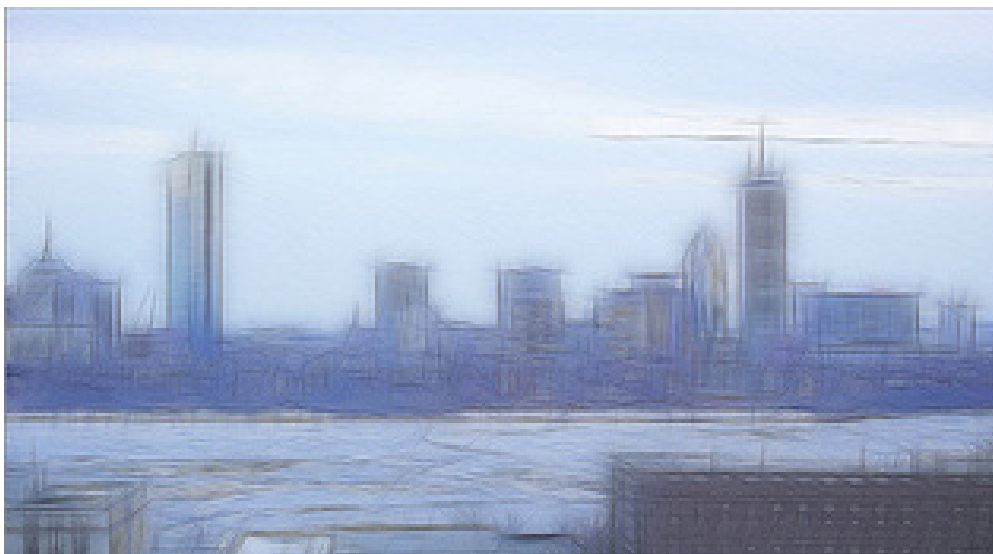


# City of Boston Guide to Variances and Permits

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City of Boston  
Martin J. Walsh, Mayor



## BEGINNING THE PERMITTING PROCESS

### Allowed, Conditional, or Forbidden

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Before starting any permit applications or construction, you will need to check zoning to ensure your intended use is approved for your property.

Check all zoning codes online, and visit the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) located at:

#### **Inspectional Services Department (ISD)**

1010 Mass Ave, 5th Floor, Boston, MA 02118

## IMPORTANT WEBSITES TO CHECK ZONING CODES

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#### **Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) Zoning Page:**

<http://gis.cityofboston.gov/zoning>

#### **BRA Maps Page:**

<http://www.bostonredevelopmentauthority.org/research-maps/maps-and-gis/overview>

Also, search your neighborhood's article for your business use listing as:  
**“Allowed, Conditional, or Forbidden”**

## DO I REQUIRE A VARIANCE?

### Zoning Board of Appeals

If you do have a **by-right use**, you can skip to pages 4 and 5, which show the permitting process based on the **type of construction** you are doing. Then, you may follow the steps on page 7 for information on obtaining your Certificate of Occupancy.

If you have a **by-right use** and you are **not doing any construction** or renovations, please check for your specific use's required permits and licenses at <http://businesshub.boston.gov/>.

Then, skip to page 7 for information on obtaining your Certificate of Occupancy.

If you do **not have a by-right (allowed) use**, you will need a Variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals.

You will need to follow the steps on page 3 to obtain your variance. You can and should work on obtaining other required permits during the appeals process in order to avoid delay.

**Note:** Various inspections and sign-offs will be required throughout the process. Your licensed contractor must be sure to schedule these appropriately to avoid delay.

# Variance Application Process

## STEP 1.

A licensed contractor must obtain a **Long Form Building Permit Application** at 1010 Mass Ave, 5th floor, Counter 1 (Inspectional Services Department).

## STEP 2.

Submit Long Form application indicating proposed use and **request an expedited denial** of your application so that you can begin the appeals process (expect approximately 30 days for denial notice).

## STEP 3.

**Submit application to appeal the refusal to ISD.** Must be done within 45 days of refusal notice. Must be done in-person or by a representative.

