



City of Roanoke  
Business Owner's Guide

## Overview

Whether you are just starting a business or are well established and now seek to expand or relocate, your success is a critical component to the City of Roanoke's prosperity, economic stability and community vitality. Starting or growing your business typically requires a significant investment of both financial and personal resources and it is our desire to assist you in making the most informed decisions possible to protect those resources. Our goal is to both inform you of the economic development services and programs which you may be qualified to receive, and to help you navigate the regulatory process required to ensure that your business has a positive impact on the community, is safe to occupy, and opens as quickly as possible.

The Department of Economic Development in conjunction with the Department of Planning, Building & Development developed this business reference guide. Please note that as each business and its existing or proposed location is unique, so too will be the procedures you may need to undertake to comply with City and Commonwealth of Virginia codes and regulations. This guide is offered as a general overview and is not an exhaustive list of all the regulations which may apply to your specific business. We urge you to contact our departments as necessary to ensure a successful business launch, expansion or relocation.

For questions regarding the programs and services offered through the **Department of Economic Development**, located at 117 Church Ave., SW, please call **540.853.2715**.

For general development questions, please contact the Planning Department's Project Assistance Line at 540.853.5550. A member of the planning staff can assist you with getting started on your project.

For questions regarding active city permits, or permitting requirements, please contact the **Permit Center**, located in Room 170 of the City of Roanoke Municipal Building at 215 Church Ave., SW, at **540.853.1090**.

City staff is available to meet with you, your contractors and your design team before you select a location for your business and before any applications are completed to help you understand and meet permitting requirements.

## Economic Development

The Department of Economic Development offices are located on the ground floor of the Church Avenue Parking Garage at 117 Church Ave., SW, and across the street from Macado's and the Texas Tavern restaurants. For detailed information about our services and the types of assistance available, please browse our website at [www.bizroanoke.com](http://www.bizroanoke.com). Our teams of Economic Development Specialists is here to meet with you, answer questions, and facilitate introductions with other departments from which you may require input and to assist you in finding the best location for your new or expanding operation.

## Just Getting Started?

If you are thinking of starting a business or are in the early stages of start-up you have numerous resources in the City of Roanoke to help you on your way. There are a great many resources available for start-up businesses, and the most successful businesses begin with a sound business plan. We recommend contacting the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) for professional assistance with plan development as well as a resource for financing assistance. The SBDC also offers temporary space to help you establish and launch your new business. Please contact the Small Business Development Center at 540-983-0717. For additional information, please browse the Virginia Business One-Stop website at [www.businessonestop.virginia.gov](http://www.businessonestop.virginia.gov).

## Searching for Property

Just looking? Our department website offers an “Available Property” search feature which highlights a range of key properties available today. If you do not find the right property by searching our website ([www.bizroanoke.com](http://www.bizroanoke.com)) then please contact us and we will access our internal database and various brokerage databases to assist you in finding all the available listings, which best match your search criteria.

Whether you are searching on your own, with a realtor or site selection consultant we recommend you be prepared to discuss the following:

**Parameters of your site or building:** Consider how you will use your property now but also question what you want to achieve over the next 5 or 10 years and be sure the property you acquire will allow you to expand later on as your company grows. This is true of a building search and of a site search. Other questions to consider include:

- What is the range of square feet you need now or may need in the future?
- Is the building expandable to allow for future growth?
- What ceiling height is necessary for equipment clearance?
- What is the number and orientation of dock doors, beam spacing, floor thickness and the size of office space vs. manufacturing space vs. warehouse space needed?
- Does the facility provide the adequate range utility services you require?
- Are there enough parking spaces now and for the future?
- Does the existing signage meet your requirements?
- Is the property properly zoned for the business/use? Contact the Project Assistance Line at 540.853.5550 for more information.

These are the types of questions that are necessary before you begin a search. We can assist in locating the properties that best fit your requirements now and in the future.

**Define your operation:** Other important information includes the number of shifts you will operate, number of full-time and part-time positions, wage ranges for each position and how those wages will grow over the next few years. This information will assist us in determining potential benefits which your business may be eligible to receive and if you meet defined thresholds for those benefits.

**Prior to Purchasing a Building, Buying a Property or Signing a Lease:** A final, yet critical, tip is to ask the leasing agent or current building owner to provide information on the status of the building or tenant space, including a copy of the existing Certificate of Occupancy (CO, property survey, and copies of the existing building plans. The existing conditions will determine the requirements for opening your business. In addition, ask if the property is appropriately zoned for your business. Also, ask if the property is located in other designated zones such as: Flood Plain Overlay, Historic, Rehabilitation/Conservation district or an Enterprise Zone (if they are not aware, please contact our staff and we will be able to provide that information to you).

