

Tenant Improvements



Businesses in Coquitlam provide jobs, sell products and offer services that benefit the city and its residents. This brochure is designed to help business owners learn more about tenant improvements, what they are and what permits and inspections are required to undertake them.

Tenant Improvements

What is a tenant improvement and when is a building permit required?

Are you a business owner, or do you lease space and plan to make changes to the building? That is a tenant improvement.

A tenant improvement is any construction or alteration of a commercial, industrial or multi-residential building — interior or exterior — and it requires a building permit from the City of Coquitlam. Here are a few examples:

- Adding a mezzanine or storey within an existing space
- Installing or modifying a commercial kitchen exhaust system
- Changing the interior layout or exterior of a building
- Re-piping or other plumbing changes
- Making modifications to the sprinkler system, or any fire protection or safety systems, including replacing the fire alarm panel
- Adding or changing racking or shelving
- Changing the use of a business or its potential number of occupants

Can you carry out improvements on your own?

If your business is leasing space, you need permission from the owner of your building to view any plans on file for the building and apply for a building permit. You must provide an Agent Authorization Form for Permit Application or File Access to view and make copies of the plans at City Hall. For more information, contact the Building Permits Division at 604-927-3441 or permits@coquitlam.ca.

Planning and Development Approval

You may also require Planning and Development Department approval if you are making alterations that include:

- Changing the use of the business (e.g., from industrial use to office use)
- Adding floor area to the building including mezzanines
- Adding seats to a restaurant
- Modifying the exterior of a building
- Altering the parking layout or landscaping plan
- Altering or adding new signage mounted on the building exterior, or on a free-standing structure

For more information, contact the Planning and Development at 604-927-3430 or developmentplanning@coquitlam.ca.

Inspections

If the work you're doing requires a building and/or plumbing permit, it will also require inspections performed by City Building and Plumbing Officials. For more information, visit the City's website at coquitlam.ca/inspections and review the FAQs.

Fees

You will pay an Application Fee when you apply for your building permit. For information on how fees are calculated and when they must be paid, contact the Building Permits Division at **604-927-3441** or permits@coquitlam.ca.

The BC Building Code

The **BC Building Code** applies to all buildings, regardless of their age. If you have questions about how the Building Code applies to your tenant improvements, you should discuss the details with an architect, designer or other registered professional. You can also contact staff in Coquitlam's Building Permits Division at **604-927-3441** or permits@coquitlam.ca.



Any tenant improvements must conform to the requirements of the BC Building Code and to any applicable City of Coquitlam bylaws and zoning regulations. This guide does not include all of the requirements of the Code and City bylaws; rather, it is an overview. As always, you should consult registered professionals and the City to determine your tenant improvement will meet all requirements.



Mezzanine Structures

What is a mezzanine structure?

A mezzanine is a floor erected between the floor and ceiling in a single storey of a building; examples include an interior balcony or a partial floor overlooking the floor below.

The **BC Building Code** considers a mezzanine an additional storey if:

- It covers more than 40% of the horizontal space of the floor below it
- It is not visually open to the floor space below
- More than 10% of the area above the floor below is enclosed

An enclosed mezzanine is not considered to be a second storey if its total area is less than 10% of the room or floor space that it occupies. A mezzanine must comply with **requirements for fire exits** in the BC Building Code and you should consult the Code before beginning any design or construction of a mezzanine.

Who can build a mezzanine?

Businesses planning to build a mezzanine on their premises, whether rented or owned, must hire professionals to:

- Prepare drawings for their application
- Design the structure to the requirements of the BC Building Code
- Build the structure; this includes using a certified trade contractor licensed in the City of Coquitlam as well as licensed trades

What you'll need in your permit application

In order to apply for a building permit to construct a mezzanine, you will need to provide the City with:

- A list of all items, including products for sale and business supplies, that will be stored on the mezzanine (e.g., flammable materials)
- Certification from a professional engineer that the structural slab below is adequate to support the mezzanine and any goods that will be stored on it
- Notes from a professional engineer that specify issues such as seismic zone, load requirements, etc.
- Plans showing clear access to exit pathways and exit doors, exit signs and emergency lighting layout, plus minimum aisle widths
- Details of the sprinkler system (further submissions may be required from a fire protection engineer to demonstrate adequate sprinkler coverage is provided)

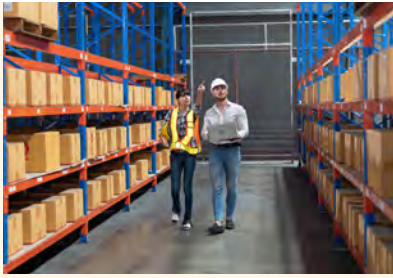
For a more complete list of requirements, review the **Mezzanine Structures Guide** at coquitlam.ca/builldocs or contact Coquitlam's Building Permits Division at **604-927-3441** or permits@coquitlam.ca.

