

# OPENING A RESTAURANT OR A CAFÉ

## BUILDING INSTRUCTIONS MAY 2012 / Replaces the January 2000 instructions

A restaurant or a café can only be opened in business premises that have been approved for this use prior to the opening. A building permit is always required when the intended use of the premises is changed, the premises are expanded or a new establishment is built. Converting a shop into restaurant, for example, or a café into a restaurant requires a building permit. It is not always possible to change the intended use into food premises. This is often the case if the premises have previously been used for example as an office, a stock room or an apartment.

In projects involving a conversion into food premises, the building permit applicant must have the help of a qualified principal designer from the very beginning. The designer will draw the necessary plans and also assist in applying for the building permit. It is also advisable to employ other designers and a supervisor at an early stage of the project.

These instructions describe the different stages that the Building Control will go over with you when premises are converted into a café or a restaurant. They can be used as a checklist by the principal designer or as an aid for the entrepreneur. More information is available from the Building Control permit processors. It is a good idea to contact the Building Control before you sign any contracts concerning the premises.

### THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE ACQUIRING BUSINESS PREMISES

The premises must meet several criteria before they can host a café or a restaurant. Make sure to check the following:

- Does the local detailed plan allow the premises to be used as business premises and is its purpose of use suitable for food premises
- Principal designer can check the intended use of the premises from the Building Control archives.
- Is the building protected (this can have an impact on any changes you may wish to make on the elevation)
- The essential technical requirements<sup>1</sup> of the premise
- The accessibility of the premises from the viewpoint of customers

### CONTENT

THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE ACQUIRING BUSINESS PREMISES	1
APPLYING FOR A BUILDING PERMIT	2
THE CONTENT OF THE DRAWINGS	2
THINGS TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN UNDERTAKING A RESTAURANT OR CAFÉ CONVERSION	3
EASE OF ACCESS IN RESTAURANT AND CAFÉ PREMISES	6
IMPLEMENTATION AND CONTROL OF RENOVATIONS	7
OTHER AUTHORITIES	7
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	8

**FOOD PREMISES**  
**= a space in which food intended for sales or distribution in other ways is prepared, stored, transported, served, sold or handled.**

(1) Section 50 of the Land Use and Building Decree

and staff

- Are the technical equipment of the premises such that preparing and serving food is possible
- Do the premises meet the fire safety requirements
- The operations you plan to undertake in the premises do not cause disturbing noise
- Are the water, sewage and air conditioning equipment suitable for use in a café or a restaurant

Ignoring any of these issues might lead to difficult modifications later on in the project. Soundproofing, for example, or water, sewage and air conditioning work are difficult and expensive, sometimes even impossible to undertake afterwards.

## APPLYING FOR A BUILDING PERMIT

You can apply for a building permit using a form available at the Building Control Department. The application must be signed by the property owner or an authorised titleholder. A representative of the business in question can only act as the permit applicant with a power of attorney from the property owner or the titleholder.

Applying for a restaurant or a café permit and drawing the master plans that are attached to it are tasks that require professional skills. For this work you need to have a designer with a proper education and enough practical experience<sup>2</sup>. This person will be named the principal designer of the site in the permit application. He/she will be in charge of the entire design process and the overall quality of the project. In most cases special designs are also needed and these have to be drawn by air conditioning, water and sewage or structural designers.

The following documents must be appended to the building permit application:

- power of attorney (unless the property owner or titleholder signs the application him/herself)
- an account of the possessory title and minutes of the board meeting
- an account of designer form (from the Building Control)
- master drawings (in duplicate): layout plan, floor plans, elevation drawings, sectional drawings
- a photograph of the building (if any changes to the elevation are to be made)
- HPAC drawings in duplicate (these can either be a permit condition or attached to the application)
- detail drawings in duplicate (if any structural changes are to be done, these can either be a permit condition or attached to the application)

No permission from building control services is required if

- the café has no more than six customer seats,
- there is no food production,
- and the serving area size is less than 20m<sup>2</sup>.

[2] Building Control Department's instructions 'Building designers and plans' and 'The quality of drawings to be archived'

## THE CONTENT OF THE DRAWINGS

The layout plan must indicate the area of change and any notes or regulations issued in the local detailed plan.