## STEP 4.

**Hearing will be scheduled.** Notice of hearing will be published at least 20 days in advance.

## STEP 5.

**Appear at Zoning Board of Appeals hearing** (City Hall, Room 801). May be represented by lawyer, architect, or other professional. The Zoning Board of Appeal's decision must be filed with ISD within 90 days.

## STEP 6.

**Review state building code requirements.** Applicant may be required to meet with a Plans Examiner.

## STEP 7.

**Boston Redevelopment Authority design review.** If required as a condition of the approval, applicant must contact BRA representative once board approval is received to meet for design review.

# MINOR CONSTRUCTION/RENOVATION - PERMITTING PROCESS

Alterations that will not change the use, living space or fire codes

Required: **Short Form Building Permit Application** from ISD

**APPLICATION MUST BE FILED BY A LICENSED CONTRACTOR!**

**Licensed contractors** can apply online or in-person at:  
1010 Mass Ave, 5th floor, Counter 1.

Required to complete application:

1. Description of proposed work
2. Total cost of project
3. Trade license
4. Copy of contract between contractor and owner

**Note:** ISD may request additional documents.

**Note:** Your specific use may require additional permits (ex: food service).

\* See page 7 for additional permits that may be required.

In order to avoid delay, it is important to **ask ISD** at the beginning of the process to see if you will require additional permits for your project.

# MAJOR CONSTRUCTION/RENOVATION PERMITTING PROCESS

Construction of new buildings or additions to existing buildings,  
making structural repairs or renovations

**May be required:** Boston Redevelopment Authority Review

**Small Project Review** - Applies to projects that add 20,000 or more square feet of floor space

**Large Project Review** - Applies to projects that add 50,000 or more square feet of floor space and to larger projects that involve a change of use without significant new construction

If your project falls within these parameters, **you must contact the Boston Redevelopment Authority** before proceeding.

**Required: Long Form Building Permit Application** from ISD

**APPLICATION MUST BE FILED BY A LICENSED CONTRACTOR!**

Licensed contractors can apply in-person at: 1010 Mass Ave, 5th floor, Counter 1. Be sure to check with ISD to ensure that the proper Long Form is secured.

Required to complete application:

1. Address of property
2. Description of work proposed
3. Owner authorization
4. Owner name, address, signature
5. Site plan
6. Floor plan
7. Certified plot plan
8. Licensed contractor or engineer's signature

**Note:** Additional documents may be required based on scope of work.

## OTHER WORK THAT MAY REQUIRE ADDITIONAL PERMITS:

Construction of Water Service Pipes from Public Water Main or Connection to Public Sewer or Storm Drain (page 9)

Demolition (page 9)

Dumpster Use (page 10)

Electrical (page 10)

Fire Alarm and Sprinkler Systems (page 11)

Interior Furnishings (page 12)

Parking Lot (page 12)

Plumbing (page 12)

Signage (page 13)

Storing/Using Potentially Hazardous Material (page 13)

Street Occupancy (page 13)

In order to avoid delay, it is important to ask ISD at the beginning of the process if you will require additional permits for your project.

**Note:** Your specific use may require additional permits (ex: food service).

**Note:** Various inspections and sign-offs will be required throughout the process. Your licensed contractor must be sure to schedule these appropriately to avoid delay.

# CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY

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A Certificate of Occupancy (C/O) is required after new construction or major renovations, and for changes of occupancy.

The previous building owner may already have a C/O on file. If you are not doing any major renovations or changing the type of business in the space, this certificate may be sufficient. However, be sure to check with ISD to ensure that the existing Certificate of Occupancy is applicable based on the work you have done and your intended use of the building.

If you made major renovations or changed the egress, capacity, use of the building, or fire protection, you will need to apply for a new Certificate of Occupancy.

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## **Step 1.**

Owner or developer applies for Certificate of Occupancy at ISD - 1010 Mass Ave, 5th floor, Counter 3. Boston Fire Department (BFD) is then notified of the application by ISD.

## **Step 2.**

Upon request for a Certificate of Occupancy, an inspector will verify that all permits were obtained and all inspections were completed along the way.

## **Step 3.**

A final walkthrough is conducted and ISD and BFD sign off on request for Certificate of Occupancy.