Racking

What is racking?

Racking is shelving, in a commercial building, that is:

- 8'6" tall or higher and 30" or more in depth; or
- two or more shelving units back to back and up to 8'6" tall but have a combined depth of more than 30" (unless the shelving units are separated by non-combustible construction or a minimum of 6" of empty space)



Any storage that qualifies as racking is considered a structure and, therefore, requires a building permit whether the racking is pre-built or assembled on site, and whether it's moveable or fixed in place.

Racking Systems and the BC Building Code

A racking system may have an impact on the building's compliance with the **BC Building Code** so it's important you hire a professional such as an engineer. Issues such as load-bearing capacity, seismic loading, exits and sprinkler protection must all be considered when you prepare an application for a racking system building permit.

Earthquakes: Are you safe?

Coquitlam is located in an active earthquake zone and racking can pose a major safety risk if a building is subjected to seismic activity. A registered professional will be able to design and review a racking system to ensure it complies with acceptable standards.

What if you only have shelving?

Storage units less than 8'6" tall and 30" deep are considered shelving and don't require a building permit for installation. But if Coquitlam Fire Services Inspectors see that storage of anything on the shelving presents an undue hazard, you will have to apply for a building permit. Even if you have shelving and not racking, you should secure your shelving to the floor or a wall, and/or add diagonal bracing.

What you'll need in your permit application

To apply for a building permit to install or build racking, you must provide the City with:

- Professional drawings of the proposed racking
- Information that shows the racking will comply with the BC Building Code and all City of Coquitlam bylaws and regulations
- A list of all items that will be stored on the racks
- Certification from a professional engineer that the structural slab is adequate to support both the racking system and the items to be stored on it as well as notes regarding structural/seismic issues
- Plans showing exit signs, pathways and doors as well as emergency lighting

For more details on requirements, read the **Racking Guide** at coquitlam.ca/builddocs. You may also contact the Building Permits Division at 604-927-3441 or permits@coquitlam.ca.

Fast Tracks

Let's make this quick: If your tenant improvements will take place in an office or retail space, and they aren't too extensive or expensive, you may be able to get a City of Coquitlam Fast Track Permit. Here are some, but not all, of the requirements for your tenant improvements to be considered for a Fast Track Permit:

- No change in occupancy use (e.g., from retail to industrial)
- No net increase or decrease in the floor area of the unit or the building
- No external modifications or minor external modifications totalling less than \$150,000 in construction value
- Minor changes only to plumbing, such as replacing existing fixtures

For more details on what is and isn't eligible for this permit, check out the **Tenant Improvements — Fast Tracks Guide** at coquitlam.ca/builddocs.

Cooking Exhaust Systems



Are you starting a food establishment, changing a kitchen setup or kitchen equipment? Any businesses with commercial kitchens need City-approved kitchen ventilation and fire protection systems to safely remove grease-laden vapours, prevent grease build-up and avoid fires.

Commercial cooking equipment must have an exhaust system that complies with all the equipment and performance standards of NFPA 96. You must: have the right kitchen ventilation and fire protection equipment for the type of food you cook (e.g., do those foods produce smoke or grease-laden vapours?); and clean and maintain your equipment regularly. As well, depending on the menu, you may need to install or upgrade your kitchen ventilation, fire protection equipment and fire alarm panel. For details on requirements, go to the **Commercial Cooking Exhaust Systems Guide** at coquitlam.ca/builddocs.

Washroom Requirements



In the case of restaurants, the larger the establishment, the more washrooms you must provide. For instance, if you have up to 10 public seats, you'll need one washroom that is unisex/accessible equipped; if your restaurant has 11 to 30 seats, you must provide two washrooms, which can be gender-specific and accessible or a mix of gender-specific and unisex/accessible. You must also post a sign in your restaurant indicating the total occupant load (including staff). See Sentence 3.1.2.6.(3) of the **BC Building Code** for design criteria for required the sign. Ministry of Health requirements may also apply. For details on requirements, go to the **Washroom and Fire Separation for Restaurants Guide** at coquitlam.ca/builddocs.

