



City of Racine Development Guide



Department of City Development

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Development Guide Overview

As in many other communities, the City of Racine has adopted standards, policies and regulations that ensure the safety of its citizens, protect property rights of landowners and further improve the quality of life in the city. Whether you are a start-up, expanding existing operations or relocating your business, we recognize the challenges you face and are here to assist you and help you move forward. The Department of City Development has created this guide provide information about, and links to, a number of resources, permits and departments that are part of the development review process in the City of Racine. While the information provided will explain how to complete your project, we recommend contacting City staff in the early stages to discuss your needs in detail and we will help you develop the best path forward. Read the information, click on links for more specific information, and feel free to contact City staff to assist you. We're here to help.

Web Resources

There are two primary websites that provide information regarding development in the City of Racine. Many of the links in this document will take you to the Build Up Racine website. One is the City's official website: www.cityofracine.org. This site provides comprehensive information about all departments, services and operations, and general City functions. You can also find public meeting schedules, aldermanic information, City Ordinances and application forms here.

In an effort to promote business and economic development in Racine, the City has also created a website that focuses on development services in the City. This site is www.buildupracine.org. You can find information related to planning review processes and timeframes, grant programs, city-wide and specific area plans, available commercial properties and general community information. This site also contains information about a number of partner organizations that can assist you in business training, financing and workforce recruitment and development.

City Departments You May Work With

Many business and development projects require input and approval from several departments or committees. This can include zoning and plan reviews, the issuance of permits or licenses, and final inspections of your property. The following section describes the duties of departments that you may be working with and provides contact information. Clicking on the Department's name will link to its website. Additional links are located within the information about the department and the services it provides.

Department of City Development

The Department of City Development actively works to enhance the community by expanding the tax base, attracting employment opportunities, and improving the City's housing stock and quality of life for Racine's citizens. This department administers land use planning, historic preservation, housing, CDBG block grant administration, economic development and fair housing. We work closely with a number of community, governmental and business organizations to accomplish this mission.

City of Racine
Department of City Development
730 Washington Ave., Room 102
Racine, WI 53403
Phone: (262) 636-9151

Business Concierge Services

The Department of City Development has an Economic Development Specialist who serves as a central resource for business development. This allows us to provide personal service to small business owners and help them navigate through the approval processes. We are happy to discuss your ideas, help you find an appropriate location and explain the how and whys that come with the review process. We will help you work through licensing, zoning approvals and obtaining building and occupancy permits. Please contact the Economic Development Specialist early on. We're here to help- really!

City Development Staff

The City Development Department is ready to answer your questions about locating or expanding your business in Racine. If your project requires site plan reviews, Plan Commission action or Landmarks Commission review, you will work with City Development staff. We also work closely with outside organizations to help you find training and financing. We work closely with the staff from other departments and are happy to coordinate meetings or find answers to any questions you may have.

<p>Amy Connolly- Director of City Development Email: amy.connolloy@cityofracine.org Phone: (262) 636-9151</p> <p>Executive Director of Redevelopment Authority of the City of Racine, Developer Inquiries, Tax Incremental Financing</p>	<p>Matt Sadowski- Deputy Director/Principal Planner Email: matthew.sadowski@cityofracine.org Phone: (262) 636-9151</p> <p>Comprehensive Planning, Historic Preservation, Current Planning- Zoning, Plan Review, Subdivision & CSM Review</p>
<p>Jeff Towne- Economic Development Specialist Email: jeffrey.towne@cityofracine.org Phone: (262) 636-9194</p> <p>Business Development, Business Location,</p>	<p>Jeff Hintz- Associate Planner Email: jeffrey.hintz@cityofracine.org Phone: (262) 636-9473</p> <p>Current Planning- Zoning, Plan Review</p>

CITY OF RACINE DEVELOPMENT GUIDE

Ben Lehner- Community Development Program Specialist Email: ben.lehner@cityofracine.org Phone: (262) 636-3320 CDBG Funding, Business assistance	
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Building Inspections Division- Building Permits, Building Occupancy, Code Compliance

The Building Division of the Department of City Development administers City and State Building Codes and the City of Racine Zoning Ordinance. The services the Building Division provides assure the public that the properties, buildings and other structures they occupy are compliant with building and safety codes, are accessible, and are being occupied legally in accordance with the Zoning Ordinance. The Building Inspections Division also responds to noncompliance issues related to property maintenance.

