

Then there is Zoning...

The City of Billings has a vibrant business community and many areas on busy streets are designated for commercial or industrial uses. These designations are called “zoning districts”. The City currently has 12 specific zoning districts for commercial or industrial activity. Not every commercial zone will allow all types of businesses. For example, Neighborhood Office (NO) zoning does not allow businesses that are primarily retail but does allow service-type businesses.

It is important to check with the land owner or your real estate agent **BEFORE** signing a lease or a purchase agreement to verify the zoning on the property. In this way, you can ensure a successful beginning to your business venture.

The Planning Division maintains a webpage where you can view the Zoning Code section by section. (<https://ci.billings.mt.us/2138/Project-Re-Code>) Yellowstone County maintains an up-to-date mapping program of all property within the City of Billings. You can access this site here: <https://www.co.yellowstone.mt.gov/mapping>

On the map, you can search for your parcel by owner name, street address, Tax ID or just zoom in on the map to locate the property. The map has a zoning district layer you can turn on or off. In addition, you can identify property information for each parcel – the property info page also includes the zoning at the bottom.

Sites that have existing buildings may or may not be ready for your business. Be sure to check your zoning before committing your time and resources to a location.



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City of Billings

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OPERATING A BUSINESS IN BILLINGS

Welcome and congratulations on opening a new business. This brochure provides important information about operating a business in Billings.

Please read this information carefully and contact staff if you have questions.

We look forward to serving your business needs.

City Finance Division

City Hall

210 North 27th Street

Billings, MT

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Is it a “Change in Use”???

Please be aware that starting a business means more than just getting a business license. To begin, you should determine whether your business creates a “change in use”. A change in use occurs when any portion of the building is used for a purpose other than what was previously approved by City departments. Do not automatically assume that a previous business was an allowed use.

When a change in use occurs the owner/applicant is responsible for complying with all codes and regulations. This may be simple or complicated depending on a variety of circumstances. There may be any number of departments involved including the Fire, Planning (Zoning), Engineering, Public Utilities, Building, and Health Departments.

We suggest the following steps:

1. Determine if the building will be changed from its current use. A few examples include a warehouse to a shop, a bakery to a restaurant, an office to a store, or a house to an office.
2. If the prior use was existing, determine if the use was previously approved.
3. If the building use needs to be changed, you may wish to contact a design professional. Some of the items that may need to be addressed include:

- Zoning, landscaping, signs
- Parking, drainage, utilities
- Construction of right of way improvements
- Structural considerations
- Occupant loads
- Fire sprinklers and fire alarms
- Fire ratings, openings, and penetrations
- Accessibility
- Restrooms
- Exits and exit components



Fire Code Says...

New and existing businesses are required to be in compliance with the fire code. In addition to change of use or occupancy issues, there are basic fire code provisions that all businesses are required to comply with. The following is a list of some of the fundamental requirements:

Exits

- Exits shall be kept clear and unobstructed.
- Exit doors shall have one approved locking device
- Illuminated exit signs and emergency lighting shall be maintained operable
- Storage is prohibited in exit stairwells

Fire Protection Systems and Fire Resistive Construction

- Fire protection equipment and systems shall be maintained in an operable condition at all times
- Fire extinguishers, fire sprinkler systems, fire standpipe systems, and fire alarm systems shall be inspected and serviced annually (every 12 months)
- Commercial cooking fire extinguishing systems shall be inspected and serviced bi-annually (every 6 months)
- Fire extinguishers shall be mounted and readily accessible
- Fire resistive construction including fire doors, walls, and barriers shall be maintained
- Self-closing fire and smoke doors shall not be wedged or blocked open

More on Fire Code

Housekeeping

- Combustible materials shall not be stored in electrical, mechanical, and boiler rooms
- Combustible materials shall not be stored closer than 36 inches of a heat source
- Combustible materials and storage shall be kept orderly
- Storage shall be maintained at least 18 inches below fire sprinkler heads
- In buildings not equipped with a fire sprinkler system, storage shall be kept at least 24 inches below the ceiling
- Excessive waste accumulation shall be removed immediately

Electrical

- Exposed electrical wiring and open electrical boxes are not allowed
- Extension cords shall not be used as permanent wiring
- Electrical panels and equipment shall be accessible and kept clear of storage

Miscellaneous

- An occupant load sign shall be posted for assembly occupancies (restaurants, bars, theaters)
- The buildings or suite address shall be posted on the side of the building facing the street on which the building is addressed
- Address numbers shall be visible from the street, a minimum of four inches tall, and shall be contrasting color to their background

