

Commercial Tenant Resource Guides

No. 5: City Processes

- Business Licences
- Permits and Inspections for a new space
- Renovating a new space

2022

5. Navigating City Permit and Licence Processes

The City of Vancouver regulates certain activities such as operating a business, renovating business premises, or opening a food-service patio. Such activities require you to obtain a **licence**, a **permit**, or **both**.

Business Licences

All businesses in Vancouver must obtain a business licence to operate. This helps ensure that business are safe and meet land-use requirements. The processing time for a business licence application varies from application to application.

[See the steps for applying for a business licence to ensure efficient processing.](#)

Changing or Transferring a Business Licence

If you are moving your business to a new location, you will need to [update your business licence](#). In case you decide to sell your business, you can also [transfer your business licence](#) to someone else. Licences must be renewed annually.

Resource Guides Overview

- Guide 1 Commercial Tenancy Basics
- Guide 2 Commercial Lease Negotiation
- Guide 3 Relocation and Finding a Space
- Guide 4 Redevelopment Timeline and Process
- Guide 5 Navigating City Permit and Licence Processes**
- Guide 6 Support, Resources and Glossary

Cover image: Graeme Jones

For help with changing, applying or renewing your business licence [contact the City of Vancouver Licence Office.](#)



Permits and Inspections you may need

The City of Vancouver may require permits specific to your business activity. Below is list of permits you may need at your new business or organization location.

Note: inspections are needed at different stages of construction based on the complexity of your project.

Further assistance can be found through the City of Vancouver [guidance on the permits you might need to do business](#). The [website](#) also has latest up-to-date list of permits and links to information that activities in commercial spaces require. We also strongly recommend you go on the City of Vancouver's "[Starting a small business](#)" [webpage](#), where you can find more information about which permits you may need and information on how to obtain them.

[Applications, renewals, and updates can be done online.](#)

List of Permits and Inspections

- [Development Permit](#): Depending on your site's zoning regulations and proposal details, a Development Permit may be required.
- [Building permit](#): Construction projects on private property will require a building permit to be issued before any work begins.
- [Plumbing and gas permits](#): Needed to install, change, or upgrade any part of a plumbing or gas system.
- [Electrical permit](#): Needed to perform most electrical work except for replacing switches, bulbs, and making minor repairs to an installation covered by an existing annual electrical permit.
- [Fire sprinkler permit](#): Needed to install a new fire sprinkler system or make changes to an existing system.
- [Occupancy permit](#): Needed to confirm the building is safe and complies with bylaws and building codes.
- [Sign permit](#): Needed for signage, including painted signs ([Sign Bylaw user guides](#)).
- [Sidewalk retail permit \(patios, displays\)](#).
- [Liquor licence](#) is required for liquor-serving establishments.
- [Temporary event](#) permits and licences may be required as needed.
- Street vending permits may be required for on-street businesses, such as [street food stationary vending](#), [roaming street food vending](#), [non-food stationary street vending](#), [mobile special event vending](#), and [merchandise display](#).



Commercial vehicles

If your business will use a commercial vehicle, certain requirements may apply (you need a [City of Vancouver decal](#) or a commercial vehicle licence plate). and if your vehicle has no permanent signage, a commercial vehicle licence plate. New decals must be purchased annually, but you do not need a new decal or licence for your commercial vehicle if you have an existing one for that year and are moving locations in the city.



Non-City Permits

Please note that there are permits from other authorities you may need in addition to City permits

- If you are a food service business, you need [Restaurant & Food Safety permits](#) from Vancouver Coastal Health
- [Air Permit](#) from Metro Vancouver

For full listing of permits by type, please see:

- [All building and development permits](#)
- [All commercial business permits](#)



[Learn about and book inspections](#)

Note: inspections are needed at different stages of construction based on the complexity of your project.



Renovating your New Space and Getting a Permit

The permits required for your new business or activity location will depend on what you plan to do. For example, if the use is allowed under the zoning, and you plan to do construction, repairs, or renovations on your new space, you may need a building or Development Permit.

For information on renovations and tenant improvements, please also see the City of Vancouver's [Small business Commercial Renovation Centre \(CRC\)](#) and the [Starting Small business information page](#).

More on renovating your space is in [Guide 3: Relocation and Finding a New Space](#).



We highly recommend that you seek professional advice for anything concerning your tenancy and relocation. For more information on how to get support, please see [Guide 6: Support, Resources and Glossary](#).

Please note: This guide is intended to be a helpful service for business operators. It is not to be relied on for legal or other professional advice.

City staff recommend that you seek appropriate advice as the need arises.