

Permitting 101
For
New Businesses

Starting and growing a business is an exciting venture no matter where it may take place, but business owners considering locating in Bucksport should know that this town is well prepared to help them succeed. Whether it may be an offer of tax incentives, financing assistance, grant funding, free land to develop, business planning guidance, marketing opportunities, or just simply being there for moral support, it is the goal of the town to do whatever it can to boost business and bring sustainable economic growth to the area. And that includes helping business owners navigate their way through an important step that every new business must take: regulatory review and permitting.

In Bucksport, most new businesses are subject to approval by the town's planning board, a municipal permitting authority that has been in existence since the 1950's. Membership on the board consists of seven local residents who bring a variety of skills and knowledge to their role as overseers of land development. The board plays a vital role in the development of the town because their primary responsibility is to ensure that each commercial project seeking their approval will fit well with the environment, municipal services, historical and scenic resources, and surrounding properties. To accomplish this task, the planning board examines each project utilizing an established procedure known as an application review.

The process starts with the submittal of an application, which is given a preliminary review by the town's code enforcement office. Abutting property owners are notified of the proposed project as part of this review. The application is also reviewed by town department directors, and their comments are added to the record. The code enforcement office works with the applicant to ensure that the content of their application is complete, and offers advice regarding any additional documentation the planning board may be looking for. The applicant may also request a pre-application meeting with the planning board. Once this preliminary review process is completed, the application is formally submitted to the board.

The planning board's application review consists of studying site plans and supporting documents, hearing comments from the public and town staff, and checking town ordinances to be sure applicable requirements are met. Reviews are often completed in one meeting, but for large-scale projects, more than one meeting may be needed to allow the board sufficient time to conduct their business. A thorough review is conducted for every application, but the board always strives to make the whole experience as expeditious as it can possibly be for every applicant. Upon finding everything to be satisfactory, the board grants its approval, and permits are then issued.

Some small towns in Maine require all proposed commercial uses, large or small, to be reviewed by their planning board. But in the town of Bucksport, review and permitting of home-based businesses and other minor commercial projects is conducted by the code enforcement office. These low impact land uses do not require the in-depth review a large commercial development might need, so the review conducted by the code enforcement office is typically completed within a day or two after the application is submitted. This simplified review process eliminates the need to wait for an application to get to the planning board, which meets on a monthly basis. It also reduces permitting costs, which can be an important factor for business owners, especially those who may be starting a business on a limited budget.

Both the planning board and the code enforcement office conduct their duties in accordance with a compendium of rules and regulations known as the Bucksport Town Code. The part of the code that is most relevant to commercial development is the land use ordinance, found in Appendix K. It is here where application review procedures are described, as well as the standards that apply to new development. The ordinance also contains a comprehensive table of land uses that identifies where each use is allowed. Other content in the Town Code that may apply to commercial development includes regulations affecting the subdivision of land, development in flood zones, streets and infrastructure improvements, sign installations, building construction, and business licensing. A review and permitting process is associated with each of these areas of regulations.

The code enforcement office serves as a clearinghouse of information on the Town Code, as well as other codes, rules, regulations and laws that apply to commercial land uses. Business owners with questions about what types of rules and regulations apply to their business can get those questions answered by contacting the code enforcement officer, who is available 5 days a week. Many business questions can also be answered by accessing information on the town's official website, bucksportmaine.gov. The entire Town Code, as well as general permitting information, is available there. And for the convenience of anyone needing a town permit or business license, applications can be downloaded from the website directly to their desktop printer.

In addition to town permitting and licensing requirements, several state agencies have their own permit or license requirements for some types of businesses, such as those that involve the production, sale or serving of food products, the construction or occupancy of public buildings, or the construction of significant site improvements. The code enforcement office can help direct any business owner to the appropriate state agency that regulates their business, and the state also provides information helpful to business owners on their website at maine.gov/online/businessanswers.

While business owners must devote a certain amount of their time and energy to the review and permitting process, it is a necessary step that each new business must take. Everyone involved in the permitting process in Bucksport works hard to help each applicant successfully complete that step, and in fact, this pro-business approach has helped the town become one of the first municipalities in Maine to be certified by the state as a business-friendly community. While this recognition may be well earned, the town has no intention of resting on its laurels. Town officials will continue their work to keep the review and permitting process flowing just as smoothly as it possibly can so that the doors to business success can be opened sooner and each new business owner can confirm for themselves why Bucksport is the right place to be.