Introduction

Any proposal to replace a destroyed building or use can be approved if the proposed replacement building or use conforms to the current zoning regulations. Additionally, non-complying buildings, non-conforming uses and conditional uses that are damaged or destroyed by fire or other calamity, or by Act of God or public enemy may be restored if the restoration is started within 18 months of its destruction and diligently prosecuted to completion. Uses, buildings and features not legally built or established may be replaced only with uses, buildings or features that conform to current standards.

Definitions

A conditional use is a use that requires authorization from the Planning Commission to be established or is a use that legally existed prior to a change in the zoning laws such that the use would be permitted in that location under the new law only with a conditional use authorization.

A non-conforming use is a use that legally existed prior to a change in the zoning laws such that the use would no longer be permitted in that location under the current law. For example, a building with more legal dwelling units than permissible by the current prescribed zoning is a non-conforming use.

A non-complying structure is one that has legally existing features, other than the uses it contains, which existed prior to a change in the zoning laws that would no longer be approved in that location under the new law. For example, a building that legally encroaches within a required setback area is a non-complying structure.

Started within eighteen months shall mean that within eighteen months of the fire or other calamity or Act of God, the structure's owner shall have filed a building permit application to restore the structure to its former condition and use.
Relevant Code Sections

Section 178(f). Conditional Uses.
Not withstanding the foregoing provisions of this Section 178, a structure occupied by a permitted conditional use that is damaged or destroyed by fire, or other calamity, or by Act of God, or by the public enemy, may be restored to its former condition and use without the approval of a new conditional use application, provided that such restoration is permitted by the Building Code, and is started within 18 months and diligently pursued to completion. Except as provided in Subsection (g) below, no structure occupied by a permitted conditional use that is voluntarily razed or required by law to be razed by the owner thereof may thereafter be restored except upon approval of a new conditional use application pursuant to the provisions of Article 3 of this code.

Section 181(d). Non-conforming Uses.
Not withstanding the foregoing provisions of this Section 181, a structure occupied by a nonconforming use that is damaged or destroyed by fire, or other calamity, or by Act of God, or by the public enemy, may be restored to its former condition and use; provided that such restoration is permitted by the Building Code, and is started within 18 months and diligently prosecuted to completion. The age of such a structure for the purposes of Sections 184 and 185 shall nevertheless be computed from the date of the original construction of the structure. Except as provided in Subsection (e) below, no structure occupied by a nonconforming use that is voluntarily razed or required by law to be razed by the owner thereof may thereafter be restored except in full conformity with the use limitations of this code.

Establishing Legality
The legality of non-complying structures and non-conforming commercial uses is determined by the site’s building permit history including approved permits and plans, available from the Building Department’s Record Management Division. To obtain copies of building records, please contact at (415) 558-6080.

For residential uses, a copy of a “3-R” report, compiled from building permit records, is normally accepted by the Planning Department as the source of information describing the authorized residential use. To obtain a “3-R” report please contact the Building Department’s “3-R” Division at (415) 558-6080.