Accessibility

Within a public washroom, you must provide enough space that people using wheelchairs can move freely to and from accessible fixtures such as toilets and sinks. The BC Building Code requires accessible washroom stalls to allow a user to transfer from a wheelchair to a toilet, and that there be grab bars installed to aid with that transfer. For details on requirements, go to the [Accessible Washroom Designs Guide](https://coquitlam.ca/builddocs) at coquitlam.ca/builddocs.



Plumbing

Tenant improvements that propose any removals, additions or alterations to the plumbing system require a plumbing permit application. Plumbing permit applications for tenant improvements require drawings identifying the water pipe sizes and loads, drainage sizes, loads and slope, vent terminals and all connections to base building or any other associated plumbing work being proposed. For details on requirements, go to the [Plumbing Permit Application](https://coquitlam.ca/builddocs) and [Plumbing Permit Checklist](https://coquitlam.ca/builddocs) at coquitlam.ca/builddocs.



Occupant Load Changes

If you own an establishment that serves liquor and want to change the occupant load of your business (i.e. the number of people allowed in the business at any given time). You must provide floor plans showing:



- Seating layouts of each area with maximum number of seating shown for all other rooms, washrooms and patios
- Standing space clearly delineated
- All occupant load numbers clearly labelled on the plan and in a summary table (i.e., seating, standing, staff, occupant load numbers)

For details on requirements, go to the [Occupant Load Changes for Liquor Establishments Guide](https://coquitlam.ca/builddocs) at coquitlam.ca/builddocs.

Fire Alarm Equipment

Fire alarm systems experience wear and tear, and will, over time, require repair or replacement so they continue to operate safely and in accordance with the [BC Fire Code](https://coquitlam.ca/builddocs). The most important component of a fire alarm system is the control unit and these units, along with related components, sometimes need replacement. If you apply to replace a control system, you must provide a document from an Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of British Columbia (ASTTBC) certified fire protection technician or professional engineer with qualifications in electrical systems, and the replacement must conform with the procedures listed in the Fire Alarm System Control Unit Replacement Policy.



Any tenant improvements that propose any addition, removal or alteration to the fire suppression system will require drawings to identify all new or relocated sprinkler heads, sizes and connections to the existing system. As well, additions to the system demand will require a professional engineer to provide calculations when there is an increased hazard classification, added zones or changes to the most demanding sprinkler. For details on requirements, go to the [Fire Alarm Equipment Replacement Guide](https://coquitlam.ca/builddocs) at coquitlam.ca/builddocs.

Common Oversights

Common shortcomings that can delay the permitting process even for Fast Track Permits include:

- Drawings are incomplete or not co-ordinated between different professionals
- Site plans are missing or they don't have information such as unit or building number, address or parking requirements
- Architect or engineer drawings submitted without the seal of a registered professional
- BC Building Code shortcomings, such as insufficient exits, absence of emergency lighting and exit signs, and of required accessible change rooms

Checklist

Use the [Tenant Improvement Checklist](https://coquitlam.ca/builddocs) at coquitlam.ca/builddocs to ensure you have all you need to proceed with design, permit applications and work on your tenant improvements.

Stay Up-to-date on Business News

To receive information the City of Coquitlam to support to your business, subscribe to [Coquitlam Business E-News](https://coquitlam.ca/builddocs) at coquitlam.ca/notifyme.

Business LinQ: Your One-stop Business Resource Centre

The Business LinQ service at City Hall provides free information and resources to Coquitlam businesses on topics such as:

- Regulations for the Temporary Outdoor Space Expansion Program
- Requirements to start and operate a business in Coquitlam
- City services and programs that support businesses

The Business LinQ resource centre is located on the main floor at City Hall; you can make an appointment or drop in at Business LinQ Monday to Friday between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

- coquitlam.ca/businesslinq
- businesslinq@coquitlam.ca
- 604-927-3975

For information on many City services and transactions, visit coquitlam.ca/eservices.

Documents and Links

The City of Coquitlam's [Document Library](https://coquitlam.ca/builddocs) has checklists, application forms, agent authorization forms as well as other guides that a business owner needs to make a successful building permit application for tenant improvements. Visit coquitlam.ca/builddocs to view these other materials.