

City of Boston
Thomas M. Menino, Mayor



Licenses & Permits for Small Business 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
Mayor of Boston



Business Permitting Overview

This checklist describes the permitting process for new or expanding 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 on-line 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.

Grocery / Retail License & 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](#).

Restaurant Licenses & Permits

- ☐ [Common Victualler License](#): To apply for an existing CV License, submit a completed application and fee. Applications for a new CV License require attending a scheduled hearing. After approval, bring the Certificate of Inspection and copy of the lease to pick up your License.
- ☐ [Food Service Health Permit](#): Submit completed application with proper fees and documentation (Certificate of Occupancy, Certificate of Inspection, [Food Safety Manager Certificate](#), Food Allergen Certificate, Common Victualler License, 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](#).
- ☐ [Place of Assembly Permit](#): (if occupancy is 50 persons or more) is issued by the BFD.
- ☐ [Certificate of Inspection](#): Submit 3 sets of plans stamped with capacity approvals from ISD and BFD to ISD Counter 3A; await inspection.
- ☐ [Live Entertainment License \(Annual Seven-Day License\)](#) or [Non-Live Entertainment License](#) from Consumer Affairs & Licensing. If live entertainment does not conform to zoning or is not listed on the Certificate of Occupancy, file a Long Form to add that use and appeal to the Zoning Board of Appeal if necessary.
- ☐ [Pool Table License](#): Applications online. For questions, contact the Boston Licensing Board.
- ☐ [Sidewalk Café Permit](#): Complete all requirements before applying with the Department of Public Works. Also file a [Use of Premises Permit application](#).
- ☐ Kitchen exhaust hoods and ducts require Health Department Review and BFD certification. See the [BFD website](#) for more information on commercial hood and duct maintenance requirements.
- ☐ [Valet Parking Permit](#): Available online.

Salon Licenses & Permits

- ☐ [Nail Salon Permit](#): Required by Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC). It includes some construction and ventilation plan specifications, so read the [guidelines](#) early in the process.
- ☐ [Annual Permit](#): required by the Boston Fire Department to store certain flammable chemicals onsite.
- ☐ [Professional License](#): All personnel that will touch customers (hair stylist, masseuse, manicurist, etc) each must be licensed to do so. You can check your employees' licensure status on the State Division of Professional Licensure website.
- ☐ [Tanning Salon Permit](#): is issued by the Boston Public Health Commission and required to operate a tanning bed.

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.

Common Fees

Certificate of Occupancy

\$110

Alcoholic Beverage License

\$170 Advertising Fee

\$200 Filing Fee

\$100 Hearing Fee

Site Cleanliness License

\$50

Dumpster Placement Permit

\$525

Sidewalk Cafe

Generally \$500-\$1,200 /month

Nail Salon Permit

\$100 + \$20/table or foot bath
(after first 4 stations)

Certificate of Inspection

\$37.50 + \$1/seat (restaurant)

Zoning Appeals Form

\$150 for each violation or

\$150/violation on State Building Code

Food Service Health Permit

\$200 + fees for certian menu items

Non-Live Entertainment License

\$105 for background music

\$145 for <5 small TVs

\$180 for >5 small TVs

\$180 per widescreen or DVD player

Live Entertainment License

\$800 and up

Common Victualler License

\$100 + \$1/seat

Place of Assembly Permit

\$125 -\$5,125 by capacity

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

Inspection Criteria Continued

Nail Salon Permit- Board of Health Inspection

Facility Requirements and Procedures

- ☐ Hand washing sink adjacent to manicuring area
- ☐ Hot and cold running water, liquid soap, disposable towels at every handwashing sink
- ☐ Written ventilation plan written with BPHC assistance
- ☐ Public Health notice posted on site
- ☐ Multi-use tools cleaned and disinfected after each use, stored correctly
- ☐ Single-use tools discarded after each use
- ☐ Towels washed with warm water and detergent between clients
- ☐ Manicuring stations and foot baths disinfected after each client
- ☐ All chemicals are properly stored and labeled, even chemicals that have been removed from original containers
- ☐ Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) posted onsite
- ☐ All chemical containers closed between usage
- ☐ All flammable chemicals kept away from heat, stored in flammable chemicals storage cabinet
- ☐ Lidded waste receptacle at every manicuring station
- ☐ Eyewash station or 2 eyewash bottles 10 seconds from every manicuring station
- ☐ First aid kit

Standards of Practice

- ☐ Technicians wash hands adequately
- ☐ Technicians use approved gloves when handling chemicals
- ☐ Technicians must have infection and rash-free skin
- ☐ Discard all bio-hazards appropriately

Prohibitions

- ☐ No services given to a child under 14 unless accompanied by legal guardian
- ☐ No services given to client with open wounds, rash, infection
- ☐ No applications of permanent makeup unless properly licensed
- ☐ No re-use of pumic stones in the City of Boston
- ☐ No credo blades or skin graters
- ☐ Alum or astringents may only be used in powder or liquid form

See the complete list of requirements at [The Boston Public Health Commission's Website](#)

Inspection Criteria Continued

Health Inspections– Food Service Health Permit – ISD Health Division

Management and Operations

- ☐ Person In Charge (PIC) assigned and he understands duties
- ☐ Proper, adequate handwashing
- ☐ Chemicals stored properly and safely
- ☐ Soiled linens stored in proper containers
- ☐ Mops and brooms stored properly

Physical Facilities

- ☐ No evidence of rodents or insects
- ☐ Light fixtures above food products have protective shields properly installed
- ☐ Handwash sinks with soap and drying device
- ☐ Outside storage area clean
- ☐ Kitchen areas properly ventilated

Food Safety Requirements

- ☐ Proper food safety practices in storage, preparation and service of food
- ☐ Proper labeling of food containers and prepackaged foods
- ☐ Cooler and /or hot holding units operating and proper temperature levels
- ☐ Thermometers available to check food product temperaturesFood properly protected from contamination in storage, display, and preparation
- ☐ In-use food utensils properly stored
- ☐ Proper segregation of cooked and uncooked foods
- ☐ No re-service of potentially hazardous or unwrapped food

Inspection Criteria Continued

Equipment and Utensils

- ☐ Three compartment sink with drainboards or dishwashing machine operational and properly sanitizing (test kit for chemical sanitizing or proper temperature sanitizing)
- ☐ Wash water and rinse water are clean
- ☐ Wiping cloths used for raw food are stored in separate sanitizing solutions
- ☐ Mop sink provided
- ☐ Separate handwash sink in food preparation area
- ☐ Food contact surfaces properly designed, maintained, installed
- ☐ Non-food contact surfaces properly designed, maintained, installed
- ☐ Proper storage of pots and pans
- ☐ Plumbing and Waste Disposal
- ☐ No waste water back up, proper backflow devices installed
- ☐ Adequate number of refuse containers, clean and covered

See the complete list of requirements at [ISD's Website](#)

Place of Assembly - Boston Fire Department Inspection

- ☐ Certificate of inspection & Place of Assembly Permit posted
- ☐ Flammability permits for all decorations, furnishings, and interior finishes
- ☐ Egress plan on site, consistent with layout of furniture
- ☐ Fire escapes clear and operable
- ☐ Door self-closers operate correctly
- ☐ Exit doors swing outward
- ☐ Exits unobstructed, lead to a public way
- ☐ Good general housekeeping
- ☐ Stairwells clear with proper signage
- ☐ Alarm system inspections up to date
- ☐ Sprinkler inspections up to date

See the complete list of requirements at [BFD's Website](#)

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