

CITY OF BRISTOL, VIRGINIA



OFFICE OF THE BUILDING OFFICIAL
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Office Hours 8:00-10:00 am, 1:00-2:00 pm & 4:30-5:00 pm

RE: Loft Apartment Development in Downtown Bristol, Virginia

Dear potential developer:

The purpose of this letter is to provide helpful hints to make renovating your downtown building easier. My first suggestion is to contact me during my regular office hours to discuss a courtesy inspection of your building so that we may discuss your renovation plans. This will enable you to have a better idea of the renovation process as it applies to your particular building.

The majority of building situated in downtown were constructed in the early 1900's. The Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code requires an asbestos inspection of the affected areas prior to renovation or demolition of buildings that were constructed prior to January 1st, 1985. That inspection is required to be conducted by a Virginia licensed asbestos inspector. If asbestos containing materials are found during the inspection and are to be disturbed during the renovation process, a letter will be required from an asbestos inspector stating the affected areas have been properly abated prior to the issuance of permits.

All sleeping rooms in loft apartments are required to have a window sized for emergency escape. At least one window in bedrooms located about the first floor level must have a minimum clear opening height of 24" and a minimum clear opening width of 20", with a minimum net clear opening of 5.7 sq. ft. Grade level emergency escape windows are required to have a minimum net opening of 5.0 sq. ft. This window must be operable from the inside without the use of keys or tools.

Apartments that are constructed on the upper level of a retail store are required to have an exit to an approved exterior stairway. The common corridor or foyer used for access to multiple apartments will be required to be of 1 hr. fire rated construction to the exit discharge. If access to the apartments is from the ground floor of the building, the interior stairway is required to be enclosed by a 1 hr. fire rated assembly.

Many building downtown may be classified as un-separated mixed use structures when utilized as retail space on the ground floor with dwelling units above. This classification can alleviate the requirement of fire-rated floor/ceiling assemblies. The construction of a restaurant or another

assembly type use in the building could require fire separation and the installation of a sprinkler system in the building in some situations.

All buildings will have to be assessed on a case by case basis. It is not possible to address all of the possible variables as they may apply to these types of renovations. Some owners would like to have retail sales on the first floor, business offices on the second floor and apartments on the third. Each situation is unique and may present its own challenges.

Architecturally sealed plans will be required for renovations involving the change of use of parts of downtown buildings. This is due to the requirement for analysis of the existing floor structure, egress calculations, use group classifications, occupant capacities and potential fire separation issues.

Hopefully this letter has been beneficial to you in planning your renovation project. Please contact me if you have questions or would like to arrange a meeting with me at the building.

Respectfully

Michael Johnston
Building Official