## ADDITIONAL PERMIT DESCRIPTIONS

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Please note that you may require additional approvals and/or permits based on your specific scope of work. To avoid delays, please check with ISD at the beginning of the process to ensure that all required approval is obtained.

### **Construction of Water Service Pipe from Public Water Main or Connection to Public Sewer or Storm Drain**

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For new construction or renovation that involves BWSC's water, sewage, or storm drains, you will need to submit a [Site Plan and supporting documents](#) to BWSC. Then, ISD will need to do a rough construction sign-off before you can obtain the necessary [General Service Application](#) from Boston Water and Sewer. Additional forms may be required by BWSC based on the scope of work.

### **Demolition**

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Before any demolition project, you will need to fill out an **Article 85 Demolition Delay Review Application** from the Boston Landmarks Commission at Boston City Hall, Room 805. You will either be determined to require the delay period or you will be exempted.

Next, you will require a **Construction/Demolition/Renovation Permit** from Boston Fire Department (BFD). [Licensed contractors](#) can apply at 1010 Mass Ave, 4th floor.

A licensed contractor may then initiate the application for a **Short Form Permit** for demolition either online or in-person at 1010 Mass Ave, 5th floor.

Additionally, as part of your application to ISD, you will submit an agreement stating that you will adhere to state building code and Boston zoning code, a bond or certified check to ISD for the total amount of the demolition cost, proof of a licensed exterminator's inspection given to Environmental Sanitation Division of ISD, and shut-off notices for utilities such as gas, electric, BWSC, telephone, and cable.

## Dumpster Use

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If your dumpster is 3 cubic yards or larger, you will require a **Site Cleanliness License** from the Environmental Sanitation Division of ISD. Please keep in mind that additional documents will be required to complete the application. You can apply for this license at BFD -1010 Mass Ave, 4th floor.

You will need to obtain a permit from BFD depending on how long you will keep your dumpster on-site. For all dumpsters 3 cubic yards or larger that are on-site for more than 24 hours but less than one year, you will require a **Dumpster Placement Permit**. For all dumpsters 3 cubic yards or larger that are on-site for more than one year, you will require an **Annual Permit**. Both permits can be obtained from BFD at 1010 Mass Ave, 4th floor.

If you have a dumpster that is 2 cubic yards or larger and is located in a public right-of-way, you will require a **Street Occupancy Permit** from Public Works. This permit can be obtained in-person at City Hall, Room 715. Please note that before you obtain this permit, you will need to present proof of bond with the City of Boston.

## Electrical

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An **Electrical Permit** is required from ISD. A **licensed contractor** can apply for this permit online or in-person at 1010 Mass Ave, 5th floor.

**Note:** Additional permission may be required from the Boston Fire Department. Be sure to check with ISD before beginning electrical work.

## **Fire Alarm and Sprinkler System**

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Please note that all fire alarm and sprinkler work should be included in your initial **Long Form Permit** at the **beginning of the application process**. This will prevent you from needing multiple building permits for one job.

Amendments to your Long Form may be issued as additional details or alterations to expected fire and sprinkler systems arise.

### **Installing or Changing Sprinklers:**

A **Long Form Permit** will be required from ISD. A licensed contractor can apply at: ISD - 1010 Mass Ave, 5th floor. Additionally, a **Sprinkler Install Permit** from ISD will also be required. This permit can be secured online or in-person at 1010 Mass Ave, 5th floor by a licensed contractor.

A **Fire Extinguishing System Permit** is required from Boston Fire Department (BFD). A licensed contractor can obtain this permit at 1010 Mass Ave, 4th floor.

### **Installing New Hard-wired Smoke Alarms or Changing Hard-wired Smoke Alarms for a Compatible System:**

A **Fire Alarm Install Permit** is required from BFD. A licensed contractor can apply at: 1010 Mass Ave, 4th floor. Additional documents are required to complete the permit application.

### **Installing/changing Fire Alarm Systems Other than Sprinklers or Hard-wired Smoke Alarms:**

A **Long Form Permit** is required from ISD. Please keep in mind that additional documents will be required to complete the application. A licensed contractor can apply at: 1010 Mass Ave, 5th floor.

