

21 Questions to Ask When Leasing or Purchasing a Site for Your Business

When searching for a location for your business, there are many things to consider. This is a general list of questions to ask your local government, leasing agent, or realtor prior to finalizing your decision on a specific location.

Zoning

- Is the use you are considering a “permitted” use? or
- Is the use you are considering a “conditional” use, or one that requires a special zoning permit?
If the answer is yes, weigh the options of applying for the special zoning permit or finding another location.
- What are the parking requirements for your business? Can they be met on site?
- What are the signage regulations of the community?
- Is the property within any special overlay zones, such as airport or floodplain districts?

For new construction, you may also need to consider...

- What are the open space or green space requirements? These areas must also generally be landscaped – what are the landscaping requirements?
- Are there any building design guidelines governing the architectural design of your building?
- Is the legal description of the property a “lot of record” or will it have to be re-platted before any permits are issued?
- Are there easements, such as for utilities or drainage, that affect the property?
- After reviewing the layout of the lot for building setbacks, any existing or required easements, and the open space requirements, is the remaining “building envelope” of a sufficient size for the building and the required number of parking stalls?

If considering an existing structure...

- Was the previous business type a nonconforming use (one that is no longer allowed by the Zoning Code)? Is it the same use you are proposing?
If a nonconforming use has been discontinued for more than 1 year, any grandfather rights to continue that use are generally forfeited.
- Is the proposed business a change in the type of use from the previous business, for example, from a retail business to a restaurant?
If yes, check whether renovations will be needed to the building to meet the plumbing, mechanical, or fire codes for the change in use.
- Is the existing parking sufficient for the new use?
- Is the building or leased space compliant with current codes, such as plumbing and mechanical requirements?

Other Municipal Issues

- Have you checked and/or applied for all necessary licenses or special approvals required?
- What are the utility connection fees? Are there any capital facilities charges or impact fees?
- What are the community's storm water management policies?
- Is the proposed use adding substantial traffic volumes? Will you be required to conduct a traffic impact analysis?
- If considering new entrance drives or access points, are there any recorded access restrictions, such as on a deed or plat? What are the city policies on the number of access points and spacing of them?
- Is a pre-application meeting required prior to submitting plans to the municipality?
- Are any additional permits required from a state agency?