City of Racine
Building Inspections Division
730 Washington Ave., Room 304
Racine, WI 53403
Phone: (262) 636-9464

City Clerk & Treasurer's Office- Liquor & Business Licenses, Elections, Tax Payments

The City Clerk and Treasurer has several duties including issuing approximately 50 different types of licenses, serving as the official records custodian for City Government, Secretary to the Common Council, Secretary to the Public Safety and Licensing Committee and is responsible for all elections and tax payments.

City of Racine
City Clerk and Treasurer's Office
730 Washington Ave., Room 103
Racine, WI 53403
Phone: (262) 636-9171

Information about various licenses is available at the following link:

[City Clerk License Information and Applications](#)

[City of Racine Health Department](#)- Food Licenses, Lodging Licenses, Community Health

City of Racine
Health Department
730 Washington Ave., Main Floor
Racine, WI 53403
Phone: (262) 636-9201

The Health Department licenses businesses that prepare and serve food, provide lodging, provide tattoos and body art and other businesses in order to ensure public health and safety standards are maintained. The department also conducts the weights and measures program and investigates potential violations related to public health issues. If you will be engaging in any of these activities, contact the Health Department for further information.

Information regarding food, lodging and other health licensing is available at the following link:

[City of Racine Environmental Health Division](#)

[City Assessor](#)

City of Racine
City Assessor's Office
730 Washington Ave., Room 104
Racine, WI 53403
Phone: (262) 636-9119

The City Assessor's Office can provide information regarding property valuation, comparable sales and tax assessments for parcels in the City.

[Department of Public Works](#)

The Department of Public Works (DPW) is made up of several divisions that provide service to the City of Racine residents by maintaining various pieces of infrastructure around the City. These include Engineering, Solid Waste and Recycling, Traffic, Road Construction and Street Maintenance.

City of Racine
Department of Public Works
730 Washington Ave., Room 303
Racine, WI 53403
Phone: (262) 636-9121

Fire Department

The City of Racine Fire Department provides fire protection services, fire prevention and inspection services, basic and advanced life support services, and public education services. Contact the Fire Prevention Division to become aware of any fire protection codes or measures you need to comply with, such as fire extinguishers, exit signs, sprinkler systems or hazardous material storage.

City of Racine
Fire Department – Fire Prevention
810 8th Street
Racine, WI 53403
Phone: (262) 635-7915

Water Utility

The Water Utility provides water service to all customers in the city of Racine. The utility can answer questions about the appropriate size service lines and billing information for water service. In some cases, grant programs may be available to assist in the cost of water service upgrades.

City of Racine Water Utility
101 Barker Street
Racine, WI 53402
Phone: (262) 636-9181

Wastewater Utility

The Wastewater Utility provides sanitary sewer service to properties in the city of Racine. Connection requirements and billing information can be answered by the staff.

City of Racine Wastewater Utility
City Hall Annex, Room 227
800 Center Street
Racine, WI 53402
Phone: (262) 636-9181



City of Racine Business Checklist

This checklist was created to help you identify several of the major steps necessary to get your business up and running in Racine. While this checklist does not cover every aspect of City approvals, using it in conjunction with the Developer Guide will help to determine the appropriate processes to get your approvals and operate your business.

☐ Location of my business

Prior to signing a lease or purchasing property, it is recommend that you contact the Building Division to verify that your use complies with the [Zoning Ordinance](#) and that the proposed use is allowed at the desired location.

- ☐ Contact the Building Inspections Division and staff will verify the property's zoning and check the Zoning Ordinance to determine if your use is permitted at that location.