Before signing a lease, it is best to begin the Certificate of Occupancy application process, which is required prior to obtaining a business license. The Project Assistance Line 540.853.5550 is your first point of contact for this information.

## Resources in Economic Development

Department of Economic Development (main number) **540-853-2715**

Retail, Office, Commercial:

Lisa Soltis, Economic Development Specialist [lisa.soltis@roanokeva.gov](mailto:lisa.soltis@roanokeva.gov)

Manufacturing, Commercial, Enterprise Zones:

Sean Adkins, Economic Development Specialist [sean.adkins@roanokeva.gov](mailto:sean.adkins@roanokeva.gov)

Site and Building searches:

Cassandra Turner, Economic Development Specialist [cassandra.turner@roanokeva.gov](mailto:cassandra.turner@roanokeva.gov)

Department Manager,

Marc Nelson [marc.nelson@roanokeva.gov](mailto:marc.nelson@roanokeva.gov)

Department Director,

Rob Ledger [rob.ledger@roanokeva.gov](mailto:rob.ledger@roanokeva.gov)

Small Business Development Center:

Amanda Forrester at 540-983-0717 (ext.102) [aforrester@roanokesmallbusiness.org](mailto:aforrester@roanokesmallbusiness.org)

Tom Tanner at 540-983-0717 (ext. 103) or email [ttanner@roanokechamber.org](mailto:ttanner@roanokechamber.org)

# Planning, Building & Development

## Licensing & Permit Guide

As you begin your business, it is important to note that there will be a number of “next steps” you must undertake to ensure you comply with City and Commonwealth laws and codes and provide a safe working environment for yourself, your employees and your neighbors. The Department of Planning, Building & Development often meets with prospective business owners to review applicable items at the beginning of the process as a preventative measure to ensure compliance.

The following information is a guide to help direct you to the most appropriate person or department whose function it is to provide you with the information you may require. A thorough review of the information provided below will be a valuable guide to assist you in your building or site search, or if you determine you will need to expand your facility in the near future. It will provide you with your own checklist of the next steps you will need to successfully launch or grow your business.

The Department of Planning, Building and Development offers a staff of professionals available to serve you as you begin to plan your future business operation. It is critically important to contact this department before you begin the application process. Please contact the department directly at 853-5550 or 853-1730 to set up an appointment. Feel free to browse the online Permit Center at <http://www.roanokeva.gov/1006/Permit-Center>

We know that time is important to you, so here is how we streamline the process:

- Site plans and subdivision plans are approved administratively. Review by the Planning Commission or City Council is not required. If your plans meet local regulations then they will be approved.
- With Site Plans, the department works for you to coordinate the review process and thereby alleviating your need to visit several agencies and offices to obtain approval.
- The department is focused on speedy turnaround. Roanoke has the shortest site plan review times in Virginia; just 12 business days, and many types of work in Historic Districts are reviewed and approved administratively often taking just a few days.

**Business License:** A new business must obtain a business license prior to transacting any business. The license must be renewed annually on or before March 1. When starting a new business, first obtain a zoning verification from the Permit Center (Room 170 on the first floor of the Municipal Building at 215 Church Ave., SW), then contact the Commissioner of the Revenue (853-2524) for your business license. The Permit Center will confirm that there is a Certificate of Occupancy for the use of the property, and that the property is properly zoned for the business. The

Commissioner's office will also guide you to other offices and agencies to ensure that you register properly to avoid any problems after starting your business.

**Zoning:** Contact the Planning Department Project Assistance Line at 853-5550 for confirmation that your proposed use is allowed under the current zoning designation and is permitted in accordance with the Roanoke City Zoning Ordinance.

**Planning/Zoning Approval:** Roanoke's planning staff reviews the land use permitted by the current zoning designation, the type of proposed business and any proposed signage. Any exterior changes to buildings located in a historic district, including signs, require approval from the city's Architectural Review Board. Contact the Permit Center (853-5550) for applicable requirements and the center's staff can determine whether you may need to meet with the City Zoning Administrator or the Development Review Coordinator for stormwater, grading and erosion control, or our Historic Preservation Planner, or other city staff to identify the types of planning and zoning approvals needed for your project.

**Certificate of Occupancy (CO):** Determine the previous occupancy use and verify that a Certificate of Occupancy was issued. Compare the previous use of the tenant space with the use of the new business. If the proposed use is a change in occupancy or a CO was not issued for the existing use, contact Roanoke's Building Commissioner or Deputy Building Commissioner at (853-1117 or 853-1139) to determine what upgrades the building may need.

**Site and Building Plans:** It will be helpful if the current building owner/leasing company can provide copies of previously approved site plans and building plans. If revised or new plans are required during the review process, having the existing plans may save time and reduce cost. If the current building owner/leasing agent cannot provide plans, please contact or visit the Permit Center located in Room 170 of the Noel C. Taylor Municipal Building, 215 Church Ave. SW, to determine if the city has any existing plans for the property.