The following items must be indicated in the floor plans:

- the area to be changed (with dash lines) and its surface area
- the intended use of the premises (both the new and old use, old use crossed out)
- the number of customer seats (minimum space per customer is 1 m<sup>2</sup>)
- structures to be demolished (with a line of dots and dashes)
- existing structures (darkened or with two lines of which one is thicker)
- new structures
- emergency exits (at least two separate emergency exits, the width of which is determined by the number of customer seats in the establishment)
- boundaries of fire compartments
- an accessible entrance
- toilet facilities and an accessible toilet
- food preparation equipment and fixtures
- social facilities (break room, dressing room and toilet, also a shower room if the restaurant has a preparation kitchen)
- cleaning cupboard
- outdoor terraces, if any are included in the plan
- smoking room, if one is to be built, and its surface area
- advertising structures (elevation drawings)

Sectional drawings are needed to clarify the changes in the floor plans.

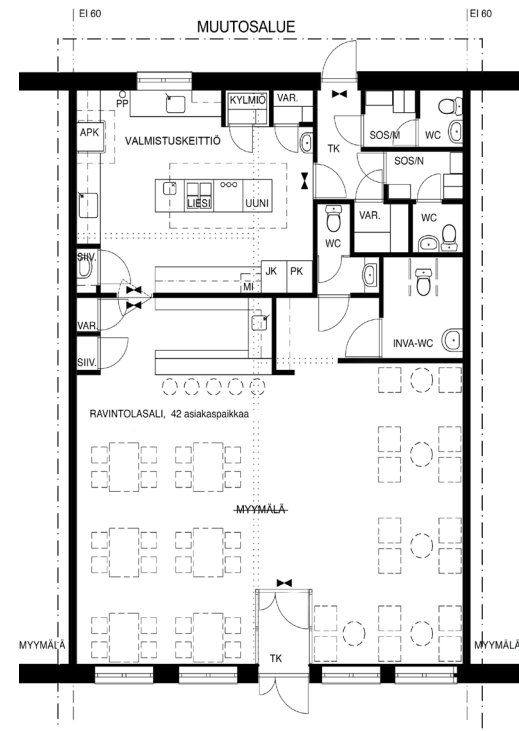
Elevation drawings present any changes to the elevation and possible protection regulations must be taken into account.

It is worthwhile to invest in the quality of the drawings and other necessary documents. Permit processing at the Building Control Department takes on average between 4 and 8 weeks. The process is faster if all of the material have been carefully drawn and compiled and delivered for the use of the permit processor early on in the process.

At the end of the permit process, the permit documents (including all drawings and the Building Control decision documents) will be archived at the Building Control archives. The drawing duplicates will be returned to the client.

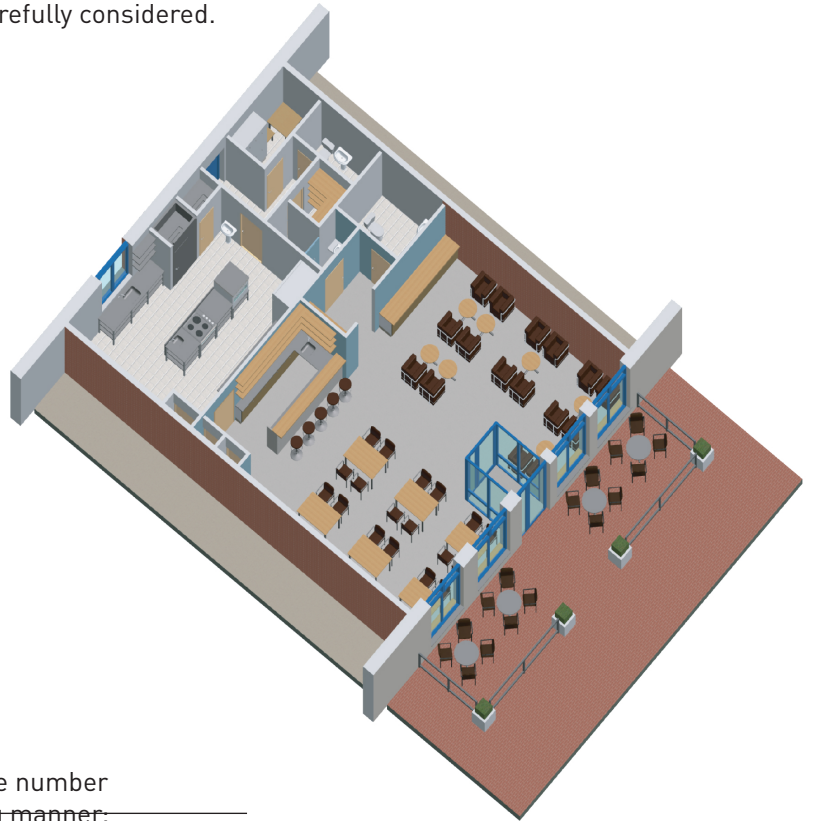
## THINGS TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN UNDERTAKING A RESTAURANT OR CAFÉ CONVERSION

The functionality of the premises must particularly be taken into account when designing food premises. In addition to the points mentio-



ned above, the items listed below must also be carefully considered.

