

Saint Louis  
**COUNTY**

**BUSINESS ASSISTANCE CENTER**

**GUIDE FOR OPENING, EXPANDING,  
OR RELOCATING A BUSINESS**



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by  
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# Introduction

St. Louis County is working to make it easier for businesses to open, expand, and/or relocate within the unincorporated area of St. Louis County. More than 1 million people live, work, and play in St. Louis County. St. Louis County has an abundance of entrepreneurs and we want to ensure that their talents remain right here within our county.

Like any large metropolitan region, St. Louis County Government has enacted business venture-related laws to protect and preserve our shared quality of life. For new or expanding businesses this usually means obtaining approvals, permits, and licenses from multiple county departments, which can be confusing and challenging at times. The Business Assistance Center (BAC) is an important resource to businesses of any size. BAC will assist you in better understanding the types of permits and licenses required and how to obtain them so that you're new or expanded business can become operational as quickly as possible.

BAC created this "Guide for Opening, Expanding, or Relocating a Business" with businesses like yours in mind.

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## Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

- 1.Q. *What are the basic steps for starting a business in Missouri?*
- A. Information can be obtained from the Missouri Secretary of State web site at [www.sos.mo.gov/business/sbac/starting\\_steps.asp](http://www.sos.mo.gov/business/sbac/starting_steps.asp). The Missouri Business Portal also offers a variety of resources aimed at helping you start a business.
- 2.Q. *Are there any available local business assistance loans and programs?*
- A. Information can be obtained from the Economic Council at 314-615-7663.
- 3.Q. *How do I obtain a business, merchant, or manufacturing license from the County?*
- A. The County does not issue a business license per se. All businesses are required to register with the Assessor's office for personal property taxes. In addition the Assessor's office issues Merchant's Licenses (retail or wholesale) and Manufacturer's Licenses (for businesses that manufacture products). Contact the Assessor's office at 314-615-5104 for additional information. For information concerning other business related activities that require a license contact the Licensing Division at 314-615-5107.
- 4.Q. *Can I operate a small business out of my home?*
- A. Under the County's Zoning Code a business may be operated in a residential area of "Unincorporated St. Louis County" as long as it complies with the criteria for a "Home Occupation" which is defined as follows:
- "A business, commercial, or professional endeavor operated as a domestic activity carried on solely by members of a family who reside on the premises. These endeavors shall not offer any services to the general public, nor stock in trade or commodity on the premises, shall utilize no equipment except as is customary for purely domestic or household purposes, and shall not involve any signage or display which indicates use of the property for any purpose other than a dwelling from the exterior of the dwelling. The keeping of not more than two (2) roomers or boarders, the supervision of not more than four (4) children other than those residing on the premises, and the instruction or tutoring of one (1) student at a time, up to eight (8) students per day, shall each constitute a home occupation. Beauty or barber shops, convalescent or nursing homes, tourist homes, including bed-and-breakfast, music schools involving the instruction of more than one (1) student at a time, massage parlors, and motor vehicle repairs shall not be deemed home occupations."*
- For additional information on "Home Occupations" contact County Zoning Review at 314-615-2525 or 314-615-7814.

- 5.Q. *I've found a vacant tenant space or building that I am interested in. How do I find out if the zoning for the location is appropriate for my business?*
- A. The County's Zoning Ordinance establishes the types of uses that are permitted within each zoning district classification. The boundaries of the zoning districts are indicated on the official zoning map of unincorporated county. County Zoning Review can advise if your particular business is a permitted use in the tenant space or building that you are interested in. Contact County Zoning Review at 314-615-2525 or 314-615-7814.
- 6.Q. *Do I need a Certificate of Use and Occupancy before I move in and open up for business?*
- A. Yes, a Certificate of Use and Occupancy (sometimes referred to as an Occupancy Permit) is required prior to moving into a vacant tenant space or building and opening for business. The certificate can be obtained by one of two methods depending on whether you can move into the vacant tenant space or building in its existing condition (other than painting, wallpapering, carpeting and similar cosmetic work) or whether renovations need to be done. Renovations may be required by you to accommodate your proposed business operation or may be required by County codes because of a change-in-occupancy from the previous use, or both. See application for commercial re-occupancy (7.Q. & A.), obtaining a building permit for renovations (8.Q. & A.), and change-in-occupancy information (10.Q. & A.) below.
- 7.Q. *When can I file an application for commercial re-occupancy?*
- A. If you plan on moving into the vacant tenant space or building in its existing condition without doing any renovations (other than painting, wallpapering, carpeting and similar cosmetic work) to the space or building you should file an application for re-occupancy. Upon verification that the site is appropriately zoned for your proposed business and that the vacant space or building passes a safety and property maintenance inspection the Certificate of Use and Occupancy will be released to you. For more information on filing an application for re-occupancy contact Public Works Permit Processing at 314-615-7866.
- 8.Q. *How do I obtain a building permit to do renovations before I move in?*
- A. A building permit is required if you plan on voluntarily doing renovations to a vacant tenant space or building for your business, or if you are required by code to do renovations to the space or building because of a change-in-occupancy. In order to obtain the building permit you are required to have a Missouri Registered Architect prepare construction documents for the proposed renovation work. If the renovation also requires mechanical, electrical, or plumbing (MEP) work to be done, you are required to have a Missouri