## Interior Furnishings

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There are **various permits** required by the Boston Fire Department Chemist for interior furnishings including, but not limited to, wall coverings, floor coverings, non-metal furniture, drapery, and ceiling tiles. To obtain these permits for your interior furnishings, you will need to complete and submit your application to BFD, 1010 Mass Ave, 4th floor. The list of regulated materials and PDF versions of the various interior furnishings applications can be found at: <https://www.cityofboston.gov/fire/prevention/chemist.asp>.

**Note:** All regulated interior furnishings must be permitted prior to their installation.

## Parking Lot

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A **Curb Cut Permit** is required from Public Works for all curb cut projects that include the construction of a driveway. A licensed contractor can submit this application and supporting documents at the Public Works Permitting Office, Room 715 of City Hall. Once an approved copy of the Curb Cut Application is returned to the contractor, it can be brought to ISD so that a **Use of Premises Permit** can be issued. The Use of Premises Permit will then be used to obtain the associated Curb Cut Permit.

## Plumbing

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A Plumbing Permit is required from ISD. A **licensed contractor** can apply for this permit online or in-person at 1010 Mass Ave, 5th floor.

**Note:** Additional permission may be required from the Boston Water and Sewer Commission. Be sure to check with ISD before beginning plumbing work.

## Signage

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First, check if design review will be required for your sign based on your location. You may require review by the BRA, your local Main Streets organization, or your local Historic District Commission.

If you are putting up a replacement sign, a **Short Form Permit** is required from ISD. If you are putting up a new sign, a **Long Form Permit** is required from ISD. A licensed contractor can apply at 1010 Mass Ave, 5th floor.

If your sign projects in, on, or over a public right-of-way, you will require a Projection Permit from Public Works. This permit can be obtained at City Hall, Room 715.

## Storing/Using Potentially Hazardous Material

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To store or use potentially hazardous material, you will need a **General Permit** from BFD. Please check with ISD before obtaining this permit as there may be different requirements based on the material and whether it is used interiorly or exteriorly.

## Street Occupancy

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In order to block a public way for construction or other purposes, you will need to obtain a **Street Occupancy Permit**. Permits are issued in-person by Public Works in room 715 of City Hall based on a Traffic Approval Form processed by Boston Transportation Department in Room 721 of City Hall. Please note that **you must be bonded** with the City before obtaining a Street Occupancy Permit for all Street Occupancy Permits other than for moving trucks.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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It is important that you consult the Inspectional Services Department throughout the permitting process to ensure that all necessary steps are taken for your specific project.

### **Inspectional Services Department**

1010 Massachusetts Avenue, 5th Floor

Boston, MA 02118

Telephone: 617-635-5300

Email: [ISD@cityofboston.gov](mailto:ISD@cityofboston.gov)

## RESOURCES

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### **Boston Back Streets- Industrial and Commercial Industry**

<http://www.bostonredevelopmentauthority.org/business-dev/initiatives/backstreets-boston/overview>

### **Boston Business Hub**

(Click on “Learn about Permitting & Licensing” for Permitting Wizard)

<http://businesshub.boston.gov/>

### **Boston Fire Department Permit Application PDFs and Guidelines**

<http://www.cityofboston.gov/fire/pga.asp>

### **Boston Redevelopment Authority Home Page**

<http://www.bostonredevelopmentauthority.org/Home.aspx>

### **Boston Water and Sewer Commission’s Construction Information Page**

[http://www.bwsc.org/BUSINESS/new\\_construction.asp](http://www.bwsc.org/BUSINESS/new_construction.asp)

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**City of Boston Online Permit Search**

<http://www.cityofboston.gov/isd/permitsearch>

**City of Boston Online Permitting Application Site**

<https://onlinepermitsandlicenses.cityofboston.gov/isdpermits/>

**Note:** Licensed contractors may use this link for ISD permit applications that are available online.

**Inspectional Services Department, Building Division Website**

<http://www.cityofboston.gov/isd/building/>

**Public Works Permitting Page**

<http://www.cityofboston.gov/publicworks/permits/>

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Bahman Farzad / [lotusflowerimages.com](http://lotusflowerimages.com)

Layout/design by:  
Ronette Seenev