



NEWS

Pittsburgh Enacts Property Maintenance Code

Following on the heels of similar facade ordinances in cities across the country, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania adopted the **Property Maintenance Code of the City of Pittsburgh** in June 2004. Here is what building owners, managers, and design professionals need to know to comply with the regulation.

What the Property Maintenance Code Means for Pittsburgh Building Owners

Based on the 2003 edition of the *International Property Maintenance Code* (IPMC) from the International Code Council, the *Property Maintenance Code of the City of Pittsburgh* institutes periodic facade inspection requirements along the lines of those found in other major municipalities, such as New York and Boston, in the interest of protecting the public from the hazards of derelict and ill-maintained structures.

For those considering purchasing a commercial property in the city of Pittsburgh, or for those who already own or manage buildings within the city limits, it is important to understand the requirements of the code and to clarify the responsibilities of owners in maintaining facade features and retaining licensed professionals to inspect building conditions and prepare reports.

Who Conducts and Reviews the Inspections?

The Pittsburgh Code of Ordinances establishes the Bureau of Building Inspection (BBI) as the code official in charge of Property Maintenance Code implementation (Title Ten, Chapter 1004: *International Property Maintenance Code Adoption*). In 2014, Mayor William Peduto and the Pittsburgh City Council



announced that the new Department of Permits, Licenses & Inspections (PLI, <http://pittsburghpa.gov/pli/>) would assume leadership of the former BBI responsibilities in Property Maintenance Code administration.

A “licensed professional engineer or registered architect” must be retained to conduct the inspections, and “reports shall bear their signature and seal.”

What Building Components Must Be Inspected?

According to the Pittsburgh *Property Maintenance Code*, all buildings must submit to periodic inspections, except those structures classified by the International Code Council standard as “Group R-3,” which includes single-family residences and daycare or rooming house facilities with five or fewer residents.



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The inspection must determine the structural soundness of the building, specifically encompassing:

- **Decorative features**, including cornices, belt courses, corbels, terra cotta trim, and wall facings and similar decorative features;
- **Overhang extensions**, including but not limited to canopies, marquees, signs, metal awnings, fire escapes, standpipes and exhaust ducts; and
- **Chimneys and towers**, including cooling towers, smoke stacks, and similar appurtenances.

Such exterior features must be “maintained in good repair with proper anchorage and in a safe condition,” and, “when required, all exposed surfaces of metal or wood shall be protected from the elements and against decay or rust by periodic application of weather-coating materials, such as paint or similar surface treatment” (*International Property Maintenance Code* §304.8, 304.9, 304.11, as referenced in *Code of Ordinances, City of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* § 1004.02 (Ord. 9-2004, eff. 6-8-04)).

When Must Inspections Be Conducted?

For those building owners already conducting periodic inspections prior to adoption of the 2004 code, inspections should continue on their previous schedule at **five-year intervals**. For those new to the inspection and filing process, the first inspection was due to be completed before June 2005, one year after the adoption of the Pittsburgh *Property Maintenance Code*, with successive inspections **every five years** after the date of the original inspection.



How Are Reports Filed?

The code does not explicitly mandate submission of an inspection report to the City, nor does it specify the format or contents of the report. The only stated requirement is that reports bear the signature and seal of the licensed professional engineer or registered architect who conducted the inspections.

Best practices would suggest that owners retain inspection reports on file as a record of compliance with the code.

Violations and Penalties

Section 1001.10 of the Pittsburgh *Code of Ordinances* establishes a fine of up to \$1,000 per day for each violation or non-compliance, with



a prison term of up to 90 days per offense for payment default (*Property Maintenance Code of the City of Pittsburgh* §106.4: Violation penalties).

Paying the penalty does not mean that owners can avoid making repairs; the unsafe condition must still be corrected. Where necessary, the Department of Permits, Licenses & Inspections is charged with taking appropriate action “to restrain, correct or abate” the violation and prevent occupancy of the ill-maintained structure.

What Building Owners and Buyers Should Do Now

Review property maintenance records to be sure that the building is in compliance with the required inspections, and take action immediately to correct any deficiencies in the structural soundness and good repair of exterior walls, decorative features, overhang extensions, chimneys, and towers.

If the building is due for inspection, retain a licensed professional engineer or registered architect experienced in facade ordinance compliance to evaluate building conditions and complete a signed and sealed report. Should repairs be necessary to maintain safe operation and address deterioration, keep written records to document property maintenance activities.

Beyond code compliance, periodic assessment of exterior envelope conditions and prompt repair of deficiencies are not only critical to public safety, they are the hallmarks of good building stewardship. Routine inspection and repair help to prolong the life of building elements and prevent the disruption, expense, and life hazards of abrupt failure and emergency repair.

For more information, contact Hoffmann Architects at (800) 239-6665 or visit www.hoffarch.com.

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