☐ Occupying a building/property

- ☐ If the [Building Division](#) determines the zoning of the property allows the use, an [Occupancy Permit](#) must be applied for. An occupancy inspection will be scheduled.
- ☐ You can request a [Courtesy Inspection](#) where the Building Inspectors will visit the property to determine if any code violations exist.
- ☐ If any [Building Permits](#) are required, it is advised that you consult with an Architect/Contractor to make sure all plans comply with applicable state building codes.
- ☐ Contact the Building Inspector about changing existing signage or adding any new signage.

☐ Other City reviews and approvals

- ☐ If additional reviews beyond [Building or Occupancy Permits](#) are required, the City Development Department will coordinate any required site reviews (Downtown Design Review, Access Corridor Review, Administrative Review) or Plan Commission actions (Conditional Use Permits, Certified Survey Maps, Rezonings).

☐ Does your business prepare or serve food?

- ☐ Contact the [City of Racine Health Department](#) to apply for a restaurant license. License types vary depending on the level of food service you will provide. This may include prepackaged foods in addition to food prepared on-site.
- ☐ If outdoor food service will occur on a public sidewalk, apply for a Sidewalk Café license from the [City Clerk](#).

☐ Does your business sell or serve alcohol?

- ☐ Serving alcohol or selling packaged goods requires a liquor License. Contact the [City Clerk's](#) office.

☐ Other licenses.

- ☐ Contact the [City Clerk](#) to see if any additional licenses are need to operate your business. Examples of required licenses include: second hand dealers, operator's (bartender) license, gas station, street vendor, Christmas Tree sales, etc.
- ☐ Some businesses require licensing from the State. Cosmetologists/barbers, motor vehicle sales, day cares, etc. - Contact the [State of Wisconsin](#) for licensing requirements. Depending on the business, licensing could be through one of several agencies- Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection; Safety and Professional Services; Health Services, or Motor Vehicles.

☐ Do you qualify for city grants?

Several [grant programs](#) are sponsored by the City. If you are occupying a building, check to see if you are eligible for these grants.

- ☐ White Box- Interior improvements to vacant, first floor commercial spaces in buildings 50 years of age or older. Contact the Building Inspections Division.
- ☐ Façade Grant- Exterior building improvements and signage. Contact Planning.
- ☐ REC Grant- Water service upgrade improvements. Contact Planning.



Getting Started

Finding the Appropriate Location

All parcels in the City have a zoning classification which indicates what uses can occur on the property. You'll want to find a property that is zoned for the use you want to do and is safe to operate in. The Building Division administers the City of Racine Zoning Ordinance. One of the first steps you should take if you are not sure of where your business can be located to be compliant with zoning, is to contact the Building Division or Planning staff to discuss your ideas. The staff will verify whether the location you are interested in will allow the type of use you want to establish. If the use is not listed as a permitted use in a particular zoning district, there are sometimes ways of allowing it, such as with a Conditional Use Permit, or in certain cases by rezoning the property to an appropriate zoning district.

Zoning Ordinance

The City of Racine Zoning Ordinance regulates which uses are allowed within specific zoning districts. Besides the uses that are allowed on a parcel, the Zoning Ordinance also regulates things such as building location, building height limits, required parking spaces, and sign design specifications.

[Zoning Ordinance](#)

Home-based Businesses

The following information applies when operating a business from your home. If you have questions, contact the Building Division at (262) 636-9464.

[Home Business Ordinance](#)

[Home Craft Show Ordinance](#)

Permits and Licensing

Building and Occupancy Permits

The Building Division is often involved on the front end in helping business owners occupy new locations or in assisting existing businesses with expansions or remodeling of their properties. Once a business owner contacts the Building Division, an Inspector will review the proposal in order to determine a course of action regarding what types of information will be required. Building plans may be required to be submitted depending on the scope of the project. It is recommend that you contact the Building Division prior to purchasing materials or beginning any construction activities.

