

# New Businesses - Prospective Property-Buyer's Fact Sheet

## The Six Things You Should Do Before You Commit To A Property Purchase:

1. **Make sure the district's zoning would permit your proposed use/occupancy.**
2. **Find out the current legal use(s) at the property.**
3. **Find out what it would take to legally create your proposed use/occupancy at the property.**
4. **Find out what requirements coming from the State building codes apply to your project.**
5. **Find out if any illegal changes have been made at the property.**
6. **Find out the environmental history of the property and your environmental responsibilities assumed upon obtaining ownership and developing your project.**

All of these factors can affect the **cost** and **timing** of realizing your idea! (And of course, other steps such as a title search and a professional building inspection from a licensed private inspector are good insurance against hidden costs.) **Be advised that current County regulations do not mandate checks on any of the above items before a sale!**

All of the above items can be researched at the Permit Office, room 301, City Hall. Staffing numbers and office workload may not permit all of the researches to be accomplished in one visit; organize your questions in a hierarchy for more efficient use of staff time. Environmental and Use/Occupancy histories can take a lot of time to accomplish; there are fees charged for these and other complete researches, and fees charged for all copies of file pages. Fees can be found in the Fees section of the City website.

Some information can only be released under a Freedom Of Information Law request; the forms can be obtained and filled out in the Law department, 11<sup>th</sup> floor.

There is a possibility that the Use/Occupancy of the property you are interested in was altered or converted without a permit and changes were made to the building, structures or lot which were not in accordance with New York state Codes. Such changes to properties are illegal and can be dangerous, and cannot be left uncorrected as part of new ownership or changes to Use/Occupancy.

This means that for example, a warehouse illegally converted to offices and sold as an office building cannot be kept or used as an office building. It must either be physically changed back to a warehouse and used as such, or a proper change of use permit must be taken out, and the proper physical changes made according to State codes, in order to change the warehouse into an office building. Changes could possibly involve prior approvals, a Zoning variance, blueprints drawn by an architect licensed in the State, and major physical changes to a property. All these costs will be yours. It is even possible that the purpose for which you want to use the property is not permitted by law, period! **Make sure you know what use/occupancy is currently legal at your address, what potential uses are possible, what costs might be involved in making any needed changes, or if a certain change would even be legally allowed - before you commit to purchasing a property. Buyer beware!**

Start by determining the property's legal assessed address, which is done in the Assessment Office, room 101; then proceed to the Permit Office, 301.

Questions can be directed to the Permit Office at (716) 851-4932, -4925, -4924, -4961, -4667, or -4926.