

NEWS

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GREENLEAF

Greenleaf closes after Guilford's permit snafu



Before the closing of the Greenleaf this semester, members of the community enjoyed the shop's new space located in the basement of Milner Hall after it's move from Mary Hobbs this past summer.

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certificate of occupancy certifying that everything is in order.

However, the process does not always work out so neatly.

"Sometimes people start a project and somebody will call to their attention that they need a permit for that kind of work," said Plan Review Supervisor Julius Register.

When a permit is not filed before construction starts, the city takes notice.

"It's an automatic double fee for the permit," said Building Inspections Section Chief Don Sheffield. "Then, we'll come in, and they'll have to undo stuff; whatever we deem necessary for us to be satisfied it was built right."

Guilford would have several tasks to complete for the city before starting the renovation of a residence hall to a coffee shop.

"Permits would be required for the electrical, mechanical and demolition work done," said Development Services Manager Michael Lewis in an email interview. "There would be a building permit and plan review required for the change of use to (the) dormitory."

Occupancy posting: required?

On multiple occasions, Public Safety requested that an official sign be posted in the Greenleaf giving the maximum capacity of people allowed inside. However, a permit was not always present in the space.

Public Safety Coordinator Rhonda Johnson noticed early on that no one had posted an occupant load and suggested posting one.

According to Vice President for Administration Jonathan Varnell, former

“We should have stopped the project and permitted it, right then and there. And we didn't do that.”

JONATHAN VARNELL, VICE PRESIDENT FOR ADMINISTRATION

project manager Tim Rouse went to the architect who had drafted the plans for the coffee shop and got a temporary occupant load posting once they received the request from Public Safety.

A sign was then posted near the exterior door inside the Greenleaf.

"There was an occupancy certificate, I looked at it, and it did not appear to be one that was issued by the city," said Director of Public Safety Ronald Stowe. "I raised the issue that I did not think that was right because we're dealing with a public space in the basement of a residence hall. That could ultimately be a liability issue or a safety issue for our students."

Afterwards, the sign was taken down. "Our staff provided one, and then (Public Safety) turned around and tried to make it look like we were setting occupancy without the city which was not at all the case," said Varnell. "We were simply responding to their request to give them one."

In early December, Duane Gilbert of the Greensboro Fire Department made an annual inspection of campus.

"The fire marshal comes out, checks all of our records, goes through all of our buildings and tells us what we need to correct as per fire code," said Johnson. "He said we needed (an occupancy posting in the Greenleaf), so I turned in my work orders and sent them to facilities."

Varnell disputes the importance of the maximum capacity posting.

"It sounds like somebody is trying to drive at that point that Public Safety made, which was not a very good point at all," said Varnell. "Public Safety raised an issue with the occupancy number, and then tried to hang it back on my staff, which was not pleasant and not right."

Stowe pointed out where Public Safety's priorities lie.

"For (Varnell) to indicate that Public Safety is doing something, well yeah, I am doing something," said Stowe. "I'm looking out for the safety of the students in the campus because I think when you start monkeying with official documents that's a concern."

"We're serious about the job of keeping the campus safe. And sometimes, we might have

to cross some people to do that."

How things went wrong ...

According to records obtained from the city, Guilford filed a building permit July 10, 2014, for interior demolition done in Milner. The permit covers \$8,862 worth of work done by Abatemaster, Inc., a company that specializes in hazardous material removal and demolition.

"We were out there (to Milner) three times in July of last year," said Sheffield. "That was just to consult for the demolition."

Guilford did not apply for another permit for the Greenleaf, including required electrical or plumbing permits, until Jan. 13, long after the shop opened and subsequently closed.

"I think that the discussion was that (Guilford) had gotten ahead of themselves," said Register. "They came in and told us what their plans were, so we told them how to go about the process."

The application states that the school paid a permit fee, with a late penalty attached, of \$226 for an estimated \$100,000 worth of work. It also covers the change of use of the space to A-2, defined as a space dedicated to eating or drinking.

"They had the previous occupancy use as being dorm rooms, and the description of the use they are going to is switching an area in the basement to a coffee shop," said Register.

Because the application covers a change in use, Guilford submitted plans from architecture firm Spectrum Designs dated Jan. 9, 2015, along with the permit. The plans show the interior demolition done over the summer as well as other construction in the Greenleaf.

