



Guide to Opening a New or Expanding an Existing Business

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Guide to Opening a New or Expanding an Existing Business

The City of Bloomington is ready to assist you in opening a new or expanding an existing business in the City. Through a team approach of staff from multiple city departments, the city is here to help you from concept to construction all the way to grand opening!

This guide provides an overview of the steps and resources available to help you succeed in opening or expanding your business in the city.

Step 1: Ensure your property's zoning is appropriate for your intended use:

Knowing how a property is zoned is critical to choosing a location for your new business or for expanding your existing business. Zoning classifications are the local laws that define how property can be used. Typically, zoning ordinances govern:

- The types of uses that are allowed in a commercial area.
- Limitation to the size of building on a parcel / lot.
- Distances from adjacent properties (setback requirements).
- Lighting requirements.
- Parking requirements (minimum number of spaces).
- Signage allowances and restrictions.
- Landscaping requirements.
- Stormwater management.

The City's zoning professionals can help you understand all applicable regulations before you secure permits or licenses. Before you buy a property or sign a new lease, or install a business sign, be sure to contact the Planning Division in the City's Community Development Department at 309-434-2226.

Step 2: Understand your Property's Unique Possibilities and Constraints

Whether buying or leasing, if the property you have selected for your business is undeveloped, or if you are contemplating expansion of an existing building or parking lot, or the construction of an additional building on the property, it is important to understand the unique possibilities and constraints of your property. The physical character unique to your property may present additional zoning and engineering considerations. Proactive investments during your due diligence of a property can save time and money in the long-run. Representatives of the City's Community Development, Public Works Engineering Division, Water, and Parks Departments are available to meet with you and your architect/engineer and contractor to review your property's possibilities and constraints early in your development planning, including requirements for setbacks, signage, allowable uses, landscaping, public utility availability and locations, land subdivision, storm water detention and drainage, driveway access, and parking. *Projects which disturb or reconstruct more than 1,400 square feet of area may also require additional storm water detention or drainage modifications.* To schedule a time to meet with the City's Project Review Group, please call the City's Community Development Department at 309-434-2226.

Best Practices:

To ensure the most timely and cost-effective process, the following steps are recommended.

- Hire a professional, state-licensed architect and engineer to prepare your plans.
- Make sure your professional contractor is registered with the City, has proper insurance, and has the appropriate experience to fully manage your project. If your selected contractor is not registered with the City, you may be held liable for any defects or non-compliance with City Codes.
- Check with your contractor to make sure all subcontractors working on your project are registered with the City before work begins.

Step 3: Understand Building Safety Requirements

The financial investment required to open a new or expand an existing business can be significant. It is important to fully understand the current physical conditions of your selected building or space and determine the costs (if any) to bring your building or space into code compliance to create a safe environment for you, your employees and your customers.

Remember, your business is an investment. If your construction project does not comply with the codes adopted by the city, the value of your investment could be reduced. Property insurers may not cover work done without permits and inspections. If you decide to sell a property that has had modifications without a permit, you may be required to demolish any unpermitted addition, leave it unoccupied, or make costly repairs.

It is recommended to contract with an architect and/or an engineer to assess the condition of your selected property prior to lease or purchase. An architect can provide you with an assessment of an existing building or space as it pertains to the City's building codes and any specific State or Federal requirements. A qualified contractor can then use your architect's assessment to provide you with an estimate to correct any identified code deficiencies. The City's Building Inspectors are available to meet with you, your architect, your engineer, and your contractor to provide additional assessment and advice prior to applying for any required construction permits.

A preliminary property assessment provided by your architect would typically focus on the following:

- Condition of walkways and stairs, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance, heating and air conditioning equipment (HVAC), electrical components, windows, doors and exterior walls.
- All means of ingress / egress including aisles, stairs, exit doors, ramps, and accessibility.
- Fire safety (emergency exits, lighting, alarms, sprinkler systems).
- Public health safety for food establishments (hand washing sinks, grease traps, proper licensing).
- A review of the site's private utilities, including the sewer service lateral.

