



# GUIDE TO STARTING YOUR BUSINESS

We are pleased that you have chosen Portsmouth for your business. The City has established standards and regulations to ensure quality development and to protect neighborhoods and citizens. In general, the required approvals for establishing a business are:

**Zoning Approvals** – Required to ensure the type of business and the building are appropriate for the neighborhood. Other permits may be required for specific business types, such as a restaurant, or if the business is located within a historic area.

**Site Plan and Building Permit Approval** – Required to ensure conformance with State and City health and life/safety requirements.

**Occupancy Permits** – Required to ensure that all of the necessary improvements have been met and the building is ready to be occupied by your business.

**Sign Permits** – Required for identification of your business.

**Business License** – Required to operate a business.

## Help is waiting for you.

The many departments of the City of Portsmouth are committed to helping you locate and get your business venture up and running. While there are many requirements of the City, there are also many services offered to help you navigate through the process. This document is designed to give a general and short overview of what is required and where help may be obtained. It describes the process as a sequence of steps, even though some steps may occur at the same time. It also includes tips and contacts to help you expedite the process.

More detailed information on specific processes or permits is available in other documents.

## Step 1: Develop a Business Plan and Review Possible Incentives

- What is the nature of your business idea?
- What is the product or service?
- Who are your customers?

Think about these questions. If you need any guidance in developing your business plan, please contact the City's Department of Economic Development.

They may also be able to advise you on available financing and incentives for your business idea or assist you in finding a suitable location for your business.

### CONTACT:

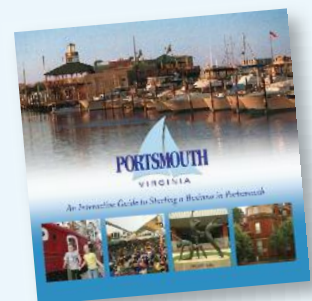
Department of  
Economic Development  
200 High Street, Suite 200  
Portsmouth, VA 23704  
757-393-8804

### HELPFUL TIP #1

Check out the website:  
[www.portsmouthvaed.com](http://www.portsmouthvaed.com)  
for our  
online business center.

### HELPFUL TIP #2

Ask for your free copy  
of our CD:  
*An Interactive Guide to Starting  
a Business in Portsmouth.*



## Step 2: Contact the Planning & Zoning Office

Your business may have unique requirements or require certain permits or approvals.

Staff will help find answers to your questions and guide you through the process by:

- Defining the steps that match your specific needs;
- Identifying the appropriate sequence of steps (some steps may occur at the same time) and how long the process may take;
- Advising you of zoning requirements;
- Providing you with contacts in other City departments;
- Scheduling meetings with key personnel;
- Coordinating the review of any required planning or permit applications; and
- Helping to identify and resolving any problems.

### CONTACT:

Department of Planning  
801 Crawford Street, 4th floor  
Portsmouth, VA 23704  
757-393-8836

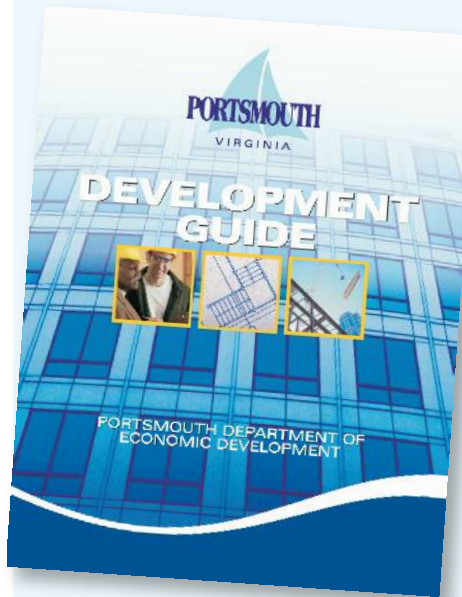
### HELPFUL TIP #3

*Each business is unique so the steps may vary. By contacting the Planning & Zoning Office, you will be advised as to which steps are required for your particular business and the order of the steps you should take to ensure a speedy process.*



### HELPFUL TIP #4

*Ask for your free copy of Portsmouth's Development Guide. The Development Guide contains brief descriptions, process flow charts, timeframes and staff contacts for each of the major development processes.*



## Step 3: Choose a building or a piece of property where your business is to be located

A real estate broker may be able to help, or you may check with a Department of Economic Development representative at (757) 393-8804. They know the City very well and often can give you valuable advice on the best location for your business.

