

# BUILDING & ZONING TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

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DEPARTMENT OF BUILDING  
AND ZONING SERVICES

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## Contents

<b>BUILDING TERMS &amp; DEFINITIONS</b> .....	1
<b>ZONING TERMS &amp; DEFINITIONS</b> .....	7
<b>ENGINEERING TERMS &amp; DEFINITIONS</b> .....	10

## BUILDING TERMS & DEFINITIONS

**Accessory Structure** – building, the use of which is incidental to that of the dwelling(s) and which is located on the same lot as the ‘primary’ structure, e.g., shed, garage

**Addition** – extension or increase in the floor area or height of a building or structure.

**After-Hours Inspection** – request for an inspection to be performed outside of normal business hours. After hour inspections are performed from 5:00 p.m. and 5:30 a.m. between days of business.

**Advanced Construction Start** – a certificate to start construction prior to the issuance of a building permit, available to begin some work prior to plan approval; work to be performed at applicant’s own risk; can also be issued for initial mitigation or investigatory purposes as a response to an unsafe condition.

**Air Admittance Valve (AAV)** - device used instead of traditional vent piping in plumbing work.

**Alteration** – any modifications or changes made to an existing structure or building which require one or more inspections.

**Ampere** – size of the main breaker or fuse that is being installed. This will be indicated on the breaker or fuses as a numerical quantity such as 200, 150, 100, etc.

**Automatic Fire Alarm System** – combination of devices that do not include a Manual Pull Station or any other means of manual activation.

**Board of Review – General and Home Improvement Contractors** - group appointed by department director; responsible for reviewing license applications for the trades of **Home Improvement (General or Limited)** and **Demolition Contractors**; also responsible for overseeing complaints filed against city-registered **General Contractors** or **Demolition Contractors** and city-licensed **Home Improvement (General or Limited) Contractors**.

**Building Compliance Section (BCS)** – a team that investigates reports of unsafe buildings, including those damaged by fire, vehicle impacts, weather events, and through deterioration and neglect. Other investigations include violations of the building code such as working without permits, occupying without a certificate of occupancy, and working as an unlicensed contractor.

**Building Services Piping** – All piping systems and their component parts that are part of a building system. Including, but not limited to, fuel-gas piping, refrigerant piping, chilled water, water/antifreeze systems, and steam and hot water for boilers.

**Bus Duct** - grounded metal enclosure containing factory mounted busbars consisting usually of copper or aluminum. Normally installed in industrial and larger commercial projects that allows for easier distribution of electrical energy throughout the facility.

**Certificate of Occupancy** - final document issued when establishing or changing the use, signifying that a structure has received and passed all inspections required to legally occupy the structure; sets the conditions of the use and occupancy of the building, requiring the owner to use and maintain the building in accordance with the Certificate.

**Certified Address** - address assigned by the City of Columbus, in accordance with Chapter 907 of City Code for use in the construction and occupancy of a residential or commercial building within the City; this address is assigned in the interest of maintaining public safety and must be prominently displayed upon that building at all times following construction.

**Change of Occupancy** – change in the purpose or level of activity within a structure which requires a submittal, review and approval of adjusted building and site plans, as well as inspections of work performed to bring about the particular change.

**Chief Building Official (CBO)** - responsible for the enforcement of the building code and the overall administration of the State of Ohio-certified building department.

**Chief Plans Official (CPO)**-responsible for managing the activities of the Engineering Plans Review Section and coordinating the timely review and evaluation of engineering plans for public/ private development projects to ensure compliance with City codes and standards.

**Columbus Building Commission (CBC)** - seven (7) member group, appointed by the mayor, to determine the suitability of alternate materials and types of construction and to provide for reasonable interpretations of the provisions of the Columbus Building Code. Responsible for reviewing registration applications for the trade of **Special Inspector**. Members include: a practicing architect, a general building contractor, a residential home builder, a structural engineer, a mechanical engineer, a representative of building labor and a representative of building material supplies, each of whom have ample experience in their respective fields.

