



## COMMERCIAL CHANGE OF USE Information Sheet

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### **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A BUILDING PERMIT AND A DEVELOPMENT PERMIT?**

Building permits ensure that the building or tenant improvements will conform to the safety standards set out under the *Safety Codes Act*. Development permits deal with the impact that the development and/or use of the land or building has on surrounding properties and town services and infrastructure.

### **WHY DO I NEED A DEVELOPMENT PERMIT FOR A CHANGE OF USE?**

If you are moving your business to a new location or changing or expanding your business in its current location, you may need to apply for a development permit for a change of use. This allows administration to determine if the business can be accommodated in the proposed location under the Land Use Bylaw. Depending on the use proposed, there may be different parking and use-specific standards that apply.

The development review process helps to ensure that appropriate standards are in place to mitigate any negative impacts to surrounding properties, such as noise, smell, aesthetics, lighting, traffic generation and parking. It also provides for notification of affected parties and the opportunity for appeal.

### **WHY DO I NEED A DEVELOPMENT PERMIT TO INSTALL A SIGN FOR MY BUSINESS?**

The Land Use Bylaw regulates the type, size, location, materials and illumination of signage on a property, which is assessed through the development permit process. The intent is to minimize visual sign clutter, address public safety and ensure that proposed signage does not conflict with the general character of the surrounding streetscape or architecture of nearby buildings.

Most signage in Okotoks requires a development permit. If you are proposing to add new signage or replace existing signage on the property, it is recommended that you apply for a signage permit concurrently with a change of use permit. Concurrent processing of signage and change of use permits saves time and results in lower permit fees.

### **WHY DO I HAVE TO SUBMIT PROFESSIONALLY DRAWN PLANS (I.E., SITE, ELEVATION, LANDSCAPING AND LIGHTING PLANS)**

Professionally drawn plans allow administration to assess, prior to construction, the exact size, location, and appearance of structures and signage on the site, and other site characteristics such as parking and access, landscaping and lighting. The accuracy and detail of these plans are critical in ensuring that the proposed development will complement surrounding properties and that the standards in the Land Use Bylaw are correctly applied. Depending on the scale and complexity of the development, some of these plans such as site, landscaping and lighting, may be combined into one plan.

## **HOW DO I COME UP WITH THE PLANS THAT NEED TO BE SUBMITTED WITH MY APPLICATION?**

Going through the development process can be complicated and technical, especially if it is your first time. Options to source these plans include:

- asking the property owner if they have existing plans for the site;
- submit a file search request with the Town for any plans or Real Property Reports that could be revised and resubmitted by the applicant;
- ask your contractor to work with the Town to apply for the permits and provide the drawings;
- if you're able, draw the plans in metric, to scale, using a standard metric scale such as 1:100 or 1:200; or
- use the services of a qualified designer, draftsman, architect, surveyor or other who has the ability to prepare the drawings in the format required.

## **WHY DO I HAVE TO PAY FEES?**

Development permit fees help to recover a small portion of the costs of the internal staff time to process and review applications from the business/person that is receiving the service. Costs of permit processing not covered by development permit fees are borne by ratepayers. Development permit applications go through a comprehensive internal review process from multiple departments including, but not limited to, engineering, parks, fire, municipal enforcement and operations. Depending on the type of application, there may also be referrals to external stakeholders such as affected government agencies, utility companies and adjacent landowners.

## **WHY DOES THE PROCESS TAKE SO LONG?**

Municipal staff strive to process development permit applications as quickly as possible. Depending on the complexity of the application, the process can range from a few weeks to a few months. Factors that influence the processing times include completeness of the application, degree of complexity, impact to surrounding community, interdepartmental review, required referrals to adjacent landowners and government agencies, and provincially mandated advertising and appeal timelines.

## **WHAT OTHER MUNICIPAL APPROVALS DO I NEED TO START UP MY BUSINESS?**

Additional municipal approvals may apply, including but not limited to building permits, fire inspection and business licensing. With respect to building permits, it is a good idea to contact a Safety Codes Officer prior to submitting a development permit, to identify any structural upgrades that may be required to ensure compliance with the Alberta Building Code. In some instances, business owners have found the cost of meeting the associated building codes to be cost prohibitive and have modified their proposal or have chosen to search for a new location.

For additional information, please contact Planning & Urban Design at 403.995.2760 for planning and/or business license matters, or Safety Codes Services at 403.995.6304.