows, stairs, room sizes, energy compliance, and structural integrity, the residential code is much more lenient than the commercial code and an architect is not required to produce drawings for these projects. The owner and/or the contractor can simply take the plans to the local building commissioner's office to obtain the required permits.

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The remaining content of this document will focus on the commercial building code and some basic information that you need to understand as you prepare for a new construction, renovation, restoration, adaptive use, or change of occupancy to a class 1 structure. A class 1 structure, in general, is any building that will be occupied or otherwise used in any part by any of the following:

- open to the public,
- has three or more tenants
- has one or more persons acting as an employee of another

Class 1 structures must comply with the adopted building code for that state, local ordinances, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the state energy code, and the related mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and fire codes.

All class 1 structures are then classified by 'Occupancy Group' and 'Construction Type' based on how they will be used and how they will be constructed. The bulk of the code requirements for each building is based on how these Occupancy Groups and Construction Types are classified. Understanding this basic premise is a critical part of the planning for any project.

In addition, most renovations, additions, adaptive use, and new facility construction projects for class 1 projects have to be submitted for state agency review incorporating

drawings and specifications generated by a licensed architect.

The state agency 'Design Release' (or approval) is then taken by the owner or the contractor to the local building commissioner to obtain the building permit and the construction can begin.

CONSTRUCTION DESIGN RELEASE		Project number	Release date
State Form 41191 (R016-98)			05/04/15
Report Printed on: May 4, 2015		Construction type	Occupancy classification
		V.S. SPK	I-2, REM
		Scope of release	
		ARCH ELEC	
		PLUM	
		Type of release	
		Standard	
		Project name	
		Street address	
		City	County

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The plans, specifications and application submitted for the above referenced project have been reviewed for compliance with the applicable rules of the Fire Prevention and Building Safety Commission. The project is released for construction subject to, but not necessarily limited to, the conditions listed below. THIS IS NOT A BUILDING PERMIT. All required local permits and licenses must be obtained prior to beginning construction work. All construction work must be in full compliance with all applicable State rules. Any changes in the released plans and/or specifications must be filed with and released by this Office before any work is altered. This release may be suspended or revoked if it is determined to be issued in error, in violation of any rules of the Commission or if it is based on incorrect or insufficient information. This release shall expire by limitation, and become null and void, if the work authorized is not commenced within one (1) year from the above date.

**CONDITIONS:**

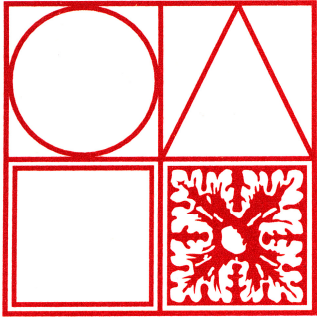
## How is your project affected by the codes?



Will your project need a sprinkler system? How many exits are required? Where do the exits have to be placed? Where do windows have to be placed and how big do they have to be? Will the corridors need to be built using fire rated construction? What is the maximum length of dead end corridors? How many watts of lighting are you allowed for your offices, restrooms, lobbies, conference rooms, etc? What 'R-value' is required for your walls, roofs, foundations? Can wood studs be used

or are metal studs required? Where will storm water be detained or how will it be managed? What efficiency rating is required for your heating and cooling system? These are just a few of the questions that need addressed early in the design process so that as your design develops, reworking the plan is limited and surprises are avoided. Working with an architect early in the process pays off in many ways. Working with an architect that really understands the building code's impact on the design is invaluable. The architect with the lowest fee does not always pay off in the long run as the project develops and the implications of the codes are realized and changes have to be made that cost time and money long term.