You can also obtain zoning information on parking, historic districts, signs and any other special requirements from the City of Portsmouth Zoning Ordinance.

### HELPFUL TIP #5

*The City's zoning ordinance is located online at:*  
[www.portsmouthva.gov/citycode.htm](http://www.portsmouthva.gov/citycode.htm)

If your property is not properly zoned for the business of your choice, someone from Planning & Zoning will advise you what areas of the City may be appropriately zoned or options that are available to you for bringing the site into compliance with zoning regulations.

This may include a Use Permit or re-zoning from City Council.

Some businesses can be operated within your house, condominium or apartment and these businesses are known as a Home Occupation. These home-based businesses have specific rules and requirements associated with their operation.

### HELPFUL TIP #6

*Always check with your apartment manager or condominium association before applying to the City and starting a home-based business.*

### HELPFUL TIP #7

*It is important that you collect the information above BEFORE signing a lease or purchasing property, so you can be sure the location you choose allows your type of business.*

## Step 4: Review Building Code Regulations

For your specific business you might need to or want to alter walls, structural elements and/or equipment within the building or on the site you have selected. In addition, to ensure the safety and health of the building's occupants, you may also be required to complete some modifications to the property in accordance with the Building Code and other City requirements.

If your business requires work on the building, before starting any construction work, obtain all required construction permit(s). The Department



of Permits and Inspections should be contacted for questions relative to permit requirements and applications. The number of permits required is dependent on the type and scope of work being performed, and separate permits may be required for each major trade doing work on your property, including: Building Permits, Mechanical Permits, Electrical Permits, and/or Plumbing Permits.

**CONTACT:**

Department of Permits & Inspections  
801 Crawford Street, 4th floor  
Portsmouth, VA 23704  
757-393-8531

**HELPFUL TIP #8**

*Applications for the City’s Rehabilitation Tax Abatement program MUST be submitted before any building permit application is turned in.*

During the construction phase, the City will send inspectors to your site to perform periodic inspections to ensure that the work is done in accordance with applicable local and state laws regarding building codes and the approved plans. When construction is complete you or your contractor should schedule a final inspection of the work. After the final inspection is approved, you will be issued a Certifi-

cate of Occupancy (C.O.) that will allow you to occupy the building.

**HELPFUL TIP #9**

*Because any number of factors could delay the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy, the City strongly recommends that you do not schedule or announce grand openings prior to actual receipt of a C.O.*

**HELPFUL TIP #10**

*Opening a business in a historic or older building often poses unique building code challenges. Please be sure to arrange a walk-thru of the building with a member of the Permits & Inspections Department prior to beginning work so that unanticipated requirements may be minimized.*

**Step 5: Review State and Other City Regulations**

In addition to local requirements, some businesses (day care, restaurants, etc.) are subject to separate State regulations and your business might be required to obtain additional operating permits (e.g., Food Operator’s Permit from the Health Department and a Meal Tax Bond.)

The Department of Public Health is responsible for inspecting and regulating restaurants, hotels and motels, daycare center, adult homes, schools, barber and beauty shops, drinking water supply, milk and dairy products, swimming pools and marinas, and sewage disposal. Certain specific businesses (e.g., restaurants, food vendors and food processing establishments) will require a Health Permit.

**CONTACT:**

Department of Public Health  
1701 High Street, #102  
Portsmouth, Virginia 23704  
(757) 393-8585

If you plan to sell alcoholic beverages in your place of business, you will need to obtain an ABC License from the Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (VA ABC). To obtain information on the types of licenses for beer, wine and mixed beverage permits, you will need to complete the Virginia ABC application. Be sure to contact an ABC agent, who can assist you with the licensing process and explain the regulations involved with operating an establishment that sells alcoholic beverages.

