

# Smart Start Business Guide



**PORTSMOUTHVA**  
economic development



**A brief overview to setting  
up a new business  
in the City of Portsmouth.**



**Portsmouth Economic Development**  
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Starting a new business takes a lot of effort, and knowing who to call and when to call them can be half the battle. Portsmouth Economic Development is your first stop and your constant advocate throughout the business startup process and through the entire lifespan of your company. This Resource Guide provides a high level overview of the information you need to get started in Portsmouth, but please make sure you give us a call at 757.393.8804 to set up an appointment and visit our website at [www.AccessPortsmouthVA.com](http://www.AccessPortsmouthVA.com) to see the most up-to-date information.

## 1 Visit Portsmouth Economic Development

### Make Economic Development your first stop.

Our Team can assist with business development, financial management, site selection, and business support services.

## 2 Develop a Business Plan

### Smart business starts with a plan.

From determining a legal structure, projecting financial statements for three-years, researching the competition and more, a thoughtful business plan will help steer your vision.

## 3 Secure Funding

### It's time to secure the financial resources to grow your business.

Whether you are bootstrapping your business, you need startup investors, or you are looking for all incentives possible, our team is here to help. We can connect you to the financing and incentive resources that are right for your project.

## 4 Find a Location

### Portsmouth offers locations for a wide range of business and industry needs.

Selecting a site for your business is important. Our Team can help you with considerations such as building size & type, location, zoning, and whether to purchase or lease.

## 5 Verify Your Zoning

### Make sure that your type of business is allowed at your desired location.

Different businesses have different zoning needs. Complete a Zoning Verification, then apply for a Zoning Compliance Permit. If it is not permitted, you can find another location, apply for a Conditional Use Permit, a Zoning Variance or apply to change the Designation.

## 6 Obtain Approvals, Permits, & Licenses

### Depending on your business you may need certain City and/or Commonwealth approvals, licenses, and permits beyond Zoning.

Before you can apply for your business license, you will need to verify that any building and health permits, alcohol licenses, tax information and employment commission items are completed. There are also local processes such as the Downtown Design Committee (DDC) that should be included in timelines.

## 7 Apply for Your Business Licenses

### All businesses need a business license.

After obtaining all permits, approvals, and licenses, apply for a business license through the Commissioner of the Revenue. No need to worry, we have a checklist for you.

## 8 Open Your Business!

Welcome to the Portsmouth Business Family!  
If you would like to schedule an official ribbon cutting, please contact the Economic Development Office to get started.

*\*\*This Smart Start Business Guide is provided as general guidance for the business startup process in the City and is not meant to be inclusive of all circumstances. Each business and development is unique and will have unique requirements that may not be covered within the Smart Start Business Guide.\*\**



## City Approvals, Permits, & Licenses

- Zoning Verification Application** | Zoning sets the permitted uses, development requirements and other restrictions for a property. Zoning verification requests are designed to give the applicant a general description of a zoning district's development standards. Applications are available through the Dept. of Planning on the 4th floor of City Hall.
- Zoning Compliance Permit** | If your use is allowed at your chosen site, apply for a Zoning Compliance Permit. Most development requires the review and approval of this permit prior to the issuance of a building permit, business license or certificate of occupancy. If your use is not allowed at your chosen site, you can search for a new site, apply for a Use Permit, apply for a Zoning Variance or apply to change the Zoning Designation. All applications are available through the Dept. of Planning on the 4th floor of City Hall or on the City's website.
- Site Plan Review** | Any land disturbance activities on your site will likely necessitate the preparation and approval of a site plan. A site plan delineates all development plans for a tract of land, including but not limited to drainage, erosion and sedimentation control, grading, engineering, design, construction details, and survey data for existing and proposed improvements, size, height, and location of buildings, location and design of parking areas, pedestrian, vehicular circulation on-site and circulation for emergency apparatus. Site plans can be required for new development and existing development where modifications are being made. Site Plan Review is managed through the Dept. of Engineering on the 4th floor of City Hall.
- Certificate of Occupancy (CO)** | No new building, building alteration or addition, or building which has changed use may be used or occupied until a Certificate of Occupancy is issued. Certificates of Occupancy are applied for through the Bureau of Permits and Inspections and are issued upon completion of all building inspections.
- Building Permit** | Depending on the improvements needed at your business location, you may need a Building Permit. Separate permits may be required for different trade work happening on your property, such as Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing, etc. After a permit is issued, the City will send inspectors to confirm that all work is in compliance with the applicable local, state, and federal codes. Building Permits are handled through the Bureau of Permits and Inspections.
- Health Permit** | Barber, beauty operations, health care, food services, and more are required to obtain a Health Permit. The Portsmouth Dept. of Health handles all business Health Permitting.
- Business License** | All businesses in the City, including home-based, are required to obtain a business license prior to beginning operations. You can apply for a Business License through the Commissioner of the Revenue.