Registered Professional Engineer(s) prepare construction documents for the MEP scope of work. These construction documents are reviewed for compliance with the County's building codes which establish minimum requirements for the public health, safety and welfare. Once building and MEP discipline permits are issued renovations may commence. Contractors are responsible for requesting inspections as the work progresses, including requesting a final inspection upon completion of the work. The Certificate of Occupancy is released upon approval of the final inspection. For more information on filing an application for building permit contact Public Works Permit Processing at 314-615-7866 or the Permit Application Center at 314-615-4269.

9.Q. *Do I need to file an application request for occupancy upon completion of my renovation work constructed under a building permit?*

A. No, as explained under the obtaining a building permit (8.Q. & A.) information above the Certificate of Use and Occupancy will be released automatically upon final inspection approval.

10.Q *I am being advised that moving into a particular vacant tenant space or building constitutes a change-in-occupancy. What is a "change-in-occupancy"?*

A. A change-in-occupancy occurs when the proposed use and occupancy is different from the previous use and occupancy of the space or building. For example, if the previous use was a retail store and you want to open up a day care center such a change would be a change-in-occupancy. When there is a change-in-occupancy the code official must make sure that all of the code provisions applicable to the proposed occupancy are complied with to ensure public health, safety and welfare. For example, a retail store use may not have required the presence of a fire alarm system when it was originally permitted but a proposed day care center use does. As such, a fire alarm system would need to be installed for the proposed day care center. Usually a change-in-occupancy almost always requires renovation work to be done to conform to code requirements for the proposed occupancy. To avoid the additional expense of code driven mandatory renovation work because of a change-in-occupancy, it is recommended that you try to find a vacant tenant space or building that was previously used in the same manner as your proposed use. For more information about change-in-occupancy requirements pertaining to your proposed use, in comparison to the previous use, contact both Public Works Building and MEP Plan Review at 314-615-5485.

- 11.Q. *I want to make some renovations that will require a building permit to accommodate my proposed use of the tenant space or building. My proposed use is the same as the previous occupant's business/use. Can I apply for a re-occupancy to get my business operating and do the permitted renovations after I move in?*
- A. Yes, it is possible to do renovation work while you occupy the space or building if you are willing to tolerate the temporary inconveniences that normally go along with construction. Since your proposed use is the same as the previous use you may file an application for re-occupancy. Upon verification that the site is appropriately zoned for your proposed business and that the vacant space or building passes a safety and property maintenance inspection the Certificate of Use and Occupancy will be released to you. This allows your business to get operational as quickly as possible while you work on obtaining the necessary construction permits for your planned renovation work. Upon completion of the building renovation work and final inspection approval, another Certificate of Use and Occupancy will be released to you. See application for commercial re-occupancy (7.Q. & A.) and obtaining a building permit for renovations (8.Q. & A.) above.
- 12.Q. *I plan on expanding my existing business into the adjacent vacant tenant space. How do I obtain a building permit to renovate the adjacent space?*
- A. The process is the same as if you were renovating a vacant space for the first time to open for business. See “*How do I obtain a building permit to do renovations before I move in?*” (7.Q. & A.) above for additional information. Also refer to the “*What is a “change-in-occupancy”*” (8.Q. & A.) information above if applicable to the space you are expanding into.
- 13.Q. *I plan on expanding my existing business by enlarging my building. How do I obtain a building permit to construct an addition to my existing building?*
- A. The County's zoning, land disturbance, and building construction codes establish minimum standards relative to site development and building construction to ensure the public safety, health, and welfare. As such, various County departmental and outside agency approvals are required before permits can be issued authorizing the construction of your addition and related improvements to the site. Public Works publishes a guide titled “Building Permit Application Submittal and Review Process Information Guide for Commercial Construction” that explains the permit and plan review process in more detail. This guide is available from the Public Works web site (see last page of this guide for web site address). The Public Works Permit Application Center (PAC) was established as a central intake location for all County departmental plan submittals, except for the Health Department, to streamline the permit process for commercial developments. PAC is pro-active in monitoring projects and can advise you on the status of your project as it moves through the review process. In addition, the

