
CITY OF AIRDRIE

BUILDING INSPECTIONS DEPARTMENT

GUIDELINES – Clarification for Building Classification and Occupancy

DATE: March 20, 2019

Purpose - To provide guidance and clarification for the classification and occupancy uses under the definition of the Alberta Building Code (ABC)

History – There is often confusion regarding how buildings are classified for different occupancies (uses) and occupant loads (number of persons allowed). Additionally, *why* are there differences in classification that appear to limit some uses from others, and *why* can't all buildings be used for any use? This guideline (notice) provides clarification and guidance from requirements of the Alberta Building Code (ABC).

To determine what occupancy, or use, a building can be used for, the question of why buildings need to be classified requires explanation. Buildings are classified as per the designed use, (*occupancy*), and the occupancy determines the *occupant load*, number of persons permitted in the building or space. Each occupancy is allowed a maximum area for design, based upon the type of construction, the use, and the occupant load. For example, the Alberta Building Code requires an automotive repair shop 46 m² area per person, where as a restaurant allows 1.2 m² area per person. Based on this criteria, a restaurant (or bar) will have a higher occupant load than the repair garage. When there is a space with more people, the requirements for available exits and distances to exits, fire loads based on construction and finishes, and numerous other factors must be considered when designing a building and ultimately the allowed occupancy and occupant loads. Based on these differences, the Alberta Building Code and the National Building Code of Canada, have assigned “classifications” for occupancy, which gives guidance and predetermination in approving and allowing an occupancy and therefore an occupant load, for the life safety of the occupants.

As the Alberta Building Code does list all potential uses for buildings, the City of Airdrie Building Inspections Department reviews an application based on an applicants intended use, or business plan, determining what classification the occupancy will best fit. This guideline has

been developed using definitions from the Alberta Building Code, for classifications of occupancies, uses, and occupant loads.

Assembly occupancy means the occupancy or the use of a building, or part thereof, by a gathering of persons for civic, political, travel, religious, social, educational, recreational or like purposes, or for the consumption of food or drink.
(As defined in ABC2014)

Business and personal services occupancy means the occupancy or use of a building or part thereof for the transaction of business or the rendering or receiving of professional or personal services.

Industrial occupancy means the occupancy or use of a building or part thereof for the assembling, fabricating, manufacturing, processing, repairing or storing of goods and materials.
(As defined in ABC2014)

Mercantile occupancy means the occupancy or use of a building or part thereof for the displaying or selling of retail goods, wares or merchandise.

Residential occupancy means the occupancy or use of a building or part thereof by persons for whom sleeping accommodation is provided but who are not harboured for the purpose of receiving care or treatment and are not involuntarily detained.

In addition to determining the actual classification of the occupancy, allowance for the occupancy will be dependent upon whether or not the actual building will be able to accommodate the proposed occupancy. The Alberta Building Code 2014, Article 3.2.2.8., allows that up to 10% of a floor area is permitted to be of a more restrictive classification without the classification being changed or the classification being considered the major occupancy.

3.2.2.8. Exceptions for Major Occupancies

1) In a building in which the aggregate area of all major occupancies in a particular Group or Division is not more than 10% of the floor area of the storey in which they are located, these major occupancies need not be considered as major occupancies for the purposes of this Subsection, provided they are not classified as Group F, Division 1 or 2 occupancies.

Based upon what is allowed by this Article, the City of Airdrie Building Inspections Department considers that 10% of a given building, or suite (bay) within a building, is permitted to be of a more restrictive occupancy classification, without the whole building, or space, being classified as the more restrictive.

Using micro-breweries as an example, if the applicant has identified the classification as a Group F2 (processing), then 10% of the floor area can be classified as Group A2 (for the consumption of food or drink) for the purpose of a tasting and sales area. The Group A2 portion would be considered ancillary to the main F2 classification, but cannot exceed 10% of the area, building or bay. However, in the case where the owner wishes to have a larger area as Group A2, then being

the more restrictive classification, the processing portion, or F2, would be ancillary to the A2. In this situation, the base building must be able to accommodate the A2 classification. Typically, Group F2 occupancies are less restrictive in their construction and safety requirements than a Group A2 occupancy.

Depending upon the occupancy classification, as either A2 or F2, will determine the other requirements from the ABC. Provision for washrooms will be determined by Section 3.7., and barrier-free requirements as per Section 3.8. Ventilation requirements are to be designed as per Part 6, Article 6.2.1.1., and subsequent Articles and Standards accepted by the ABC. The actual occupant loads (number of persons allowed), would then be limited to floor area, available washrooms to the occupants, and ventilation (HVAC).

It is expected that a permit applicant and/or business owner, provide at the time of application, what their business plan and intentions are. In this manner, when the permit application is reviewed by the inspecting SCOs, it can be determined *whether or not* the building is compatible with the proposed occupancy. Upon completion of the permit process, the classification (A2 or F2) and actual maximum occupant load must be posted (Article 3.1.17.1. ABC2014).

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