**Consult Inspection** – request made by an applicant to meet with an inspector at a job site to ask for the advice of, or to deliberate together, an issue involving an installation for code compliance; this special type of inspection usually occurs prior to the installation and the usual inspection request.

**Contractor License/Registration Number** – identification number issued by Building and Zoning Services to all licensed/registered general, home improvement, trade contractors and special inspectors.

**Cost of Construction** - monetary value as reported by the applicant, of the permitted work performed on a building/structure, which are recorded to provide to the US Census Bureau.

**Demolition Permit** - total removal of an existing structure to grade level (see *grade*).

**Demolition Contractor** - person registered by Columbus Building and Zoning Services Department to receive demolition permits for all types of structures.

**Disconnect** - switch used to disconnect service or appliance; safety switch.

**Electric Heat Unit** - self-contained factory unit that is being used to supply heat to a specific space or area; such as baseboard heaters, wall heaters, etc.

**Fee Schedule** – a City Council adopted ordinance which establishes the costs of all development related transactions involving various departments and divisions within the city of Columbus.

**Final Air Test / Plumbing** – test applied to the plumbing system at the final inspection after all fixtures are set.

**Fire Protection Contractor** - person certified by the State of Ohio and registered by Columbus Building and Zoning Services Department to perform work relating to fire alarm and fire suppression on all types of structures.

**Footing** – an enlargement at the bottom of a wall or column to distribute the weight of the superstructure over a greater area to prevent settling, usually concrete.

**Foundation** - the entire substructure below the first floor or grade of a building, including the footing, upon which the building/structure rests; may include a basement.

**Gas Piping** - gas connections to gas-fired appliances.

**General Contractor** - person registered by Columbus Building and Zoning Services Department to construct a **NEW** 1, 2 or 3 Family Dwelling, or perform structural work on all types of commercial buildings, including 4+ Family Dwellings.

**Grade** – the ground level surrounding any building or structure.

**Gross Sq. Ft. Working Area** – the exact size of the area, noted in total square feet, where the permitted work is being performed, reported to the US Census Bureau, used to determine some permit costs as noted in the fee schedule

**Home Improvement Contractor** - person licensed by Columbus Building and Zoning Services Department to perform all types of structural work on an **EXISTING** 1, 2 or 3 Family Dwelling.

**Home Improvement – Limited Contractor** - person licensed by Columbus Building and Zoning Services Department to perform structural work **limited to a specific scope (ex: roofing, decks, fencing, etc.)** on an **EXISTING** 1, 2 or 3 Family Dwelling.

**HVAC** - used in reference to any heating, ventilation, air-conditioning and/or environmental air system.

**Hydronics Contractor** - person licensed by the State of Ohio Construction Industry Licensing Board and registered with Columbus Building and Zoning Services Department to perform all types of work relating to hydronic piping systems; hydronic piping systems include steam and hot water from boilers, condenser and cooling tower water, chilled water, boiler condensate and ground source heat pump loop systems.

**Inspection** - review of construction to verify that the work is being performed in accordance with the approved drawings and applicable codes.

**Industrialized Unit** - prefabricated components comprised of closed construction manufactured at a location remote from the site of intended use and transported to a building site for its subsequent use.

**In-kind repair/replacement (like-for-like)** - changes made to an existing building using similar construction or materials that were originally incorporated.

**Manual Fire Alarm System** – system that includes at least one Manual Pull Station, or any other means of manual activation.

**Manufactured Electrical Assembly** – an assembly of electrical components and cables used to distribute electrical power to multiple locations which has been listed and labeled by an approved testing agency; these assemblies are used primarily for carnivals, festivals and other special events; the assembly must be listed in its entirety.

**Maximum Capacity Card** – certificate issued for assembly occupancies denoting the maximum approved occupant load for a room or space; rooms or spaces having more than one function require additional maximum capacity designations.

**Mechanical Permit Application** – application form used for the installation of items regulated by the mechanical code; includes HVAC, refrigeration and hydronics.

