

Existing Commercial Building Submittals

The PA Uniform Construction Code provides several methods for dealing with alterations and additions to existing structures. The two options are Chapter 34 Existing Structures of the International Building Code and the International Existing Building Code.

The design professional must clearly indicate on the plans which of the two options are being utilized. It may be one or the other but not both. In addition the design professional is required to provide one set of the most recently approved plans for the existing structure along with the permit submittal. These plans may be obtained from the municipality or from the Department of Labor and Industry when applicable.

If no previously approved plans can be found the building is then deemed an **Uncertified Structure** and a building assessment must be done for Fire and Life safety as well as Accessibility. Minimum Fire and Life safety requirements will review fire extinguishers, means of egress, emergency lighting, exit signage, and fire protection systems. ABI will meet with your design professional on site as a consultant to walk through the structure and offer opinions based upon the conditions visible during the site visit. A minimum fee of \$300 payable to ABI will be required prior to commencing the walkthrough. Be advised that the full determination of all code requirements will only be completed with a thorough and detailed plan submission! It is virtually impossible to note all possible issues during a cursory walkthrough of the property.

In addition to minimum fire and life safety items the accessibility issues to be addressed for an **Uncertified Structure**, if an alteration to an area of primary function occurs, shall, at a minimum include one van accessible handicap parking space, an accessible route to an accessible building entrance, an accessible route within the building to the area(s) of primary function, an accessible sales transaction space, a minimum of one unisex accessible restroom, and ALL code required signage. These are minimum requirements and a full building assessment may reveal other required code elements. Note that any appeals of the accessibility requirements are mandated by state law to be submitted to the Accessibility Advisory Board of the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry.

The International Existing Building Code has three options for compliance in an existing building and they are the Prescriptive Method based on Chapter 3, the Work Area Method based on Chapters 4 through 12, and the Performance Compliance Method (a point system) based on Chapter 13.

Remember that the more detailed your plan submission, the more expedient the plan review process is, resulting in a quicker turnaround time with less plan review comments requiring responses. You can not provide too much detail, but you can provide too little.