In some instances, in order to develop your site or operate your business, you may also need to apply for other permits for such things as:

- Encroachment Permit
- Water Permit Application
- Sign Permit
- Outdoor Dining Permit

**HELPFUL TIP #11**

*Temporary Sign Permits for banners announcing Grand Openings are required, but they can be approved administratively and quickly!*

**Step 6: Registering Your Business**

If you are a Sole Proprietor who is doing business under your name only, you are not required to file with the Circuit Court Clerk. However, if you are a business doing business under a name other than your own (Trade Name, T/A) you are required to register with the Circuit Court. Complete the Certificate of Assumed or Fictitious Name form.

**HELPFUL TIP #12**

*This form may be found online at: [www.courts.state.va.us/forms/circuit/cc1050.pdf](http://www.courts.state.va.us/forms/circuit/cc1050.pdf)*

Corporations, Limited or General Partnerships or Limited Liability Companies must register with the Virginia State Corporation Commission (SCC) and the Department of Taxation (TAX) and, possibly, with the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC).

Virginia publishes the *Business Registration Guide* and the *Virginia Guide to Establishing a Business* designed to assist new businesses operating in the State by providing information detailing the steps in registering with these agencies as well as including a brief description of other agencies that you may need to contact before opening a new business. In addition, SCC Forms are available:

- At the SCC Office in Richmond  
1300 East Main Street
- By calling (804) 371-9733
- From the SCC web-site:  
[www.scc.virginia.gov/division/clk/fee\\_bus.htm](http://www.scc.virginia.gov/division/clk/fee_bus.htm)

### HELPFUL TIP #13

*Va's Business Registration Guide may be found online at:*  
[www.scc.virginia.gov/clk/files/brg.pdf](http://www.scc.virginia.gov/clk/files/brg.pdf)

### HELPFUL TIP #14

*Va's Department of Business Assistance is online at:*  
[www.dba.virginia.gov/](http://www.dba.virginia.gov/)



## Step 7: Obtain a Federal Employee Identification Number (EIN)

A Federal Employee Identification Number (EIN) is required for most businesses; only sole proprietors with no employees or no Keogh plan are not required to have an EIN.

To obtain an EIN, complete IRS Form SS-4, available from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. The IRS Form SS-4 is available:

- At the local IRS Office  
200 Granby Street, Norfolk, VA  
(757) 213-3925
- By calling (800) 829-3676
- From the IRS Web-site  
([www.irs.ustreas.gov](http://www.irs.ustreas.gov))

## Step 8: Obtain a Virginia Sales Tax Number

A Virginia Sales Tax Number is required for all businesses that intend to operate within Virginia. Businesses must register with the Virginia Department of Taxation (TAX) for all taxes that may apply to the operation of the business, including the sale of taxable goods. To register, complete a Combined Registration Application Form. This form can be found online at:  
[www.tax.virginia.gov/taxforms/Business/Registration/R-I.pdf](http://www.tax.virginia.gov/taxforms/Business/Registration/R-I.pdf)

## Step 9: Obtain a Business License

Now you are almost ready to open your business in the City of Portsmouth. A business license must be obtained by all businesses operating in the City prior to beginning operation.

A Commissioner of the Revenue representative can assist you in registering your business and completing your business license application. Please note that even independent contractors, self-employed individuals, businesses with no employees, and part-time businesses may also be subject to a license.

- New Businesses must obtain a Zoning permit and a tax clearance from the City Treasurers office before visiting the Commissioner of the Revenues office.
- Any business renewing their license must obtain just a tax clearance.

**Please note:** Business license applicants must apply in person, and you should allow at least one hour to complete the application process.

### HELPFUL TIP #15

*To help streamline your application process, be sure to bring these important documents with you:*

- Identification (picture ID - all parties)
- Corporate Charter (if applicable)
- Partnership Agreement (if applicable)
- Estimate of Gross Receipts through December 31st
- Required Permits/Licenses (if applicable)
- Bring required receipts, certificates, and forms from the applicable agencies
- Check or cash for fees required

### CONTACT:

Office of the  
Commissioner of Revenue  
801 Crawford Street, 1st floor  
Portsmouth, Virginia 23704  
(757) 393-8714



## Last Step: Open Your Business

You're on your way!  
Good luck and may your business prosper!