Occupancy Certificates must be obtained for all new businesses, changes of ownership, or business agent changes prior to occupying a building or property. An inspection will be scheduled for the Building, Electrical, Plumbing and Fire Inspectors to walk through the building. If code violations are found, the violations must be corrected prior to the Certificate of Occupancy being issued to the applicant. Certificates of Occupancy can be issued for a permanent occupancy, a 6 month occupancy, or for “**Pop Ups**” of to 3 months in duration.

[Download Application for Certificate of Occupancy](#)

As an additional service, the Building Division also performs **Courtesy Inspections** to determine if a building is able to be occupied in its current condition or if work needs to be done. Appointments can be scheduled for a walk through of a building with Inspections staff.

[Download Application for Courtesy Inspection](#)

[Building Permits](#)

Other Business Permits

Don't overlook obtaining a Tax Identification Number (TIN) and registering with the Wisconsin Department of Revenue. Depending on the structure of your business, the State may require that you file information related to sales tax collection on a regular basis. The State of Wisconsin has created web portals for this process.

State of Wisconsin's "One Stop Business Portal": [State of Wisconsin Business Permits and Registration](#)

Wisconsin Department of Revenue: [State of Wisconsin Department of Revenue Tax Filing and Registration](#)

Licensing

A license to operate may be required depending on the type of business you own. Most licensing is done through the City Clerk's Office, the City of Racine Health Department, the State of Wisconsin or a combination of these entities.

The following links contain information and downloadable license applications:

[Body Art Establishment Licensing](#)

[Liquor Licenses](#)

[Lodging Facility Licensing](#)

[Pet Shop Licensing](#)

[Restaurant & Food Service Licensing](#)

State of Wisconsin Professional Licensing

[Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection](#)

[Department of Safety and Professional Services](#)



Planning in the City of Racine

The Planning Division of the Department of City Development provides regular support to the City Planning Commission, the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Racine (RDA), the Landmarks Commission, the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and the Downtown Area Design Review Committee (DADRC) regarding land use and development issues. Planning staff work closely with other departments to coordinate the review of design standards, site plan reviews and development projects throughout the City.

City Development staff can help you determine appropriate locations for your business, if any permits or licenses may be needed, coordinate plan reviews, and assist you with any committee or commission action you may need to obtain on your way to getting up and running.

The City of Racine has adopted several citywide and area specific plans to guide the development of the City. The subarea plans work in conjunction with the citywide Comprehensive Plan to provide a framework for development within the City.

[City Planning Documents and Specific Area Plans](#)

Project Review and Approval

Some proposals are taken through the Plan Commission and the final approval rests with the Common Council, and others are staff reviews. Items that go through Plan Commission and Common Council include things like Conditional Use Permits, Rezoning and Certified Survey Maps. Simply changing ownership of a property without a change of use may only require a new Certificate of Occupancy, which is a simple staff review. Changing the use of, or constructing a new building, will require a greater level of review for things like parking, lighting, landscaping, utilities and storm water management and driveway locations. This is typically a staff review as well, but it goes through a committee that provides a single, comprehensive review.

- **Administrative Review:** These reviews are performed by City staff and generally apply to simple projects not requiring any zoning action or committee action.
- **Design Review:** The location of a project will determine whether design review standards apply. Design review districts have been established in portions of the City to maintain the neighborhood character and ensure that structures are compatible with the surrounding area. Most design reviews fall under the administrative review process.
- **Plan Commission/Common Council Action:** If a rezoning or conditional use permit is needed, then the proposal must go through the public hearing process which requires Plan Commission review and Common Council approval. Projects that require this level of review generally take longer to approve due to things like public hearings required by Wisconsin State Statutes and meeting scheduling.

Access Corridor Review

Development along certain street corridors in Racine is subject to an “access corridor” review. This is an administrative review by staff to ensure that zoning standards are met by reviewing things like exterior building modifications, number of parking spaces and driveways, screening of trash receptacles and signage. Properties in West Racine, Uptown and along Douglas Avenue are considered access corridor properties.