**Minor Work Permit** - construction or change to a portion of a building or equipment of a minor nature that requires only one (1) 15-minute inspection to verify the completed work.

**Non-Permitted Inspection** – inspection of an existing installation/condition, not permitted for work, in order to determine code compliance.

**Partial (~~formerly Temporary~~) Certificate of Occupancy**- certificate issued by building inspector to allow conditional occupancy of a structure or portion thereof, without endangering life or public welfare, until a final Certificate of Occupancy can be issued. Area of the structure to be occupied and duration of the certificate is determined by building inspector.

**Permit Expiration** – A permit expires if work does not commence within 12 months of plan approval. Once work has commenced, there can be no delay or suspension of work for more than 6 months. Typically, inspections are used to track the commencement and continuation of work.

**Permit Extension** – Extension requests must be made in writing to [ExpiredPermits@columbus.gov](mailto:ExpiredPermits@columbus.gov) and paid for in accordance with the fee schedule. They will be approved, as allowed by code: One (1) 12-month extension is available to start work. Two (2) six-month extensions for delays or suspensions of work are also available.

**Permit Transfer** - any permit may be transferred once from one (1) address to another prior to the start of any work, or changing the name on the permit from the original contractor who obtained the permit to a new contractor; permit transfers may also be utilized to correct the address on a permit.

**Phased Construction** – type of new construction permit that allows for incremental steps (or *phases*) of construction, e.g., foundation, core and shell, fit-out, etc...

**Plan Review Only** - construction documents submitted for review and/or approval when not associated with the issuance of a building permit.

**Product Refrigeration Permit** - commercial storage for product preservation.

**Proposed Work** – description or scope of work intended for permitting.

**Receptacle** – A device installed in boxes that allows for the “plugging in” of appliances, lamps, televisions, radios, etc.

**Rehab / Repair** - remove and replace with new or repair of existing fixtures, equipment and other construction-related items.

**Relocated Structure** - any building/structure moved from one site to another.

**Replacement** - installation of a 'like-for-like' apparatus, system or fixture. Note: some items may not require a permit; the Residential Code of Ohio Section 105 and the Ohio Building Code section 105 list exempted items.

**Revision** - a change to an approved project affecting the scope of work or one which may affect building code requirements after the project has received plan approval.

**Rough In Plumbing** – all plumbing and plumbing fixtures that must be installed prior to concealment by building components and/or materials.

**Safety Switch** – switch used to disconnect electric power from equipment or appliances.

**Sales Office** - temporary utilization of a dwelling unit/part of a dwelling unit in a subdivision/community for conducting sales of other dwelling units within that same subdivision/community.

**Secure Permit** – A process to delay required repairs on a building declared unsafe, provided that the building can be secured from unauthorized entry, is structurally stable, and does not remain a hazard when secured. Valid for 90 days and renewable for up to two years, subject to the Chief Building Official.

**Self-Contained Electrical Heat** - heating system permanently wired into electrical system for heating purposes only.

**Service** - the equipment and conductors necessary to connect the serving utility company to the premises; usually constitutes the main shut off for the building or structure:

- **Temporary Service** – a service that will be in use for 90 days or the length of construction.
- **Free Standing Service** – a service that does not rely on a structure or building for its support apparatus.
- **Emergency Generator** – a generator that is being used to supply emergency egress illumination, exit sign illumination or exit discharge illumination; typically installed in commercial property.
- **Standby Generator** – a generator that is being used to supply loads not considered emergency; typically installed in homes.

**Sewer Contractor** - person licensed by Columbus Building and Zoning Services Department to perform work relating to sewers and excavation; this license is issued by the Columbus Division of Sewers and Drains.

**Shed** - a roofed one (1) story structure, open on one (1) or more sides used for storage purposes. All sheds in residential areas over 200 sq. ft. require a building permit.

**Shell** - any structure with minimal construction and mechanical work; later divided and occupied by multiple tenants/users; a *Certificate of Occupancy* is not issued for the shell portion of work.

