

# How and Where to Obtain Business Licenses & Permits in Edmonton

By Chad Griffiths CCIM MRICS

If you run a business in Edmonton, it is imperative that you're familiar with your business classification under the Business License Bylaw and your building's classification under the Zoning Bylaw. In fact, we get asked about the business license process so often that we wrote this article to help give insight on the topic.

To begin, the City of Edmonton clearly describes in the Business License Bylaw<sup>1</sup> that "No Person shall engage in or operate a Business in the City unless the Person holds a Licence authorizing the Person to engage in or operate that Business". In the same bylaw they explain that a Business is:

- (i) A commercial, merchandising or industrial activity or undertaking,
- (ii) A profession, trade, occupation, calling or employment, or
- (iii) An activity providing goods or services."

In other words, **if you're occupying a commercial or industrial space, you will need a business license**<sup>2</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> Business License Bylaw: [http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws\\_licences/C13138.pdf](http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws_licences/C13138.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Non-profit organizations may be exempt and pay a Non-Profit Organization Fee instead of a Licence Fee. We would encourage any non-profit to discuss with a development officer.

Some businesses have fairly straightforward classifications (ie: Restaurant or Food Service), whereas others fall under general categories. For example, a company that warehouses and ships oilfield equipment would likely be in the following category:

*General Industrial: Processing of raw materials; manufacturing, assembly, cleaning, servicing, testing, repairing, storage, shipping or distribution of commercial or industrial materials, goods or equipment.*

Once the business use classification has been determined, it then must be matched with a compatible property. Every property will have a zoning classification<sup>3</sup> attached to it with a corresponding set of permitted and discretionary uses. If the business classification is not listed as a permitted or discretionary use, a building permit simply cannot be issued. A building owner can apply to have a building re-zoned, but this process may take 6 months or longer. The process is known to be rife with fees, bureaucracy and uncertainty.

Assuming the business use classification fits under a permitted or discretionary use, a business license<sup>4</sup> and / or a development permit can be applied for.

If the proposed use is the same as previous use, the application is called a "Continuation of Use" and a business license may be granted the same day. An

<sup>3</sup> Zoning Bylaw: [http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws\\_licences/PDF/current\\_Zoning\\_Bylaw.pdf](http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws_licences/PDF/current_Zoning_Bylaw.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Business License Application: [http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws\\_licences/PDF/business\\_licence\\_application\\_form.pdf](http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws_licences/PDF/business_licence_application_form.pdf)

example would be a new restaurant that is taking over a space that a previous restaurant had occupied. Please note that this might not be a “rubber stamp” if too much time lapses from when the last business left the property. However, if there is a change of use (ie: general retail going to an office use) a development permit will be required. **It is important to note that even if the use is permitted under the building’s zoning classification, it does not automatically guarantee that a development permit and business license will be issued.** For example, if the new use has a higher parking ratio than the previous use, a development officer may approve it or make it conditional to reviewing and approving a Parking Impact Assessment. In addition to a parking assessment, there may be additional studies that the City may require depending on the scenario.

If the proposed use is discretionary, there are even further requirements and additional time involved before a development permit can be issued. **On a discretionary use, there is a possibility of being denied altogether for just as the name implies, approval is at the discretion of the development officer.** An applicant will have the option of appealing to the Subdivision and Development Appeal Board but the process is cumbersome and does not guarantee a favorable outcome.

For permitted or discretionary uses alike, a development permit application<sup>5</sup> has a number of requirements<sup>6</sup>, including site plans, floor plans, parking layouts, neighbouring business names and the size of the space they each occupy. We have posted a link below to the full checklist of requirements. If any work is being completed on the property, a building permit will also be required. Activities requiring a building permit involves work varying from a wall being added to a complete overhaul of electrical, mechanical and plumbing. Furthermore, if a building permit is issued, it will be conditional upon safety and fire codes complying under current standards.

While the estimated time for full approval will vary depending on the use and the building, there are some general timelines to work off. If the proposed use is permitted under the property zoning, it may take anywhere from 1 day to 6 weeks to get full approval. If the proposed use is discretionary, it may take up to 12 weeks for full approval. Again, we emphasize that **approval is not guaranteed.**

We have prepared this article as an overview of the licensing and permit process but there may be additional regulations, fees or requirements that are evaluated on a case by case basis. Under each building zoning classification lies an entire set of development regulations for both permitted and discretionary uses so there is no “one size fits all” answer to every question. We always recommend that a buyer or tenant have formal discussions with a City of Edmonton development officer as a condition of a sale or lease.



#### A few final notes:

- The forms and information herein are current as of March 2016 but may be changed by the City of Edmonton without notice.
- Business licenses must be renewed every year.
- The office for planning and development is currently at the HSBC building in downtown Edmonton:

#### Permits and Licensing Service Centre

Sustainable Development 5th floor  
10250 – 101 Street  
Edmonton, AB  
T5J 3P4

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5 Development Permit Application: [http://www.edmonton.ca/by-laws\\_licences/Commercial\\_Development\\_Permit\\_Application\\_.pdf](http://www.edmonton.ca/by-laws_licences/Commercial_Development_Permit_Application_.pdf)

6 Development Permit Checklist: [http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws\\_licences/Commercial\\_Industrial\\_checklist.pdf](http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws_licences/Commercial_Industrial_checklist.pdf)