Joint Plan Review Team

For more complex site plan reviews, the City has a team (Joint Plan Review Team, or JPRT) consisting of staff from several departments that will provide a comprehensive review of project plans. This team includes Planning, Building, Fire, DPW, Health and Utilities staff. The idea behind this team is to provide a central place for you to submit plans, and to provide you with a coordinated review letter outlining any issues that need to be resolved prior to permits being granted.

Design Review Districts

Several areas of the City have been designated as design review districts which have standards that differ from the standards of the Zoning Ordinance. Development in these districts generally requires additional levels of building exterior or site design review. Depending on the district, this review may be completed by staff or it may have to go before a committee. Funding may be available for exterior building improvements through the various [Business Improvement Districts \(BIDs\)](#) or the City’s [Facade Grant](#) programs.

Specific information regarding the design review districts is listed below:

[Downtown Design Area Map 2006](#)

[Downtown Design Standards – Complete Document 2005](#)

[Douglas Avenue Design Guidelines – Amended 2008](#)

[West Racine Design Guidelines – Amended 2006](#)

[Uptown Design Guidelines 2006](#)

[Planning Documents- Design Guidelines- Comprehensive Planning](#)

Plan Commission, Downtown Design Committee, Landmarks Commission Review

In some cases, committee or commission review is required in addition to any other site plan reviews. In these cases, planning staff will work with you to help you understand the reasons for the process, and how to proceed. Certain actions such as Conditional Use Permits, Rezoning, and Comprehensive Plan Amendments require Public Hearings.

Planning Processes and Application Forms

The City has created an application form that covers several of the review processes. There are also checklists for specific processes that describe the process and what information is required for the City to be able to fully review the proposal.

Pre-Submittal Conference Required

For all applications, a pre-submittal conference is required. Contact the Department of City Development, Division of Planning at (262) 636-9151 to speak with a staff member by phone, or by email:

- [Michelle Cook](#), Administrative Assistant
- [Matthew G. Sadowski](#), Assistant Director/Principal Planner
- [Jeff Hintz](#), Associate Planner
- [Jeff Towne](#), Economic Development Specialist

[Conditional Use Permit Application](#)

[Design Review Application](#)

[Administrative Review Application](#)

[Access Corridor Review Application](#)

[Sample Site Plan](#)



Regular Committee/Commission Meeting Dates and Times:

Common Council: First and third Tuesday of each month, 7:00 p.m.

Redevelopment Authority (RDA): First Thursday of each month, 6:00 p.m.

Plan Commission: Second and last Wednesday of each month, 4:15 p.m.

Downtown Area Design Review Commission: First Thursday of each month, 4:30 p.m.

Landmarks Preservation Commission: Second Monday of each month, 5:00 p.m.

Development Review Schedule 2018

Processing Timeframes:

REZONINGS* allow seven weeks processing time from date of complete submission.

CONDITIONAL USE PERMITS* allow four weeks processing time from date of complete submission.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENTS allow twelve weeks processing time from date of complete submission.

CERTIFIED SURVEY MAPS* allow four weeks processing time from date of complete submission.

DOWNTOWN AREA DESIGN REVIEW COMMISSION allow three weeks processing time from date of complete submission.

LANDMARKS COMMISSION allow four weeks processing time from date of complete submission.

FAÇADE & WHITE BOX GRANTS allow six weeks processing time from date of complete submission.

ACCESS CORRIDOR REVIEW allow 28 days from the date of submittal of a complete application.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW allow 14 days from the date of submittal of a complete application.

LOCAL LANDMARK OR HISTORIC DISTRICT* add Landmark Commission dates to Rezoning Dates.

NOTE: *indicates that a fee is charged. All fees are non-refundable.

Business Assistance Programs

City of Racine Grant Programs

The City of Racine offers several grants to assist with building improvement costs. These grants are in the form of matching funds, which reimburse pre-approved costs upon project completion. Be sure to get in touch with staff before beginning your project, as all proposed work must be evaluated and very specific criteria must be met in order to receive reimbursement.