## State Permits & Licenses

- Virginia State Corporation Commission (SCC)** | Be sure to register your business entity with the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- Virginia Tax** | Register your business Income Tax, Retail Sales & Use with Virginia Tax.
- Virginia Employment Commission (VEC)** | Register with the VEC if/when you plan to hire employees.
- Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Federal Employer Identification Number (EIN)** | An Employer Identification Number (EIN), also known as a Federal Tax ID Number, is used to identify a business entity for tax purposes.
- Contractor's License - Class A, B, or C** | Contact the Virginia Dept. of Professional & Occupational Regulation (DPOR) Board for Contractors for information on the classification of contract work.
- Beer, Wine, and Mixed Beverage Permits - ABC License** | Restaurant, entertainment, and event establishments may be required to obtain an ABC License in order to serve alcoholic beverages.

## Zone Specific Approvals

- Certificate of Appropriateness, Intent and/or Compliance: in Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) or Downtown Design Committee (DDC)**  
Special design related criterion may apply in either the Downtown area or in one of Portsmouth's Historic districts. Should development plans include new construction, demolition, and/or alterations to existing buildings visible from a public street or right-of-way in one of these neighborhoods, a Certificate of Appropriateness, Intent and/or Compliance must be issued from the appropriate committee or commission. See the Dept. of Planning for more information.

*\*\*Numerous approvals, licenses, and/or permits included on this list have fees associated with them. Please contact the managing office of the license or permit for the most up-to-date fee requirement.\*\**

*\*\*Lists are not all inclusive or in a specific order. Certain businesses may require additional approvals, licenses, and/or permits.\*\**

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### City Department Contact Information

Economic Development	757.393.8804
Commissioner of Revenue	757.393.8714
Office of Engineering	757.393.8592
Permits & Inspections	757.393.8531
Planning Office	757.393.8836
- Downtown Design Committee	
- Historic Preservation Commission	
Public Utilities/Works	757.393.8691
Fire Department	757.393.8689
Police Department	757.393.8257
Dept. of Health	757.393.8585
Circuit Court	757.393.8671
City Clerk's Office	757.393.8639

The Economic Development Team can help you with who to call and when. Be sure to contact our staff for support!

### Business License Checklist

**Applying for your business license is your last step, after you've completed steps 1-6 of the process.**

Application Checklist:

- Personal Identification/Photo ID
- Corporate Charter, if applicable
- Partnership Agreement, if applicable
- Estimate of Gross Receipts through End-Of-Year
- All required Permits & Licenses
- All Required Receipts, Certificates, and Forms from the appropriate Departments and Agencies
- License Fee

Contact the Commissioner of Revenue's office for more information about Business Licenses.

### Financing Resources

**There are several avenues for startup financing available to small businesses.**

The Economic Development Team will share information with you during your meeting, and there is information available at [www.AccessPortsmouthVA.com](http://www.AccessPortsmouthVA.com).

Be sure to look to the below to learn more:

- PED Local Incentive Program (LIP)
- Small Business Administration (SBA)
- Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP)



**No matter what your business is, we're here to help you get started.**