

How to Apply for a Building Permit in the Downcity District

This guide is designed to help business and property owners understand the proper steps to take in obtaining a building permit from the City of Providence in the Downcity District. If you have any further questions, please contact Bill Packard at the Department of Inspection and Standards, 190 Dyer Street, Providence or call (401) 421-7740 or Chris Ise at the Department of Planning and Development, 400 Westminster Street, Providence or call (401) 351-4300 ext. 521.

What is the Downcity District?

The purpose of the Downcity District is to ensure that new development is compatible with the existing historic building fabric of downtown, to preserve historic structures, and to encourage mixed-use development that relates to the pedestrian and promotes the arts, entertainment and housing.

What is the Downcity Review Committee (DRC)?

The DRC was formed to carry out the goals of the Downcity District. All development in the District shall be reviewed and approved by the DRC in conformance with the Downcity District Zoning Regulations.

How to submit an application to the DRC

The first step in obtaining a building permit from the City of Providence is to submit an application for review to the Downcity Review Committee. An application can be obtained by contacting Chris Ise at the Department of Planning and Development, 400 Washington Street, Providence or calling (401) 351-4300 ext. 521. No building permit will be issued before a project receives a Certificate of Design Approval from the DRC or its staff. The DRC will review applications during regular meetings that are open to the public. A determination will be made within 30 days of receipt of a complete application.

The Downcity District is divided up by A-Streets and B-Streets. If your property or business is located on an A-Street, a formal DRC application and review is required. The following streets in the Downcity District are A-Streets: Washington, Westminster, Weybosset, Empire, Fountain, Mathewson, Dorrance, Kennedy Plaza, Exchange Terrace, Richmond, Chestnut and LaSalle Square. A Building located on the corner of an A-Street and B-Street is also subject to full DRC review.

DRC approval is NOT necessary for work needed to repair damage or deterioration of a structure that involves no change in materials, dimensions, design, configuration, texture or visual appearance. Approval is NOT necessary for the painting of previously painted surfaces.

There are NO development standards and NO DRC review requirements for existing buildings on B-Streets with the exception of new construction and demolition. However, consultation with DRC staff is highly recommended to ensure overall compliance with the City of Providence's Zoning Regulations.

Important Things to Know When Applying for a Building Permit

Once a Certificate of Design Approval is issued, applicants should contact Bill Packard at (401) 421-7740 at the Department of Inspection and Standards to obtain an application for a building permit. To ensure that a building permit is issued in a timely manner, please have the following information available when filling out an application:

1. Before applying for your building permit, check with the Department of Inspection and Standards to ensure that your business conforms to the current legal use of the business location. For example, the business location's current legal use may be a restaurant use but the legal use of your business is mercantile (retail). Your business will not be issued a building permit until the business location's legal use is established and deemed compatible with the legal use of your business.
2. If a change of use is required, you must submit the following to the Department of Inspection and Standards:
 - a. Completed Building Permit with 2 sets of building floor plans
 - b. 3 sets of building floor plans for the Fire Marshall's Office
 - c. 1 set of building floor plans for the Fire Alarm Inspector's Office
 - d. The application will be reviewed by Building Inspection, then to the Fire Marshall and Fire Alarm Inspection and then back to Building Inspection for final approval.
3. Have a copy of the DRC approval.
4. The party applying for the permit must be licensed and bonded in the State of Rhode Island for \$1 million. This is usually the contractor or the installer.
5. Include a drawing or plan of work being proposed with description and exact dimensions.
6. If work being proposed is a sign:
 - a. Signs cannot exceed 2 sq. ft. for every lineal ft. of building frontage. For example if a building's frontage measures 50 ft., the total amount of signage cannot exceed 150 sq. ft.
 - i. Projecting Signs and Flags: Cannot exceed 48 sq. ft.; if sign or flag projects more than 36", it will need approval from the engineering department.
 - ii. Canopy Signs: Cannot exceed 2 sq. ft. for every 1 lineal ft. of building frontage.
 - iii. Wall Signs and Banners: Cannot exceed 2 sq. ft. for every 1 lineal ft. of building frontage.
 - b. Include a detailed drawing of how sign will be attached to the building.

There is a \$250.00 fine for work done in the City of Providence without a building permit.