**Sign Erectors Board** - group appointed by the director, responsible for reviewing license applications and overseeing complaints filed against a **“Sign Erector (General or Limited)”** licensed by Columbus Building and Zoning Services Department for violating Columbus City Codes.

**Sign Erector General Contractor** - person licensed by Columbus Building and Zoning Services Department to perform work relating to all types of signs – also referred to as **graphics**.

**Sign Erector Limited Contractor** - person licensed by Columbus Building and Zoning Services Department to perform work **limited to a specific scope (ex: less than 64 sq ft in area and 16 ft in height)** for signs – also referred to as **graphics**.

**Skilled Trade Review Board** - group appointed by the director, responsible for overseeing complaints filed against city-registered contractors.

**Special Inspection** - an inspection of construction requiring the expertise of an approved special inspector in order to ensure compliance with the Ohio Building Code and the approved documents. Generally speaking, it is an inspection requiring extensive knowledge, equipment or testing above what a certified building inspector or department can reasonably provide. A list of special inspections can be found in Chapter 17 of the Ohio Building Code and are listed on our Statement of Special Inspections form.

**Special Inspector** - person registered by Columbus Building and Zoning Services Department who has demonstrated competence for the inspection of a particular type of construction or operation requiring special inspection. A list of registered special inspectors can be found on our web site.

**Sub-Contractor** - licensed and city-registered contractor performing part of the scope of work for a primary licensed and city-registered contractor which has a valid permit for the same scope of work; the license and city registration requirements of the subcontracting company shall coincide with that of the primary contracting company as required to cover the particular work being subcontracted.

**Sub Panel** - a panel that receives its electrical supply from some other distribution equipment located upstream from it.

**Swimming Pool** – any structure intended for swimming or recreational bathing that is capable of a water depth over 24 inches, including in-ground, above-ground and on-ground pools, hot tubs and spas.

**Team Inspection** - concurrent inspections performed by structural, electrical, plumbing, mechanical and/or fire -- scheduled by appointment after *CBO* approval.

**Temporary Structure** - tents over 400 square feet, stages over 120 square feet or that exceed an occupant load of 10 or more persons; may also refer to membrane covers and platforms if a person may be under or on them. Permit(s) required.

**Temporary Structure Permit** - two types 1) temporary structures utilized for less than 180 days, for the purposes of sales promotions, advertising displays, and additional capacity for restaurants and bars, private or gated events 2) public events that utilize temporary structures and or temporary electrical services and are free and open to the public for five (5) consecutive days or less.

**Time Limited Occupancy** – a time limited occupancy may be issued provided: (1) there are no building code violation orders pending on the subject property, (2) it is established, after plan approval and subsequent inspection, that the proposed occupancy is not deemed to endanger public safety and welfare, (3) the *CBO* has approved the use for an alternative purpose on a temporary basis and, (4) the *CBO* has issued a *Certificate of Occupancy* indicating any special conditions under which the building can be used for the alternative purpose for the time limit specified – not to exceed 180 days.

**Transformer** - a device that transfers electric energy by increasing (stepping up) or reducing (stepping down) the voltage.

**Temporary Electric** - Non-permanent electric service (construction sites, festivals, Christmas tree lots, carnivals, etc.).

**Temporary Electric – 200+ AMPS** - nonpermanent electric service in excess of 200 amps.

**Working Without Permit Fee** - fees, charged in addition to the cost of the permit, when work has been or is being performed without first obtaining the required permit. All fees, including working without permit fees, are designated in the Fee Schedule

## **ZONING TERMS & DEFINITIONS**

**Architectural Review Commission** - when used without clarification means the historic resources commission created by Columbus City Code, Title 33 – Zoning Code (herein after referred to as C.C.) Chapter 3117, C.C., or an architectural review commission created by Chapter 3319 to Chapter 3331, C.C., inclusive, and having jurisdiction over the application.

**Area Commission** - Established to afford additional voluntary citizen participation in decision making in an advisory capacity and to facilitate communication, understanding and cooperation between neighborhood groups, city officials and developers.

**Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA)** – a 5-member, mayor-appointed board which hears and decides appeals from any persons affected by any order, requirement, decision or determination made by the director of Building and Zoning Services Department in the administration or enforcement of the Zoning Code except for those matters subject to the jurisdiction of the Graphics Commission. The board shall also hear and decide requests for special permits and variances (except for those under the jurisdiction of City Council or Graphics Commission) and any other matter upon which it is required to pass under the Zoning Code. For more information, see C.C. 3307.

**Certificate of Appropriateness (C of A)** - issued by the Architectural Review or Historic Resources Commission to an applicant stating that the proposed construction, alteration or demolition of a structure, architectural feature or listed property pursuant to the application filed is appropriate under the terms of the chapter of the Zoning Code; consistent with the architectural characteristics, guidelines and standards affecting same or due to unusual and compelling circumstances or substantial economic hardship does not require such consistency; and that, 0a permit can be issued

**Change of Use [zoning]** - any alteration in the use of a lot for zoning purposes which may entail the need for additional parking or loading facilities.

**Condominium** - a building or group of buildings, in which dwelling units, offices, or floor area are owned individually, and the structure, common areas, and facilities are owned by all the owners on a proportional, undivided basis.

**Council Variance** - a variance to allow a use that is not permitted by the underlying zoning district; City Council may also consider variances to yard, height, and parking only if in conjunction with a use variance or a rezoning.

**CZO** - Chief Zoning Official; responsible for managing zoning personnel and for ensuring that all property and structures within the boundaries of the city comply with Columbus Zoning Code.

**Development Commission** – 7-member, mayor-appointed advisory commission to the administration and City Council in matters related to zoning code changes, rezoning applications, and various planning initiatives. For more information, please see C.C. 3105.

**Downtown Commission** – a 9-member, mayor-appointed commission that hears and decides matters regarding development in the Downtown District. For more information, please see C.C. 3359.

**Dwelling** - A structure or portion thereof that is used exclusively for human habitation.

**Dwelling Unit** - a single, self-contained unit providing independent living facilities for one (1) or more individuals and which contains eating, living, sanitary and sleeping areas and one (1) cooking facility, all for exclusive use by the occupants. This definition does not apply to units in dormitories, homeless shelters, hotels, motels or other buildings designed for transients.

**Easement** – a grant of one or more of the property rights by a property owner for use by the public, a corporation, or another person or entity.

**Flood Plain (also Special Flood Hazard Area)** - a river or other watercourse and its adjacent area subject to inundation by the “base flood”, i.e., a flood having a one (1) percent chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year. The base flood may also be referred to as the one hundred (100) year-flood. A “Special Flood Hazard Area” is also known as a “flood plain” or “100 year flood plain” and is composed of the “floodway” and the “floodway fringe.” Special Flood Hazard Areas are designated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency as either Zone A, AE, AH, AO, A1-30, or A99.

**Frontage** – side of a lot abutting on a street; the front lot line.

**Front Yard** – area located between the front lot line and the building on the lot nearest to the front lot line extending between one (1) side lot line and the other side lot line.

**Graphics Commission** – a 7-member, mayor-appointed commission that hears and decides appeals from any persons by an order, requirement, decision or determination made by the director of Building and Zoning Services Department in the administrative or enforcement of the Graphics Code and also hears and decides requests for special permits, graphics plans and/ or variances from the city’s graphics code. For more information, please see *Article XV – City Graphics Code*.

**Graphic** - any communication designed to be seen from any public place utilizing letters, words, numbers, symbols, pictures, color, illumination, geometric, or nongeometric shapes or planes, in whole or part, including all structural components. The term graphic specifically includes the terms sign, architectural decoration, mural, sculpture, show window display, outline lighting, and banner.

**Lot** - a parcel of land occupied or designed to be occupied as a unit by one (1) building, one (1) apartment complex, one (1) multiple dwelling development, or one (1) commercial complex and the accessory buildings or uses customarily incident to it, if any, including such open spaces as are required by this Zoning Code and such open spaces as are arranged and designed to be used in connection with such building or buildings. Such lot shall be of record in the appropriate county recorder’s office.