- Local detailed plan
- Protected building
- Accessibility
- Fire safety
- Emergency exits
- Entrances
- Social facilities
- Cleaning and waste management
- Toilet facilities
- Smoking room (not mandatory)
- Hallway and cloakroom
- Air conditioning
- Water and sewage equipment
- Lighting
- Sound proofing, noise
- Public areas
- Dining hall
- Kitchen
- Food and goods transport
- Dry storage and cold storage
- Terrace and outdoor serving area
- Advertising structures and awnings



The number of toilet facilities is determined by the number of customer seats in the premises in the following manner:

Customer seats	Women/number of toilet seats	Men/number of toilet seats + urinals
Less than 25	One unisex toilet*	One unisex toilet*
26–50	1	1
51–100	3	1+1
101–150	4	1+2
151–200	4	2+2
201–250	5	2+3
251–300	5	2+4
301–400	6	3+4

Outdoor seats, for example on a terrace, must also be taken into consideration when calculating the number of toilet facilities. Customer seats on the terrace are added to the number of toilet facilities by a coefficient of 0.5, meaning that half the terrace seats are calculated when determining how many toilet facilities are needed.

Restaurant and café premises that are designed in new buildings must be equipped with at least one toilet for the disabled.

\*if the premises are to be used mainly to serve alcoholic drinks, the toilet facilities for men and women must be separate regardless of the number of customer seats

Restaurant and café premises with more than 25 customer seats must also include a toilet for the disabled.

When determining the number of toilets, the nature of operations practised in the restaurant must also be taken into account. Bar rooms should be equipped with more toilet facilities than restaurants.

Toilet seats must be situated behind two doors, i.e. in a separate space with an anteroom away from the kitchen or other premises where foodstuffs are being processed or served. The only exception to this is a toilet for the disabled. However, the door of such toilet must be situated so that it does not open into a public area.

The premises are also subject to specific HPAC regulations. The staff must have separate dressing, washing and toilet facilities as stated in the regulations and, when necessary, these social facilities must be separate for men and women.

Smoking<sup>3</sup> is forbidden in all public areas and work spaces and a separate smoking area is not mandatory. If necessary, a separate smoking room can be added to a restaurant or a café. This room has to be at least 7 m<sup>2</sup> in size, structurally separate from the other premises and have negative pressure ventilation. The smoking room must be equipped with its own extract air discharge flue that leads to the roof of the building. The technical solutions for a smoking room will be presented in the special design plans appended to the building permit application. If a smoking room is constructed at a later stage in a restaurant that is already open for business, a separate building permit is needed.

Customer and kitchen premises must have separate cleaning cupboards for cleaning.

There are three different types of kitchens in food premises.

- A preparation kitchen is a room where food is prepared by frying it in a pan or a grill, baking it in an oven or deep-frying it in grease (french fries, for example). Preparation kitchens include for example the kitchens of restaurants, cafés, street kitchens or staff diners.
- A heating kitchen is a space where precooked, semi-finished products or ready meals are heated in an oven, a double boiler or by boiling.
- A service or distribution kitchen is a space in which hot or cold foods transported from elsewhere is served.

The ventilation and sewerage of restaurants and kitchens are regulated by sections D1, D2 and E7 of the National Building Code of Finland. These regulations are determined by the extent of operations and the type of kitchen equipment in use. A large restaurant with a preparation kitchen, for example, usually has to be equipped with a separate discharge channel for greasy extract air and a grease trap for the sewage pipeline. It should be clarified at an early stage whether these

<sup>(3)</sup> Applying for a building permit for a smoking room or requesting for statement, Building Control instructions

features are necessary, as they might require significant space alterations and may cause changes that need to be included in the permit drawings.

When using liquid gas or town gas, regulations governing its use must be observed.

