

City of Boston
Thomas M. Menino, Mayor



Licenses & Permits for Retail Shop Owners

A Letter From the Mayor, Thomas M. Menino

Dear Business Owner,

Thank you for opening a small business in our city and investing in Boston! Small businesses play an important role in our city: they provide quality jobs, help power our economy, and revitalize neighborhoods.

I know that opening a business is a significant undertaking, so my administration created this guide to help you through the permitting process. I hope you will explore it and all of the resources offered by the Boston Business Hub at boston.gov/businesshub.

Once again, I welcome you to Boston's business community and I thank you for your investment in our city.



Thomas M. Menino



Retail Permitting Overview

This checklist describes the permitting process for new or expanding retail businesses in the City of Boston. Additional business registration requirements are outlined in the Office of Business Development (OBD) [Small Business Resource Guide](#). Customized permitting checklists, links to applications, and permit information are available at boston.gov/businesshub through the Licensing & Permitting Wizard. For additional questions, please use the [Connect with an Expert](#) function on the Business Hub and you will be routed to the best expert for your question.

This document can be found online, with active links, at
www.cityofboston.gov/business/permitguides.

Choosing a Location - Zoning & Occupancy

- ☐ Check zoning online by searching for parcel designation on the Boston Redevelopment Authority's [searchable map](#), then check whether your desired use is allowed, Forbidden, or Conditional in the [Zoning Code](#) (by Neighborhood District in Articles 38-73).
- ☐ Check the building's existing legal use and occupancy online through the [Building Permit Search](#).
- ☐ The Inspectional Services Department (ISD) offers a one-on-one [Zoning Clinic](#) for zoning-related questions every Tuesday from 9am-12 noon at Plans and Zoning, Counter 2, 1010 Mass Ave 5th floor, Boston, MA.
- ☐ If you need to appeal to change the zoning or use, file a [Long Form](#) online and appeal to the [Zoning Board of Appeals](#) if your intended use is conditional or forbidden at that location.

Designing the Space - Construction & Building Approval

- ☐ For major construction or structural changes, file a [Long Form](#) online. For minor repairs, file a [Short Form](#) online. For more information on building permit types, visit [ISD's website](#).
- ☐ The Boston Fire Department (BFD) also requires permits for construction projects. Those applications and guidelines can be found at the [BFD's Construction Site Safety web page](#).
- ☐ Secure the appropriate building/plumbing/gas/electrical/mechanical permits through [ISD's online application system](#). Only licensed contractors may apply. Obtain all required inspections.
- ☐ [Certificate of Occupancy](#): If there is no existing Certificate of Occupancy, you're completing substantial construction, or if you are seeking to change the occupancy/use, apply at ISD Counter 3A with signed building card and final construction costs breakdown. Also see the BFD's [requirements](#) for Certificate of Occupancy.

To Consider During Planning

- ☐ [Site Cleanliness License](#): Submit dumpster site plan, maintenance schedule, disposal contract, and rodent/pest control contract to ISD Environmental Services Division, 1010 Mass Ave, 4th Floor.
- ☐ Storefront Signage: If you are located in a [landmark building](#), [Historic District](#), or [Main Streets District](#), your signs will have to undergo design review with that board/organization. If not, they still may need to be reviewed by the [Boston Redevelopment Authority](#).
- ☐ [Flammability Certificates](#): (Flame Certs) Required for each item in the shop that could pose a fire hazard. This includes but is not limited to: any [carpet](#), [tapestry/ceiling tile](#), [curtain](#), any [upholstered chair](#), [couch](#), or [non-metal furniture](#) (including pedicure chairs), any [wallcovering](#), and other decorations.

Retail Licenses & Permits

- ☐ [Food Service Health Permit](#): Required for selling ready-to-eat or packaged food. Submit completed application with proper fees and documentation (Certificate of Occupancy, Certificate of Inspection, [Food Safety Manager Certificate](#), Federal Tax ID, and Workers' Compensation Insurance information) to [ISD Health Division](#). Request a health inspection to check conformity to [State Sanitary Code](#) and [Federal Food Code](#).
- ☐ Weights and Measures Inspection: All scales must be inspected by the [ISD Weights and Measures Division](#). Request an inspection by calling 617-961-3248.
- ☐ To display merchandise outside your business, you may need to apply for a [Stationary Vending License](#) or a [Use of Premises Permit](#).

Other Considerations - Additional Permits

- ☐ [Dumpster Placement Permit](#): For permanent (i.e. one year or longer) placement of a dumpster, file an [Annual Permit Application](#).
- ☐ [Permit for Location and Sales of Tobacco Products](#): Apply through the Boston Tobacco Control Program. You must have a license from the state of Massachusetts, form CT-3A , which can be obtained from the [MA Department of Revenue](#).
- ☐ [Alcoholic Beverages License](#): The number of available licenses is limited by State law; applicants must appear at a hearing to allow for neighborhood input. See the Boston Licensing Board website linked above for more information.
- ☐ [One-Time Entertainment License](#) from Consumer Affairs & Licensing - for special events (such as a store opening).

Common Fees

Certificate of Occupancy

\$110

Dumpster Placement Permit

\$525

Alcoholic Beverage License

\$170 Advertising Fee

\$200 Filing Fee

\$100 Hearing Fee

Zoning Appeals Form

\$150 for each violation or

\$150/violation on State Building Code

Site Cleanliness License

\$50

Inspection Criteria

Building Permit Inspections - Certificate of Occupancy - ISD Inspection

- ☐ Emergency lights installed and functional
- ☐ Fire escapes in satisfactory condition
- ☐ Fire extinguisher tag dates current
- ☐ Commercial duct work cleaning on schedule
- ☐ Stairs properly railed
- ☐ Exits/directional signs visible and lit
- ☐ Sprinklers functioning properly
- ☐ Fire alarm system/smoke detectors working properly
- ☐ Exitways unobstructed
- ☐ General conditions satisfactory

Contact Information

AGENCY	ADDRESS	PHONE
Boston Business Hub	http://businesshub.boston.gov	617-635-4500
Office of Business Development	26 Court Street, 9th Floor	617-635-0355
ISD Building Division	1010 Mass Ave, 5th Floor	617-635-5306
ISD, Plans & Zoning Division	1010 Mass Ave, 5th Floor	617-635-5312
ISD Certificate of Occupancy Division	1010 Mass Ave, 5th Floor	617-635-3223
ISD Health Division	1010 Mass Ave, 4th Floor	617-635-5326
Boston Fire Department Fire Prevention Division	1010 Mass Ave, 4th Floor	617-343-3628
Public Works Department Permit Division	City Hall, Room 714	617-635-4910
ISD Environmental Services Division	1010 Mass Ave, 4th Floor	617-961-3422
Boston Public Health Commission	1010 Mass Ave	617-534-5395
Boston Licensing Board	City Hall, Room 809	617-635-4170
Mayor's Office of Consumer Affairs & Licensing	City Hall, Room 817	617-635-4165
Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services	City Hall, Room 708	617-635-3485