**Home Office/Business:** Zoning verification for a business license is required to operate a business in your home. The zoning ordinance has requirements pertaining to operation of a home business to ensure that the home business does not change the residential character of the dwelling. Contact the Planning Department to review the additional requirements for a home occupation.

**New Building/Building Addition:** If you are constructing a new building or an addition to an existing structure, an engineer and architect most likely will be needed to develop plans for review. Before the engineer and architect begin design work, the existing zoning should be evaluated for the proposed use, and the amount of work reviewed, to determine the need for an architect and/or engineer for plan preparation. Please contact the Permit Center early in the process to make these determinations. In addition, the engineer/architect should contact the Western Virginia Water Authority to coordinate water/sewer design issues. **Note:** If the building has a fire suppression system and/or fire alarm system, the City will review and approve the fire protection plans. Separate fire protection permits will be required.

**Existing Building:** Planning staff will assist you in determining the type of approval required for your project (i.e. Zoning, Historic Review, Special Exception, Rezoning, Building Modifications, Parking, Driveway Access, Fire Suppression, etc.) based on the property/building's existing zoning and proposed use.

**Site Development:** The Permit Center will assist you in determining the type of approvals that may be required for development of your site (i.e. Land Disturbing Permit, Basic Development Plan, Comprehensive Development Plan, Subdivision, Erosion and Sediment Control, Driveway Permits, Landscaping Requirements, Stormwater Management, Flood Protection, Stream Corridor Protection, Lighting, Underground Utilities, Sign Regulations, Parking, Solid Waste Management, Driveways, Streets and Traffic etc.). Projects disturbing more than 2500 square feet will require an Erosion and Sediment Control Plan, and projects disturbing more than 10,000 square feet will require a stormwater management plan. City staff will be glad to coordinate meetings with you, your design professionals and appropriate city inspectors to determine all the applicable requirements needed for compliance and safety. Please contact the main number at 853-1730 to set up an appointment.

**Signage:** The City's Zoning Ordinance regulates the design, placement and maintenance of signs. Signs also require a Building Permit.

**Building Division Approval:** Please be sure to check with our Building Inspections Division to determine if a Virginia licensed architect, professional engineer or contractor must prepare the design/plans. Building permits information and applications are available online at <http://www.roanokeva.gov/1134/Applications-Procedures-Fees>. All building permit applications are submitted through the Permit Center.

**Asbestos Information:** Building permits cannot be issued for buildings permitted before Jan. 1, 1985 until the local building department receives certification from the owner or his agent that the affected portions of the building have been inspected for the presence of asbestos by a properly licensed individual, and that either no asbestos-containing materials were found or that appropriate response actions will be undertaken in accordance with state and federal regulations. Please contact Roanoke's Building Commissioner for more information.

### **Existing Tenant Space:**

**With Change of Use:** A building permit, which includes a zoning permit, must be submitted for review and approval. Tenant spaces with a change of use must be brought into compliance with the current adopted codes and a new CO must be issued. If the fire suppression system and/or fire alarm system are being installed or altered, review and approval of fire protection plans is needed. A separate fire protection permit may be required.

**Without Change of Use:** If your business is going into a building or tenant space that was occupied by a similar business (within the same “occupancy group”), and no work is proposed, you must request a Zoning Verification for a Business License from the Permit Center. Depending on the age of the building and if an existing Certificate of Occupancy is available, the Building Official will determine what if any additional information and inspections may be required. If there is no CO or the CO has outdated information a floor plan, building code data, and an inspection may be needed to confirm that the building or space is safe.

**Building Permit:** A permit is required for any work including, but not limited to the following:

- Installation of new type one hood systems
- Any remodel to existing tenant space
- New tenant spaces
- Accessibility upgrades
- Asbestos abatement

**Note:** A permit is not required for the following: Painting, papering, tiling, carpeting, cabinets, counter tops, and similar finish work, non-fixed and movable fixtures, cases and racks. Contact our Deputy Building Commissioner to determine permit requirements for Tenant Improvements.

**Tenant Improvement:** If you will be remodeling, tenant improvement plans must be submitted for review and approval. Only those portions of the building/tenant space being renovated must be brought into compliance with the currently adopted codes. If the fire suppression system and/or fire alarm system is being installed or altered, review and approval the fire protection plans will be required.

**Permit Issuance:** The contractor can obtain permits when the design/plans have been approved, permit fees have been paid, any tax arrearages are paid and a business license is obtained. **Note:** The contractor must be registered with the Commonwealth of Virginia. Contact the Permit Center to determine whether your proposed contractor possesses the appropriate licenses.

