

The cover features a background image of a city street with a stone building on the left and a modern glass building on the right. A dark grey semi-transparent overlay covers the right two-thirds of the page. In the top right corner of this overlay is a blue square with the word 'Edmonton' in white. The title 'Commercial Business Handbook' is centered in the middle of the overlay. At the bottom of the overlay, contact information for Business-Friendly Support is provided.

Edmonton

Commercial Business Handbook

Business-Friendly Support
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OVERVIEW OF THE BUSINESS LICENSING PROCESS



City Staff Roles

- Business Licensing Technician** (Orange box)
- Development Officer** (Teal box)
- Safety Codes Officer** (Dark blue box)

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ARE YOU PLANNING ON OPENING A BUSINESS IN THE CITY OF EDMONTON?

Hello, future business owner! We know starting or growing a business in Edmonton can be a bit overwhelming because of the different rules and regulations. But don't worry, we're here to help. Think of the City of Edmonton as your teammate in this journey.

We created this handbook to break things down in simple terms and answer your questions about licences and permits. These are the things you need *before* you start construction and/or open your doors for business – it's like making sure you have all your ingredients before baking a cake.

Business Licence: Your Official Stamp of Approval

This shows your customers that you have followed the rules. You'll only get this *after* a review of your location to make sure that any necessary permits are in place and construction along with inspections are complete, if required. If you move, you'll need to get a new business licence, and maybe new permits too. Remember, each spot is unique, so requirements will vary depending on your business location.

Permits: Your Construction Go-ahead

Development Permits: Zoning keeps things organized and safe, and development permits determine *what* you can do and *where*. It wouldn't make sense to have a factory next to a school, right? Want to learn more about zoning? Check out this handy [Zoning Bylaw guide](#).

Building Permits: These make sure your building is safe and follows construction standards so that everyone is safe and sound. [Trade permits](#) (HVAC, electrical, and plumbing & gas) must be included with your building permit depending on the scope of construction.

- Other City Permits to consider:
 - [Sign Permits](#) (Digital, Storefront Signs, etc.)
 - [Mobile Vending](#) (Food Trucks)



Every location is different, so it's a good idea to understand the approvals you need before signing a lease. We want you to have all the information before you make a decision and commit.

Before You Get Started

Do your research first.

We get it, you're excited and want to jump right in, but trust us, it's better to understand the permit process *before* signing a lease. Begin with business planning fundamentals that review things like your budget, your operating costs, space layout and how many staff you will need. Construction and upgrades can get pricey, and you don't want any surprises blowing up your budget or timeline.

Helpful tip: Contact the non-profit organization [Business Link](#) for free support with your business planning and market research needs.

Check the location's history and approved permits.

We issue business licences based on the location's history, and it takes us about 30 days to do the research. Before you start planning your dream space, make sure the building and tenant space is up to code. You never know, the previous tenant might have carried out construction or made some changes without permits, and those could cause problems for you. Chat with your landlord, and make sure you know the history of the space before you sign the lease and make commitments.

Every location is different, so it's a good idea to understand the approvals you need before signing a lease.



Helpful tips:

- [Search of Records](#) is a service offered by the City for landowners or the acting agents (developer or builder) to retrieve property records or plans.
- Development and Building Safety Codes Officers can be contacted for [Permit Inquiries and Appointments](#).

Team up with the professionals

Development and building permits can be tricky, so consider working with consultants, professionals, engineers, architects, licensed contractors, etc., who are experts. It might seem like an extra expense, but it can save you a lot of time and headaches in the long run. Remember, City staff can only tell you what's missing from your application, not how to fix it or redesign something that does not meet the requirements. Avoid the back-and-forth and the lost time by getting things right the first time.

Ensure the professionals you hire add you as a team member for you to track your permit's progress via the new team settings feature on our Self-Serve application portal. This will provide updates on information requests, permit issuance, permit approval and is available on all new and existing permit applications. See this [FAQ](#) for more information.

Business-Friendly Edmonton

You don't have to go through it alone. The Business Friendly Edmonton team is here to cheer you on and offer a helping hand. We offer free, one-on-one support whenever you need it. Our small business specialists are your personal guides, ready to help you navigate the exciting (and sometimes confusing) world of opening a business in Edmonton. Think of us as your business buddies or a concierge desk to help hunt down some answers to your questions.