Missouri registered architect and professional engineers you retain to develop the construction documents for both the site improvements and the building addition, as well as the contractors you hire to construct it, should be able assist you with the process of obtaining the various approvals and permits. One of the first steps in the process is to submit a site development plan to the Planning Department for approval. As part of the site plan review process, the Planning Department obtains input from various County departments (ones listed on page 7 of this guide), as well as from Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District (MSD) and Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT), before approving the site development plan. Subsequent to the approval of, or anticipated eventual approval of, the site development plan, your architect and engineer(s) can finalize the project construction documents for submittal to the various other County departments that participate in the permit review process, as well as to MSD and MoDOT (if applicable). Once approvals from the reviewing departments and outside agencies are obtained the various required construction permits (land disturbance, building, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, etc.) can be issued allowing construction of the addition and associated work to commence. Contractors are responsible for requesting inspections as the work progresses, including requesting a final inspection upon completion. The Certificate of Occupancy will be released upon approval of the final inspection. For more information on filing an application for building permit contact the Public Works Permit Application Center at 314-615-4269.

- 14.Q. *I am considering opening, expanding, or relocating my business to or within a municipality located within St. Louis County. Where do I start and how does that change things relative to the above procedures for Unincorporated County?*
- A. Similar to Unincorporated County, municipalities within the county have enacted business venture-related laws to protect and preserve the shared quality of life within their jurisdiction. This includes, but may not be limited to, business and merchant licenses, zoning regulations, requirements for re-occupancy, and requirements for building construction permits and inspections similar to the ones described above. You should always start by contacting the zoning and building officials in your local municipality for their requirements. Most municipalities have their own regulations and processes for administering the regulations. In some cases the local municipality may contract with the County (jurisdiction of Unincorporated County) for code enforcement relative to re-occupancy and/or building construction permits and inspections. When such a contract exists you will be required to obtain zoning approval from the municipal zoning official and advised by them to apply for your re-occupancy or building permit with the County. Under these circumstances the Certificate of Use and Occupancy, upon the County's re-occupancy inspection or final inspection of completed construction, is forwarded to the municipality. The municipality, upon final inspection verification of compliance with their regulations, will release the Certificate of Use and Occupancy to you.

**St. Louis County  
Business Assistance Center**

Department of Public Works  
41 S. Central, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Clayton, MO 63105  
Phone 314-615-4269

[www.stlouisco.com/YourGovernment/CountyDepartments/PublicWorks](http://www.stlouisco.com/YourGovernment/CountyDepartments/PublicWorks)

**Business Assistance Center Mission Statement**

“To advocate St. Louis County as a positive environment for the Business Community, to facilitate individual new developments or business expansions navigating through the zoning, plan review and permitting process.”

**Other Helpful Resources in St. Louis County**

**Associated County Departments & Offices:**

Department of Planning.....	314-615-2520
Department of Public Works.....	314-615-2559
Department of Highways and Traffic.....	314-615-8504
Department of Health.....	314-615-0600
Department of Revenue.....	314-615-5107
Assessor’s Office.....	314-615-5104

**Outside Agencies:**

Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District (MSD).....	314-768-6272
Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT).....	888-275-6636

**Business Assistance Center Partners:**

St. Louis Economic Council.....	314-615-7663
St. Louis Development Corporation.....	314-657-3700
St. Louis Regional Chamber.....	314-231-5555
East-West Gateway Coordinating Council.....	314-421-4220
St. Louis County Municipal League.....	314-726-4747
City of St. Louis Business Assistance Center.....	314-622-4120