Placing a possible outdoor serving area<sup>4</sup> on a street or park area always requires a permit from the Public Works Department. A permit from the Building Control is not necessary for outdoor serving areas where the number of seats is less than 25 and the area is completed with as light structures as possible (the area is closed with light rope fences that are not higher than 90 centimetres or with open steel structure fences). The area cannot include platforms, canopies or walls. The outdoor serving area must be furnished with high-quality furniture that is suitable for the environment. Sunshades without any advertisement and awnings that are open from the side are permitted. No advertisement is permitted in the area. If a service desk or other structures deviating from the guidelines mentioned above are installed after the building permit has been applied for, an action permit must be applied for.

Separate Building Control instructions are available for advertising structures<sup>5</sup>. You need not apply for a permit for all advertising structures. You can check whether or not a permit is necessary from the instructions mentioned above or from the permit processor in your area.

## EASE OF ACCESS IN RESTAURANT AND CAFÉ PREMISES

Ease of access<sup>6</sup> must be considered when planning restaurant or café conversions. Easily accessible facilities are necessary not only for people in wheelchairs, but also for the elderly and for customers with prams and strollers.

The design and implementation of all new construction must follow the principles of accessibility and must also be taken into consideration when renovating existing buildings. If complete accessibility cannot be reached in renovation construction, the accessibility requirements will be determined by the age of the building and the conditions from the viewpoint of the historical and protected cityscape and entrepreneurship. If the building in question was constructed before 1 January 1990, it is difficult to implement an accessible entrance with reasonable costs, and the establishment has no more than 25 seats, easily accessible entrance and toilet facility can be compromised. Usually restaurant or café premises with more than 25 seats must be designed to have an easily accessible entrance and toilet facilities. The building permit authority might accept an exception to this rule for a special reason, if an easily accessible entrance would require an elevator or a lifting device that cannot be easily fitted and the number

(4) Outdoor serving areas, instructions by the Building Control Department

(5) Advertising structures in buildings, Building Control building instructions, Cityscape statement, Building Control instructions, Positioning guidelines of movable advertising stands, Building Control instructions

(6) Section 53 of the Land Use and Building Decree, Ensuring accessibility in building



of seats in the premises does not exceed 30. Unobstructed access requires doorways that are at least 800 mm wide, ramps (1:12,5) with no more than 8 per cent inclination, necessary railings and doorsteps that are not higher than 20 mm. Section F1 of the National Building Code of Finland describes the accessibility requirements of buildings. In restaurant conversions that are transitional and renovational in nature, the regulations are followed where applicable.

## IMPLEMENTATION AND CONTROL OF RENOVATIONS

Building permit decision includes permit regulations that must be followed when undertaking the renovations. The regulations usually deal with technical special designs that are submitted to the Building Control, air conditioning, water and sewerage equipment and structural drawings, for example. The permit decision also obliges the applicant to name people in charge of the quality of the construction work (supervisors in charge) and describes the compulsory inspections related to the project.

When the building permit is issued, renovation work can be started and the Building Control Services will monitor its progress. Anybody undertaking this project will need to employ a supervisor to monitor the work. A supervisor in charge is responsible for the quality and implementation of the construction together with the principal designer and the party engaging in the building project. All electrical and HPAC installations must be conducted by a professional installer.

The construction department of the Building Control Services will carry out the inspections mentioned in the permit, including for example the start-up notification/meeting, structural inspection, water and sewage or air conditioning inspection, and the final inspection. The premises can only be taken into use once the inspections have been completed.

## OTHER AUTHORITIES

Besides the Building Control Services, the City of Helsinki Environment Centre and the Rescue Department also control the establishment, construction and use of restaurants and cafés. The Environment Centre is a health protection authority to which all operators must deliver a written notification when they have established or opened a café or a restaurant. The Rescue Department conducts a fire safety inspection after a restaurant has been opened. This inspection focuses on issues related to personal and fire safety. A licence to dispense alcohol can be applied from the Regional State Administrative Agency. Occupational safety on site is controlled by the Regional State Administrative Agency of Southern Finland, Industrial and Occupational Safety Department.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Building Control Services permit advisor and the permit processors of the area (Building Control Services, tel. exchange 09 310 2611, [www.hel.fi](http://www.hel.fi)).

Sources besides the ones mentioned in the footnotes:

- Land Use and Building Act
- Land Use and Building Decree
- The National Building Code of Finland
- The City of Helsinki Building Code
- Occupational Safety and Health Act 738/2002 (Section 48 Personnel rooms, Section 57 Obligations of designers)
- Decree of the Council of State on Occupational Safety and Health 577/2003 (Section 4 Dining and break rooms, Section 5 Dressing rooms, Section 6 Washing and toilet facilities)
- RT building instruction cards (instructions on drawing plans, designing restaurants and cafés etc.)

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