Helpful tip:

Visit our [Business-Friendly Support website](#) for more info and let's get started.

Business Licensing

Before you start planning your dream space, make sure the building and tenant space is up to current building codes.



A Business Licence is like a certificate of honour for your business. It shows customers you've checked all the boxes to operate legally and safely. Different types of businesses fall into different categories, each with their own set of rules. Most businesses need a licence to run things, and it needs to be renewed every year or two.

Think of your licence as being attached to both your business *and* its location. If you relocate, even just next door, you'll need a new licence to ensure the new space is up to code. Remember, even if you plan to open in multiple spots, a business licence is required for *each* location; every spot is unique and may have different requirements.

When you fill out a Business Licence Application, we'll do a background check on your location to make sure the zoning and building are all good to go. We'll email you the results. And if any permits are needed, you'll have to get these approved and finish construction with passed inspections before we can issue your new licence. You can apply for your licence before or after your permits, it is up to you.

Helpful tips:

- A quick reminder to check the space's approved permits early so it does not come to a surprise during the licensing review. See "**Check the location's history and approved permits**" above.
- Detailed steps and information on applying for a City of Edmonton Business Licence can be found at [Apply for a Business Licence](#).

Typical Business Improvements Requiring Permits

Development Permits (Land Use and Zoning)	Building & Trade Permits (Safety Codes)
1. Change of Use (unless exempt)	1. Change of occupancy (use of space) and/or increase in capacity (# of occupants)
2. Discretionary Uses	2. Construction of a building addition
3. Variances to regulations	3. Changes to a mezzanine
4. Exterior Alterations	4. Interior and/or exterior alterations
5. Changes to Site Access/layout	5. Changes to building mechanical systems and/or electrical systems
6. Sign Permits (New signs)	6. Changes to fire and/or life safety systems

Development Permits (Land Use and Zoning)

Edmonton is like a giant jigsaw puzzle, with each piece representing a different zone. These zones are governed by the [Zoning Bylaw](#), which is basically a rulebook for how we build our city. It keeps business activities (land uses) such as factories and noisy businesses away from your quiet neighborhood, and makes sure things like cannabis stores aren't too close to schools. Zoning tells us what can be built *where*, and *what* kind of land uses /businesses activities can set up shop in each spot.

For you as a small business owner, these rules determine whether your business idea is a good fit for a particular location.

Want to learn more about zoning? Check out this handy [Zoning Bylaw guide](#).

Change of Use

We use the term "Change of Use" when a location will be doing something different than what was there before. Like turning a restaurant into a bookstore, or an office into a cafe. It also applies if you're planning to increase the activity level, like adding more seats to your restaurant or transforming an office into an event space that can handle way more people.

Often a Change of Use will trigger a Building Codes change of occupancy type which might require renovations (See building Permit below)

When you apply for a Development Permit, Development Planners will check if the proposed land use is allowed in the zone where the property is located. Understanding the previous tenant's business name and what they were doing there will be beneficial for this review. A search of record or the landlord should have this info on hand and can form part of your application for ease of review.

Think your project might be complicated? Development Permit

Pre-Application meetings are perfect for complex projects and give you a chance to chat with City staff about the specifics. There's a fee, so we only suggest them for more complicated projects. For more information, visit [Pre-Application Meetings](#).

If your project is straightforward, a professional or City staff member (e.g., Development Planners and/or Business Friendly Edmonton team) can help you with the usual application process.

Helpful tips:

- If you're planning renovations, you can apply for both your development and building permits together when you have a full set of complete drawings.
- Once you submit your application, you'll get a project number or "City File Number" on the self-serve portal. Use this number whenever you chat with us so we can keep track of everything.

Building Permits and Inspections (Construction to Occupancy)

Building Permit Review (Plans Examination)

Construction and life safety standards are established by the National Building Code and are then adopted by the Province of Alberta through the National Building Code - Alberta Edition. As an accredited municipality, the City of Edmonton is required to follow and enforce the Safety Codes Act. All construction projects and occupancies must be compliant with the Safety Codes Act's regulations, standards and/or procedures (i.e. variance(s) demonstrating an equal level of safety is obtained by other means). Building permits are issued for construction projects that meet these standards, and inspections are mandatory to ensure that the completed construction matches the proposal outlined in the permit application.

