

# A GUIDE TO STARTING YOUR BUSINESS IN DOWNTOWN FOND DU LAC

Downtown Fond du Lac welcomes new businesses to our community. Our downtown offers a wide variety of unique spaces to support new local businesses, and our staff and community are ready to help you succeed. This guide provides an overview of what you need to know to successfully launch your business in downtown Fond du Lac. We look forward to working with you!

## 1 How do I find a space?

The Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership maintains a listing of available spaces. Most are displayed on our website at [www.downtownfdl.com](http://www.downtownfdl.com). However, if you don't see what you're looking for, give us a call and we can help you identify other property owners or businesses that might have what you're looking for.

As you evaluate available spaces, consider the following with regard to your business:

- What type of power is available? Gas line? Fiber or broadband?
- Is there any type of venting in place? Where would a line need to go?
- When has the cabling, wiring, electrical and HVAC system been updated?
- Is the floor level? Can it support shelving, vaults or other features required?
- Have there been leaks or drainage issues in the past? Have they been repaired?
- What is the annual heating/electricity bill for the space?
- Is the owner willing to finance any or all of the cost of renovations? At what rate?
- Does the owner have any other properties/spaces? Are there expansion options?

## 2 How long will it take to open?

Registering and setting up a new business can take from 1-3 months, depending on the amount of space improvements that need to be completed. Many common delays are associated with navigating and coordinating state and local codes and processes. Addressing the following issues initially can help avoid costly delays:

- Is my preferred location zoned for the type of business you intend to operate? The City of Fond du Lac's Zoning Map link is on the Planning & Zoning section of the Community Development website page. Contact the Community Development office to determine the process and timing of requesting any zoning changes. Most projects will also require review and approval of the Downtown Architectural Review Board prior to the issuance of permits.
- Depending on the type of changes required to the space, various approvals, permits and inspections may be required. It is advisable to contact the Community Development office with guidance on the Downtown Design Overlay District, Historic Preservation codes and regulations and various local and state building codes and regulations.
- If you intend to operate a restaurant and/or bar, you will also need to address fire code and safety issues. This can be done by contacting the City Building Inspection Department. Additionally, liquor permits are reviewed by the Alcohol Licensing Committee. Applications are available through the City Clerk Department.



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## FAQ

Below are the most frequently asked questions from businesses that have opened in downtown Fond du Lac.

**Q:** *What is the local market like?*

**A:** Information on demographics, employment and visitor data is available on our website at [www.downtownfdl.com](http://www.downtownfdl.com)

**Q:** *Are there incentives available?*

**A:** Downtown Fond du Lac offers a variety of financial assistance programs to help you expand, relocate or open your business in downtown Fond du Lac. Visit the Financial Incentives page of Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership for a complete list of programs.

**Q:** *How can I market my business?*

**A:** There are many ways to get involved in the DFP. The DFP coordinates local advertising in various print media. Additionally, consider sponsoring a local festival, such as Fondue Fest which attracts 20,000 visitors.

**Q:** *How much does it cost to rent space?*

**A:** Average rents in Downtown Fond du Lac range from \$3 to \$15 per square foot depending on the size and location. There are also spaces available for sale, and financing through SBA or others can make this an affordable option.

## 3 Startup Checklist

Below is a checklist of activities that will need to be completed during the startup process. Use this checklist to keep your opening on schedule:

- ◇ Complete your business plan, including an operating plan, monthly and yearly budget, cash flow and marketing plan.
- ◇ Explore space needs and market characteristics that your business will require to be successful.
- ◇ Meet with your lender or financing partners to discuss your first year capital plan and financing terms.
- ◇ Make sure your professional license is in order (dsps.wi.gov)
- ◇ Register your business name (wdfi.org)
- ◇ Register for a business license (Wisconsin.gov) and any industry specific licenses (dhs.wisconsin.gov). Fond du Lac does not require businesses to register locally.
- ◇ Register with the IRS and Wisconsin Department of Revenue to receive tax ID numbers.
- ◇ Register for a sales tax number (revenue.wi.gov).
- ◇ Secure unemployment and business insurance and draft legal documents together with your attorney.
- ◇ Tour sites and talk with the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership, City of Fond du Lac staff and local businesses to identify zoning, building, signage or other local regulations you should be aware of for preferred sites.
- ◇ Tour preferred spaces with an architect and/or engineer to ensure that they will work for your business.

## 4 What should I budget?

Startup budget requirements vary greatly from business to business. However, there are certain types of costs which are frequently overlooked by new businesses. Identifying and planning for these costs can dramatically improve cash flow in the first year.

- ◇ Licenses and fees. Almost all of the activities on the previous page are associated with some type of fee. Typically, these are small, but together they add up!
- ◇ Space costs. Unforeseen costs of renovations can add up quickly. Be sure to get your questions answered up front and do your due diligence regarding build out requirements.
- ◇ Signage and marketing. Signs, domain names and business cards all have costs.
- ◇ Business and personal property taxes. Likely, you have never filed taxes as a business. Engage an accountant early in the process to be sure you register, budget and file correctly.

- ◇ Negotiate a lease/purchase of your preferred space.
- ◇ Draft and submit interior and exterior plans to the City of Fond du Lac Building Inspector and Community Development offices.
- ◇ Begin to implement your marketing plan.
- ◇ Receive approvals, complete build out, and schedule inspection.
- ◇ Order inventory, hire and train staff, and welcome customers!

## 5 Where can I get more help?

Downtown Fond du Lac has a number of professionals right here in the community that are available to help work through many of these issues. If you don't already have professional advisors, please contact one of the many professionals in downtown Fond du Lac below to help you get started.

Accounting Professionals, Finance Professionals, Insurance Professionals, Legal Professionals, Real Estate Professionals, and Business Advisors are listed at: <http://www.downtownfdl.com/directory.php?cat=services>