City of Racine Commercial Building Facade Grant Program

The City of Racine's Façade Grant Program provides financial assistance to commercial property owners interested in renovating the major street faces of their buildings. The program provides matching funds up to \$10,000 to commercial property owners to assist them in restoring their building façades. For information on how to apply and program requirements, please contact the Department of City Development at (262) 636-9151.

[Facade Grant Application Packet](#)

City of Racine Commercial "White Box" Grant Program

The White Box Grant assists with interior improvements to vacant commercial buildings over 50 years old. Eligible projects could receive up to \$20,000 per project. The White Box Grant Program is administered by the Chief Building Official. Please call the Building Division at (262) 636-9161 for more information.

[White Box Grant Program Application](#)

Water Impact Fee "REC (" Fee) Reimbursement Program

For commercial or mixed-use buildings built before 2004, the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Racine has created the Water Impact "REC" Fee Reimbursement Program. Building owners can receive reimbursement for up to one "Residential Equivalent Connection (REC)" charge of \$3,450 for new water impact fees necessitated by a change in water usage associated with a proposed new commercial use. For more information, contact the Department of City Development at (262) 636-9151 with any questions.

[Download the REC Reimbursement Grant Application](#)

Tax Incremental Financing and Tax Credits

Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) or Tax Increment Districts (TIDs) are somewhat interchangeable terms for an economic development tool used by the City of Racine and other municipalities to leverage private development investment. This tool has been available since the state of Wisconsin adopted a TIF statute in 1975.

Racine has a number of active Tax Incremental Districts (TIDs) to support a wide variety of projects and has closed out several former districts. These TIDs have been instrumental in assisting projects including the Johnson Outdoors headquarters on Main Street in Downtown Racine, and have resulted in other community improvements such as streetscape enhancements.

[City of Racine Tax Increment Districts and Documents](#)

[City of Racine Tax Incremental Financing Policy](#)

[City of Racine Tax Incremental Financing Application](#)

[View the State of Wisconsin Tax Incremental Finance Manual](#)

Historic Building Rehabilitation Tax Credits

The following programs support the rehabilitation of properties that have received a historic designation after review. Strict program guidelines apply. The State of Wisconsin administers these programs. Click on the following links for more information.

[Tax Credits for Historic Building Rehabilitation](#)

[Tax Credits for Historic Income-Producing Buildings](#)

[Tax Incentives for Preserving Historic Properties](#)

Other Resources

This guide attempts to cover Racine's development review processes concisely, but there is a lot more helpful information available. We encourage you to use www.buildupracine.org to learn more.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and Business Associations

Business Improvement Districts are established to perform duties such as marketing, event management, improving and monitoring safety, and maintaining public spaces within particular areas, where the commercial and industrial property owners pay special assessments to fund these services. Racine has three BIDs. There is also one business association in Racine, which is not funded through special assessments.

These organizations also offer incentives for business development such as design services, signage grants, business rental assistance programs, and landscaping/lighting grant opportunities. Each organization offers different incentives, so contact the appropriate organization to find out what services they may be able to offer to your business.

[Downtown Racine Corporation](#)

[Uptown Racine](#)

[Douglas Avenue](#)

[West Racine Business Association](#)

Training and Financing Resources

The City has strong partnerships with a number of organizations that specialize in the areas of workforce development, business training and mentoring and funding resources that can help you achieve success. The following links provide additional information:

[Employer Training Resources](#)

[Business Financing Resources](#)

[Site Selection Resources](#)

[Contact Us](#)

We hope this guide has been helpful. It's not possible to create a document that covers everything because each situation is different. We encourage you to contact us early and we will help you get on your way. Click on the link above, call us at (262) 636-9151 or stop in to Room 102 of City Hall at 730 Washington Avenue, Racine, WI 53403. Thank you for your interest in doing business in Racine.