The City's Safety Code Permits & Inspections branch reviews drawings and complete site inspections to confirm general code compliance with fire and life safety standards.

Required permits all depend on the history of the space, what business was there previously, what permits were issued in the past and the scope of construction to meet your business need and/or occupancy type. This includes recognizing if the 'occupancy type' is already approved for the space, if a change of occupancy type is needed, and/or if any construction requirements are needed to change the occupancy.

Often some renovations or updates are necessary to suit the needs of the business and adhere to the occupancy type requirements. This includes installing the right size and number of bathrooms, access/egress for patrons, barrier free parking, life safety systems (fire sprinklers, fire alarm, exits, etc.) and more.

Helpful tips:

- Most small businesses will apply for a [“Changes to an Existing Building”](#) commercial permit.
- Review the [Project Implementation Plan](#) to help you plan for your construction project.

Inspections

We conduct hundreds of inspections each day, so make sure your project is ready to be inspected. Failing an inspection can set you back a week or two, delaying your grand opening.

Every building permit, including trade permits for plumbing and gas, heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC), and electrical, must be inspected to ensure construction safety standards have been met. Inspectors confirm that the construction approved on your permit drawings was carried out properly. If you make changes during construction, save yourself time by submitting a “revision request” to your building permit. Otherwise, your inspection will fail and will have to be repeated.

All required inspections for a project are listed in the Self Serve portal after a permit is issued.



Depending on how busy we are, inspections can take a few days or a week to schedule, so factor that into your timeline. Check our website for current inspection wait times and plan accordingly. Find more at [Building Permit Queue times](#).

Helpful tip:

- All required inspections for a project are listed in the Self Serve portal after issuing a permit. You can request, cancel or reschedule them there or call 311.
- The following [Commercial Inspections webpage](#) provides detailed information on this process.

Application Processing for Permits

Missing information on your application is a major speed bump...a complete application keeps things moving smoothly.



As with Business Licences, applications for permits are applied online through our [Self Serve portal](#).

Drawings and Documents

The following documents are typically required for changes of business activities and/or for alterations:

- Site Plan/Key Plan
- Floor Plan(s)
- Other Technical Documents depending the project scope, such as:
 - Structural, Mechanical, and Electrical Plans/Specifications
 - Sections and Details
 - Energy Code Documents
 - Professional Stamped Schedules
 - Building Code Variance and/or Alternate Solutions Request documentation.
 - Installed Equipment information

Submitting an incomplete application may cause significant delays as City staff are unable to begin reviews until all information is collected. Applications are considered incomplete if necessary drawings, documents and details are missing or incomplete.

Double check that all documents that are uploaded to the portal as part of your application are complete. It's the little things — like missing the address, north direction arrows, or labels — that cause delays. Take a few extra minutes to make sure everything is there and matches the guidelines on our website and helpful tips. And for building permits, double-check that your drawings are stamped, signed and ready for construction. Be sure to upload only one copy of each document in the right spot. All of these things help us move your application along smoothly.

Helpful tips:

- Carefully review the [Minimum Submission Guidelines](#) to submit a complete building permit application.
- Teaming up with engineers, designers, architects and licensed contractors who know the zoning and building rules can help make sure your application is complete from the start. Every incomplete application slows things down, so do your best to get it right the first time.

Timelines

Edmonton's a big city, and getting your licence takes time, especially if permits are also required.

Spring and summer are the construction seasons, with a lot of permit applications coming in. But, we're proactive about checking your plans to make sure they follow the Building Code. This saves you time and money down the road, so you won't have to redo anything when you're ready to open to the public.

As every spot and project is different, timelines vary. Knowing the amount of time it will take for your specific project will help you negotiate your lease and tenant space improvement needs. Some places are ready to roll, while others might need a major makeover.

Helpful tips:

- See the application processing times for Business Licences, Development Permits, Building Alterations and Change of Use Permits, Trade Permits (Electrical, Plumbing & Gas, HVAC), Sign Permits [here](#).
- Building Permits and Inspections Application Queue timelines are found [here](#).

Closing Thoughts

Opening a new business requires careful planning and a thorough understanding of the necessary permits and approvals. By following the steps outlined in this document, you can ensure that your business complies with all licensing, zoning and building regulations. Remember to start the process early to allow sufficient time for any required permit applications and inspections.

Good luck!