Obtain proper licenses or permits as required.

The City of Bloomington does not require a business license for a majority of business types, although there are several that do require city-issued licenses or permits, such as the types listed below:

- Amusement machines
- Amusement machine operators
- Auctioneer
- Bowling
- Food trucks
- Golf courses
- House mover
- Junk dealer
- Liquor
- Massage establishment
- Miniature golf
- Mobile home park
- Music machines
- Music machine operators
- Nursing home
- Nursery schools (Day Care Centers)
- Pawn brokers
- Pool (Billiards)
- Pool (Billiards) - Coin Operated
- Public dancing
- Skating rink
- Rooming house
- Sales from vehicle, cart, etc.
- Second hand dealer
- Shooting gallery
- Shuffleboard
- Sidewalk café
- Taxi/DTS driver
- Taxi/DTS franchise
- Temporary sales permits (roadside markets)
- Theatre / Cinema
- Tobacco
- Towing

Depending on the type of business, it may be possible to apply for approval or permit concurrent with a renovation or new construction project for your business.

To obtain an application for a license or more information for any of the above listed types of businesses, please contact the City Clerk's office at 309-434-2240.

- Stormwater detention requirements. Projects which disturb or reconstruct more than 1,400 square feet of area may also require additional storm water detention or drainage modifications. The City prefers on-site detention, but developers should contact the Public Works Department for specifics.

To schedule an appointment to meet with one of the City's Building Inspectors please call the City's Community Development Department at 309-434-2226. To schedule an appointment with a City Engineer, call the City's Public Works Department at 309-434-2220.

Step 4: Assess your Project's Impact on Non-City Infrastructure and the Community

If new plumbing is involved in your project, the Bloomington Normal Water Reclamation District (BNWRD) will need to review your plans to determine any fees BNWRD may assess for impact on its system. Please contact BNWRD at 309-827-4396.

Your proposed project may have positive or negative impacts on a range of community stakeholders including neighbors, schools, churches, other units of local government. Additionally, your project may require the review and approval of one or more city boards and commissions such as the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, Liquor Commission, Historic Preservation and the City Council. A full listing of City boards and commissions is available on the City's website at: <http://www.cityblm.org/government/boards-commissions>

City's Project Review Group:

For larger projects, representatives of the City's Community Development, Public Works Engineering Division, Water, and Parks Departments are available to meet with you and your architect and contractor to review your project before submitting permit applications and plans. To schedule a time to meet with the City's Project Review Group, please call the City's Community Development Department at 309-434-2226.

Step 5: Plan Submission, Review, and Permitting

Once your plans are finalized for new construction or renovation, your design professional (who is registered to work in the State of Illinois) will need to submit to the city two (2) sets of sealed and signed drawings detailing the improvements proposed. Plans should detail all existing and proposed building, plumbing, electrical, and HVAC, as well as sprinkler and alarm plans if the project requires this type of work due to its size or construction type.

Additional engineering items may apply to your project and may be required as part of your plan review process such as:

- Total site area, total disturbed area, and total proposed impervious area for the site (helps with fee calculation)
- Federal Aviation Administration Obstruction evaluation
- FEMA Flood Map modification documents (LOMA/CLOMA/etc)
- IEPA watermain/sanitary sewer extension permit applications
- Stormwater detention calculations
- A copy of the Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan and NPDES Permit and/or NOI Form, if the site is over one acre
- Final plat / easement dedication / etc documents (if submission to council is needed)
- Fixture Counts / meter sizing info (form on the back of the building permit application)
- Request for fee in lieu of stormwater detention (please contact us beforehand)
- For sites in flood plain: Bloomington Flood Plain Permit
- For sites in the floodway: Illinois Department of Natural Resources Permit
- For sites on state routes: Illinois Department of Transportation Permits
- For sites with public improvements: Engineer's estimate of cost for public improvements

Certified plans examiners from the Building Safety Division and Public Works Department will review your drawings and provide a written report detailing any items that will need to be addressed. The Public Works Department will conduct a review of the site plan and determine the impact on the property and surrounding properties with respect to proposed elevations and water runoff from all impervious surfaces. Once all necessary corrections to your plans and applications have been made, appropriate permits will be issued (after payment of permit fees) following a final review.