**Building Permits/Trade Permits:** Depending on the scope of work, construction may require a **combination permit** which covers all of the various building trades, or a **trade permit** if only one type of work needs to be completed. The following are some of the most common instances when permits are required for starting a new business. Often a trade permit for upgrade to a single system can be issued on the day of request through the Permit Center.

**Mechanical Permits:** A permit is required for mechanical work including but not limited to the following:

- Installation or modification of hood systems
- Installation of exhaust fans
- Installation or replacement of HVAC system
- New or replacement gas lines

- Relocation of existing duct work
- Installation or relocation of kitchen appliances

**Plumbing Permits:** A permit is required for plumbing work including but not limited to the following:

- Installation of sinks, water closets, dishwashers, hot water heaters, floor drains or any other new plumbing fixtures or appliances
- Relocation of existing plumbing fixtures or appliances
- Installation of new water or waste piping
- Replacement of existing water or waste piping
- Installation of grease interceptor

**Electrical Permits:** A permit is required for electrical work including but not limited to the following:

- Installation of new lighting receptacles, outlets, or wiring
- Installation of new exhaust fans
- Installation of new service panels
- Relocation of existing lighting
- Installation of emergency lighting and illuminated exit signs

**Note:** An electrical permit is not required for the following: minor repair work; the replacement of lamps and receptacles.

**Fire Alarm Permits:** A permit is required for fire alarm work including but not limited to the following:

- Installation of new alarm systems
- Additions or modifications to existing alarm systems

**Note:** Moving or adding partitions may require modifications to an existing fire alarm system. Contact the **Permit Center** (540.853.1090) for verification.

**Fire Suppression Permits:** A permit is required for fire sprinkler system work including but not limited to the following:

- Installation of new sprinkler system
- Modification to existing sprinkler system
- Installation of cooking hood fire suppression system

**Note:** Moving or adding partitions may require modifications to existing sprinkler systems. Contact the Fire Sprinkler Plan Reviewer for verification.

**Land Disturbance Permit:** Protecting waterways and properties from erosion and siltation are important environmental goals and city requirements. Whenever more than 2000 square feet of land are disturbed, an Erosion and Sedimentation Control Plan and a land disturbance permit are required. You can contact the City's Development Review Coordinator for information about the Erosion Sediment Control requirements.

## Other Areas to be Addressed:

### **Stormwater Management**

Protecting properties from stormwater runoff caused by development and managing runoff to protect water quality are also important environmental goals and city requirements. Whenever more than 10,000 square feet of land is disturbed, a Stormwater Management Plan is required. You can contact the City's Development Review Coordinator for information about stormwater management requirements.

### **Public Works Department**

The Public Works Department reviews applications for dumpster locations. Some small businesses may qualify to use "big blue" roll out containers for weekly collection and all downtown businesses pay a monthly charge for trash collection. Contact the Solid Waste Management Division for information and requirements. Public Works also reviews plans for compliance with environmental regulations. Some businesses may need to provide stormwater pollution prevention plans due to the nature of their operations. You can contact the City's Environmental Administrator to determine the need for a stormwater pollution prevention plan for your business.

### **Health Department**

Health Department approvals are required for some businesses, such as food services, prior to obtaining a certificate of occupancy. Contact the Roanoke Health Department for information.

### **Local Taxes**

A new business will be responsible for paying local taxes, which may include taxes on Real Estate, Business Personal Property, Prepared Foods, Admissions, etc. New businesses should contact the Commissioner of the Revenue to determine which taxes may apply and to complete registration forms. Once you have received a business license you will need to contact the Department of Billings and Collections to register for such tax payments as may be applicable to your business.

### **Tax Arrearages**

Any delinquent real estate taxes applicable to a property must be satisfied prior to the issuance of any permits. Citizens can settle any assessments or pay bills at the City Treasurer's Office in the Noel C. Taylor Municipal Building in downtown Roanoke.

Resources for Planning, Zoning and Development (Area Code 540)

<b>Main number - To set up an appointment</b>	<b>853-1730</b>
<b>Project Assistance Line – general development questions</b>	<b>853-5550</b>
<b>Permit Center - active permits, permitting process</b>	<b>853-1090</b>
Planning Administrator	853-5808
Zoning Administrator	853-2346
Development Review Coordinator	853-5796
Historic Resources/Preservation Planner	853-1522
Building Commissioner	853-1117
Deputy Building Commissioner	853-1227

**Additional Resources:**

Solid Waste Management	853-6848
Environmental Administrator	853-2425
Health Department	857-7800
Commissioner of the Revenue	853-2524
City Treasurer	853-2561
Billings and Collections	853-2880
Western Virginia Water Authority	853-5863