**Lot Line** - line of demarcation between properties either public or private.

**Lot Split** – the division of a lot or parcel into two (2) or more lots or parcels.

**Minimum Side Yard Required** - area of the side yard (see Side Yard) that must be open and unobstructed from grade to sky as regulated by C.C.3332.24, 3332.25, 3332.26, 3332.28, 3333.21, 3333.22, 3333.23, 3333.25.

**Nonconforming Building** - a building erected legally but does not comply with subsequently enacted zoning regulations for the district in which it is located.

**Nonconforming Graphic** - a graphic erected legally but does not comply with subsequently enacted provisions of the Graphics Code.

**Nonconforming Use** - a use which was initiated legally but which does not comply with subsequently enacted regulations of the use district in which it is situated.

**Overlay** – also used in various forms such as Zoning Overlay, Planning Overlay, Limited Overlay, Commercial Overlay, etc. Overlays may increase, decrease, supplement, or add conditions to the minimum development standards of the underlying zoning district or use.

**Parcel** - a contiguous lot or tract of land owned and recorded as the property of the same person(s) or controlled by a single entity.

**Planning Overlays/Impact Districts** - additional development standards over those contained in specially-designated zoning districts within a unique part of the city.

**Plat** - a map or site plan of all or a portion of a subdivision of land which identifies the location, design, and configuration of individual properties, setbacks, streets, utilities, storm water controls, and other infrastructure details.

**Rear Yard** - area located between the rear lot line and the rear surface or surfaces of the principal building on the lot extending between one (1) side lot line and the other side lot line.

**Rezoning** - a change of the zoning classification of particular lots or parcels of land; Rezoning is also known as “amending the zoning map” and can be approved only in ordinance form by City Council after receiving a recommendation at a public hearing of the Development Commission.

**Right-of-Way** - general term denoting land, property or the interest therein, usually in the configuration of a strip, acquired for or devoted to transportation purposes. When used in this context, right of way includes the roadway, shoulders or berm, sidewalks, ditches and slopes extending to the right-of-way limits under the control of the state or local authority.

**Setback** - the minimum distance of a specified physical feature from a property line or street right-of-way. The minimum setbacks in a zoning ordinance may define the building's placement (or location) and establish the required yards -- front, rear and side. The zoning ordinance also indicates what may be permitted in which yards: parking, fences, accessory buildings, patios, etc.

**Side Yard** - area located between a side lot line and the building nearest to that lot line extending from the front yard to the rear yard. In the event there is no front yard, the side yard extends to the front lot line; in the event there is no rear yard, the side yard extends to the rear lot line.

**Special Permit** – permit required by the Board of Zoning Adjustment for specified uses due to unique characteristics relative to location, design, size, operation, circulation or need for public services; and to provide supplemental criteria.

**Use Variance** – a variance to allow a use that is not permitted by the underlying zoning district (see *Council Variance*).

**University Area Review Board** – a 7-member, mayor-appointed board that hears development related concerns in the University Overlay/Impact Areas. For more information, please see *C.C. 3111.07 and C.C. 3372.504*.

**Variance** - permission to depart from the minimum development standards of the zoning code. (see Board of Zoning Adjustment and Council Variance)

**Zoning** - delineation of districts and the establishment of regulations governing the use, placement, spacing, and size of land and buildings.

**Zoning Clearance** - determination that an application is in conformity with the provisions of the Zoning Code or as permitted by a variance, special permit, or decision from an appeal. A “certificate of zoning clearance” is required and shall be obtained prior to the construction or alteration of any building or structure; the establishment, change, or modification in the use of any building, structure or land; or the grading, excavating or filling of land.

## **ENGINEERING TERMS & DEFINITIONS**

**CC Plan** – a stormwater management or sanitary sewer plan.

**E Plan** – a plan for constructing items within the right-of-way; also known as a street construction plan.

**Site Compliance Plan** – a plan routed to various city agencies to review for compliance with applicable standards; previously known as a zoning clearance plan.