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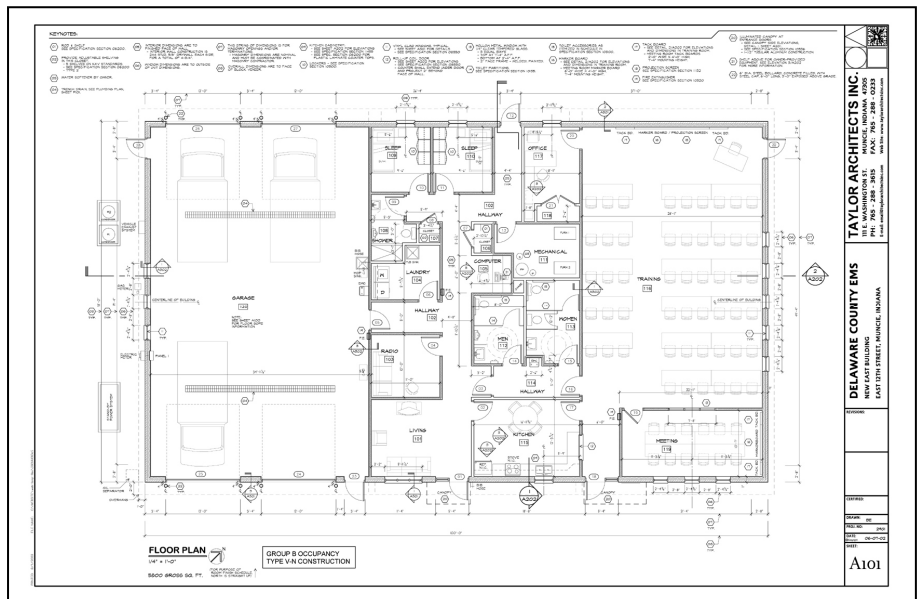
## How do the codes and getting permits impact the process and costs?

We have seen so many projects get stopped and redirected because the answer to this question was not understood. And, unfortunately for the project owner or developer, the answer is: "It depends on the project".

This is where having an architect that understands the process and is willing to direct the steps in a way that is sensitive to the owner's plans is critical. The process for getting permits is different for a small renovation that maintains the current occupant than it is for a large addition or a new facility. However, even a small renovation that changes the occupant has to go through the same process as a new building. Earlier in this document we mentioned that all buildings are assigned an 'Occupancy Group'. If that occupancy designation will be changed, then the project has to be filed with the state agency and comply with the codes as if it were a new building. That process is longer and more complicated than say, an office renovation where a few offices are converted into a conference room for the same occupant. Then, a local permit may be the only requirement.

*Whether or not a project has to be submitted to the state review agency has a significant impact on the amount of time and service required by the architect, and therefore impacts the architect's fee and time needed to obtain permits.*

A state agency review for any size project requires a complete set of drawings (including site plans, floor plans, schedules, construction details, building elevations, mechanical / electrical / plumbing plans, and energy compliance document), an architect's submission of the drawings, and an understanding that the review can take weeks to be completed. These requirements are the same for a small renovation as they are for a larger, more complex renovation, addition, or new structure. That is why an architect's fee for a small project is often not much different than it is for a larger project. The amount of work needed to obtain the state agency approval is the similar for both projects.



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### **Sprinkler Systems:**

An automatic fire suppression system, or sprinkler system requirement as part of any construction project is becoming more and more prevalent for lots of reasons. One, they make buildings safer. Two, many owners get better insurance rates when sprinkler systems are installed. And three, the building codes; which are ever evolving, are requiring sprinkler systems in more and more situations than ever. In addition, sprinkler system installation can be used to offset other building code requirements that would otherwise be costly and time consuming. We have many owners that are choosing to install sprinkler systems rather than be forced to install fire walls, fire dampers, fire-rated doors and windows and other expensive components because the building code allows the sprinkler system use to avoid these other requirements in many situations.

The other thing that owners and/or developers need to know is that drawings and state approvals for sprinkler systems cannot be submitted by architects; but can only be submitted by approved sprinkler system installation companies. Therefore, knowing how this process works and the impact that obtaining those approvals has on the cost and time related to a project is an important step in planning the development of a project.

### **Project construction:**

Once a permit has been issued and construction begins, the architect is required by the state law to observe the construction and make sure that the project is built in general compliance with the approved drawings and that any changes along the way are also code compliant. The contractor is always responsible for the project schedule and the means and methods of construction, so having a good contractor is also critical to the success of any project. The architect has to work in partnership with the state and local compliance agencies to protect the health, wealth, and life safety of the public in addition to protecting the owner and the owner's investment. The construction process is not perfect and unexpected issues will always develop; but building a team of owner, contractor, and architect early in the process can certainly help to make the process better.

### **Summary:**

The building codes play an important part in the planning of any project. A licensed architect is required to submit drawings for all class 1 projects that need state agency review. But, more importantly, an architect can help guide the process from beginning to end to make sure the project progresses



smoothly. Teaming the architect with a good contractor will help minimize changes and delays, saving you the owner time and money. And that is always exciting.

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