A permit is required to construct, enlarge, alter, repair, move or demolish a building or structure. Erecting, installing, enlarging, altering, repairing, removing, converting or replacing any electrical, gas, mechanical, plumbing, or fire safety systems also requires a permit. For a detailed listing of work that requires a permit (as well as work that does not), please visit

<http://www.cityblm.org/government/departments/building-safety/permits-fees>

Step 6: Inspecting the Work and Completing Your Project

Depending on the project, a number of professional inspections may be required, such as for plumbing, electrical, building, mechanical equipment, fire suppression, grading, erosion, and public health. Be sure your contractor is aware of all inspections that will be required. Once your project has passed all of its final inspections, the City will provide a Certificate of Occupancy verifying that all requirements needed to open for business have been met by you or your contractors.

Other Resources for New or Expanding Businesses in the City of Bloomington

- **McLean County Health Department**



The McLean County Health Department is located 200 W Front Street in Downtown Bloomington. The County Health Department's Environmental Health Division handles the County's Food Protection Program. If you are considering food service at your new business, you will be subject to code requirements and will need to obtain the appropriate permits for food establishments. www.health.mcleancountyil.gov

- **McLean County Chamber of Commerce**



The McLean County Chamber of Commerce is member-oriented and driven by the evolving business community within the county. It is the Chamber's responsibility to not only offer programs and resources to members, but to provide true benefit; connecting members with new customers or vendors and developing programs that help increase their bottom line. www.mcleancochamber.org

- **Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Illinois Wesleyan University**



The Small Business Development Center of McLean County is housed at State Farm Hall at Illinois Wesleyan University. The SBDC offers free counseling for businesses as well as seminars to assist entrepreneurs in their journey to open their own business. The SBDC is a close partner of the City of Bloomington and we highly encourage all prospective businesses to begin their journey with a visit to the SBDC. www.iwu.edu/sbdc/

- **BN Economic Development Council**



The Bloomington-Normal Economic Development Council grows the local economy by assisting with local business expansion, recruiting new businesses and companies to the area, and encouraging the next wave of entrepreneurs to establish their business here. Contact the BNEDC before you start or expand your business to find out more on how they can assist you. www.bnbiz.org

- **Façade Grants / Programs and Incentives**

A variety of grants and incentive programs are offered by and administered by the City of Bloomington. For a complete listing, please see the City's website: www.cityblm.org/ED

- **State List of Registered Design Professionals**

A list of architects, engineers, landscape architects, surveyors, etc. registered with the state of Illinois is available online at: <https://ilesonline.idfpr.illinois.gov/DFPR/Lookup/LicenseLookup.aspx>

- **Central Illinois SCORE**



The counselors of Central Illinois SCORE are experienced business owners and managers who volunteer their experience and knowledge to help potential and existing small business owners achieve success. SCORE counselors can provide you with in-depth, industry-specific business assistance to help evaluate a business idea or plan, stimulate business growth and ensure long-term stability. www.centralillinois.score.org

- **Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity**



Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity

The IL Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity offers a wide array of helpful information for entrepreneurs on its website, including financial programs and regulatory and permitting information. www.illinois.gov/dceo

- **US Small Business Administration (SBA)**



The United States Small Business Administration offers outstanding online education through its SBA Learning Center. This portal features an entire library of free online courses to assist businesses of all sizes. www.sba.gov