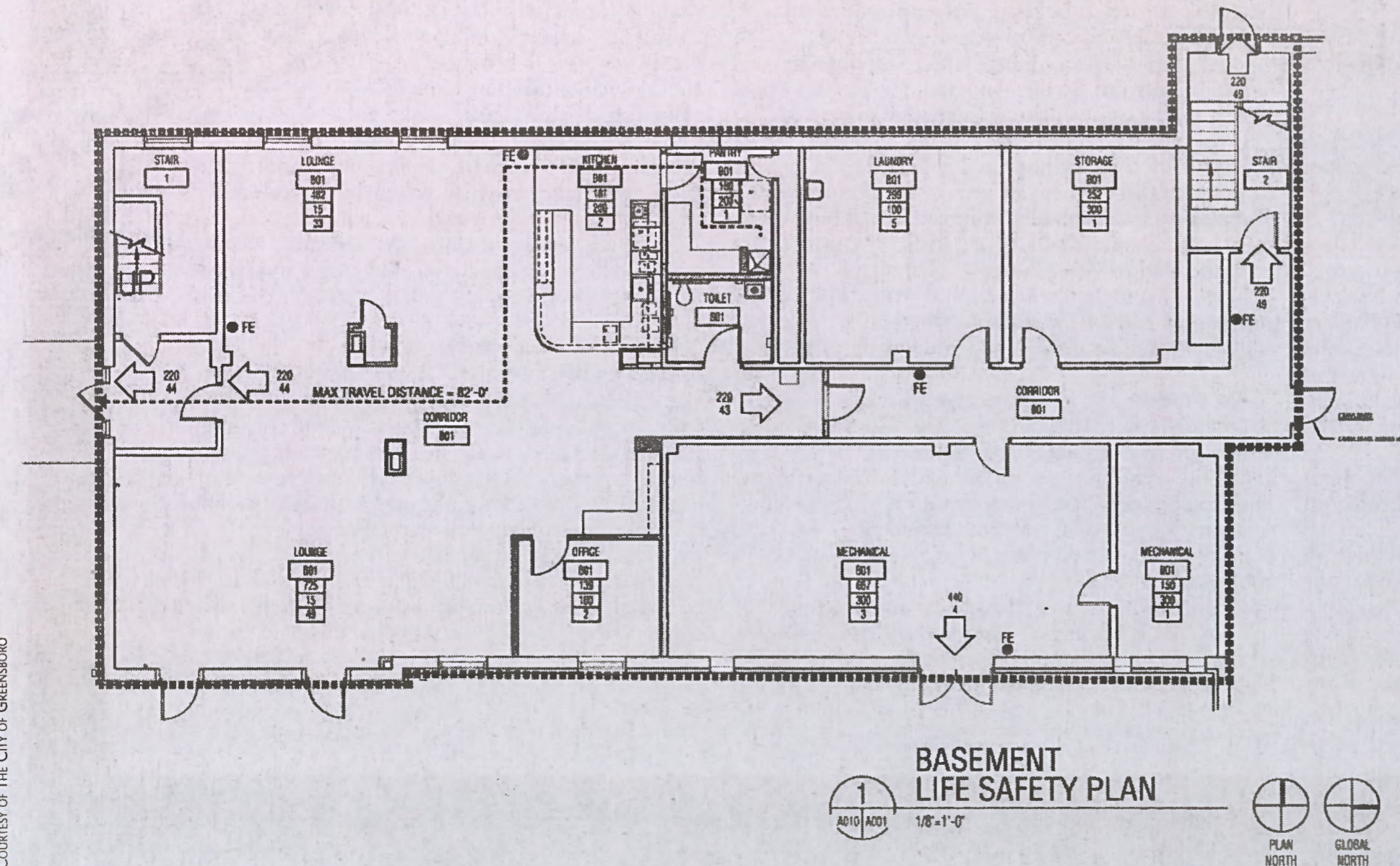
Because the space in Milner is a type of assembly space, it must follow certain different rules. According to the 2012 North Carolina Fire Codes, the occupancy load must be posted near the main exit.

And how it slipped through the cracks

The long delay between the construction over the summer and the permit filed in January may have contributed to the debacle over the occupancy load sign.

As part of the permitting process before the renovation, the city would have given Guilford a number to post. In the city's review of the new Greenleaf plans, the fire prevention reviewer noted that an occupant load of 83 would need to be posted.

According to Varnell, the delay was partially due to the tight schedule — work did not begin until mid-July and the fall semester started in late August.



In applying for the necessary permit from the city on Jan. 9, Guilford submitted the floor plans above showing the renovations done over the summer.