

Guide to Doing Business in Durham

Welcome to Durham, New Hampshire! Our unique community is conveniently located in the seacoast region and proud to be the home of the University of New Hampshire. It may also be the perfect place for you to do business.

The following information provides a guide to starting a business in Durham. Whether you are brand new to business ownership or highly seasoned, we hope that you take a few minutes to look this over and familiarize yourself with the processes involved in setting up shop in Durham. This is just a guide and we understand that every business is different and not every question can be answered here. Please contact our office early in the process so we can best serve you.

This guide will cover three types of business development processes:

1. Taking over an existing business
2. Changing the physical structure of an existing commercial building
3. Building a business from the ground up

If you are new to business ownership, please look at our **Business Resource Guide** for information about the variety of resources available to you.

1. Taking over an existing business

If you are simply taking over an existing business in Durham you will need to obtain a Change of Commercial Tenant [permit](#) (also referred to as Change of Use) from the Town's building department. If you are changing the signage on the building you will need to fill out a sign [application](#). Businesses that plan on serving alcohol will need to [apply](#) to do so with the Town *before* applying for their license with the State.

The State of NH will also expect you to register your business with them before you open your doors to the public. Visit the Secretary of State's Corporate Division to access their [NH Quickstart](#) program where you can register your business and access other useful information.

2. Changing the use or structure of an existing commercial building

Changing the use of the space may trigger a review of life safety, parking, utilities, etc. so please call our office *before* you begin any work. Changing the use of a commercial space could involve some fees or infrastructure expenses for water and sewer or parking or other items. It all depends on the use and the particularities of the individual business. Please read over our [Site Plan Regulations](#) if you will be making changes to how the building is currently being used. It's better to know up front what, if anything, needs to be addressed so you can plan accordingly. If you are changing the layout of the interior of the facility a building permit needs to be obtained before any construction begins. The building department can help you figure out exactly what needs to be done in order to take over the space.

Change of use will also require you to obtain a Change of Commercial Tenant [permit](#). Once the building inspector has reviewed the application it will be determined what, if any, additional permits are needed. A change of use may affect such things as parking requirements or licensure. Changes to the site such as landscaping, drainage, paving and sign location will require review by the building department. Interior changes such as electrical, plumbing and handicap accessibility will require permits before the work can be done. Working with a reputable contractor will help you avoid potential mistakes and delays. Regular communication with our office is the best way to keep your project on track and on time.

As with any new business you need to [register](#) your business with the NH Secretary of State's Corporate Division.

3. Building a business from the ground up

Building construction is a very involved process with multiple steps and considerations. We strongly recommend that you contact the Town's Planning department to set up a time to meet with us to discuss your project. Communication early and often is the best way to ensure your project moves forward without delays or unexpected steps.

Our office can help you find the appropriate location for your business, guide you through the development process and provide you with the resources you may need as you go from plans on paper to bricks and mortar and finally, open for business. Each business is unique and therefore the process for each project will also be unique. Let us work with you to bring your unique business to reality in our historic community.

Other Considerations

If your property or building is in the Historic District or has wetlands, you may need to meet with the Historic District Commission or the Conservation Commission. Please contact the Planning office if you have questions or concerns.

Applications are in the Planning offices at Town Hall and on the Town's website, www.ci.durham.nh.us.

Frequently Asked Questions

Where do my employees park if my business is downtown?

Parking permits are available through the Durham police department. Applications need to be made in person. You can access the parking map [here](#) and visit the station during regular business hours.

What fees are involved in the construction process?

Fees vary depending on the type of business and the [Building Department Permit Fees](#) show the various fees that may apply to your business. Reach out to the building department for help with this process. The Fire Department will have their own set of requirements and fees related to fire prevention and suppression and you should contact them directly for that information.

Are there requirements from the Town for a home-based business?

Yes. All businesses need to register with the State and the Town. Please read over the parameters that define a home-based business or call our office to discuss. Eligible businesses need to submit an [application](#) and fee of \$25 to the Planning Department.

How do I know what type of sign I can put out for my business?

A [permit](#) is needed for all new signs or modifications to signs, in excess of six (6) square feet of total exposed surface area, and for temporary signage. Please be sure to follow the specific guidelines for the district in which your business is located. The information in the Zoning Ordinance in regard to signage can be found [HERE](#).

When is trash and recycling picked up?

The sanitation department handles trash and recycling for the Town and can be reached at 603-868-5578. The calendar for non-holiday pick-up can be found [here](#).

Town of Durham Staff

Planning & Building Departments

Michael Behrendt-Town Planner

mbehrendt@ci.durham.nh.us

603-868-8064

Audrey Cline-Building Inspector

acline@ci.durham.nh.us

603-868-8064

Tracey Cutler-Administrative Assistant

tcutler@ci.durham.nh.us

603-868-8064

Fire Department

Brendan O’Sullivan-Inspections
brendan.osullivan.dfd@unh.edu
603-868-5531

Aimee Routhier-Administrative Assistant
aimee.routhier@unh.edu
603-862-5212

Police Department

Chief Rene Kelley
rkelley@ci.durham.nh.us
603-868-2324

Public Works

Rich Reine-Director
rreine@ci.durham.nh.us
603-868-5578

Town of Durham Land Use Boards

[Planning Board](#)
[Zoning Board of Adjustment](#)
[Historic District Commission](#)

Local Utility Providers

Unitil – Natural Gas
Eversource – Electric
NHEC - Electric

State and Federal Departments & Resources

[NH Secretary of State Corporate Division](#)
[NH Department of Revenue](#)
[NH Department of Labor](#)
[NH Office of Professional Licensure and Certification](#)
[NH Department of Health and Human Services](#)
[U.S. Small Business Administration](#)
[Internal Revenue Service](#)