

Guide to Starting Your New Business



Photo credit: Alderman Brian Campbell

A comprehensive informational packet to assist entrepreneurs with opening a business in Alton, Illinois



We appreciate that you are considering Alton as the location of your new business! Our hope is that this guide will provide valuable resources to help you navigate each step toward successfully launching your business in our community. Be advised that the overall process may take several months; please plan accordingly.

Please direct any questions on licensing to:

City Treasurer's Office
618-463-3540 / licensing@cityofaltonil.com

For personalized assistance on available real estate, educational opportunities, testing your market, and building brand awareness please contact:

Sara McGibany, Executive Director - Alton Main Street
618-463-1016 / sara@altonmainstreet.org



Step 1

Step 1: Write a Business Plan and Connect with Local Business Support Organizations

A business plan is a formal written document containing business goals, the methods on how these goals can be attained, and the time frame within which they need to be reached.

A typical business plan has a basic structure that includes:

- Executive Summary
- Company Description
- Market Analysis
- Organization & Management
- Service or Product Line
- Marketing & Sales
- Funding Requests
- Financial Projections

The following tools and resources will help you create your business plan

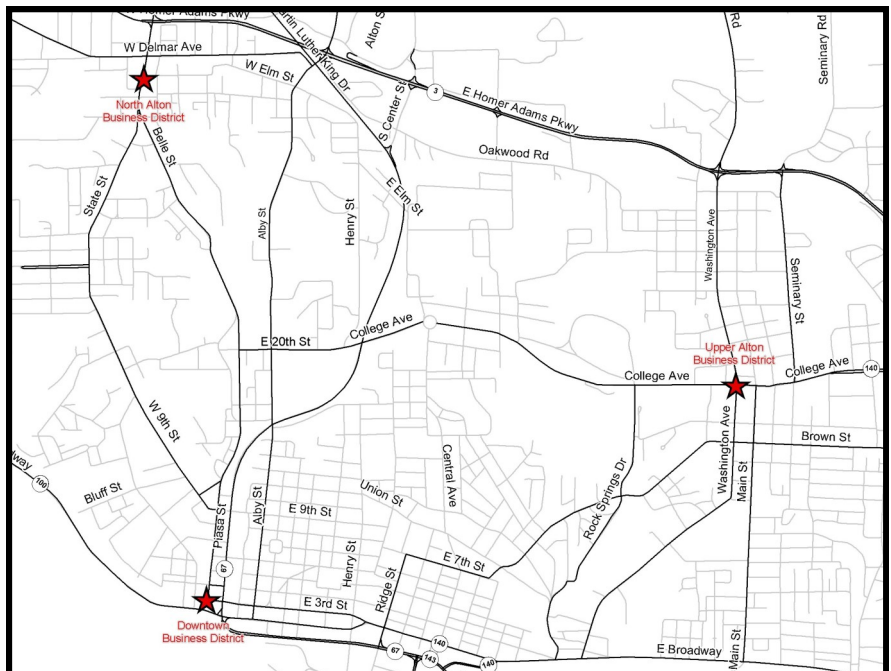
- **SCORE- Business Plan Template:**
<https://www.score.org/resource/business-plan-template-startup-business>
- **Forbes- How to Create A Business Plan:**
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/alejandrocremades/2018/07/24/how-to-create-a-business-plan/#784bf0347391>
- **SBA- Write Your Business Plan:**
<https://www.sba.gov/business-guide/plan-your-business/write-your-business-plan#section-header-0>
- **SIUE- Small Business Development Center:**
<http://www.siue.edu/business/sbdc/>
- **Local Banks and Financial Institutions (select Banking & Finance):**
<https://www.riverbender.com/directory>

Alton has three traditional business districts in addition to Homer Adams Parkway, which are indicated on the map to the right.

Each of the districts has its own supporting organization. **Alton Main Street** serves downtown, the **North Alton-Godfrey Business Council** serves North Alton, and the **Upper Alton Association** serves Upper Alton.

The **Riverbend Growth Association** is the Chamber of Commerce for 12 communities in the Riverbend region, including Alton.

Contact these groups for networking and promotional opportunities. Links to each organization's website can be found on page 6 of this guide.



Step 2

Step 2: Choose Your Business Location

- The City of Alton uses the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS) as the basis for its zoning laws. Some uses are permitted by right in the district and some require approval from the City Council. Certain business categories also require specific amounts of water, electricity or parking spaces for operation.
- The building selected for the business must be inspected by the City's Building and Zoning Department. In addition to other criteria, please be aware of the following information that will be examined during the inspection:
 1. Have one 2A-10BC fire extinguisher within 75-foot travel distance on each level of the business, wall mounted with the top between 42 inches and 54 inches from the floor. All extinguishers must be serviced once per year.
 2. All private protection systems need to be inspected by licensed personnel and serviced if needed.
 3. All unnecessary combustibles must be removed from the premises.
 4. All buildings that have an apartment or sleeping arrangements must have smoke detectors.
 5. Electrical circuits must be identified, and individual circuits should be marked on the electrical panel.
 6. Adequate exits must be established and kept in working order as well as avenues to the exits.
- If a business is located in the Appearance Review District, please contact the Building and Zoning Department regarding signage or changes to the building's exterior. The City offers façade grants to qualifying applicants through the Building and Zoning Department.
- Businesses located in a residence must meet the requirements of a "Home Occupation". The business must clearly be a secondary use and it must be operated by a person living in the house with no non-family employees.
- Electrical, plumbing, and building inspections are handled by the Building and Zoning Department.
- For food establishments, a permit will be required through the Madison County Health Department.

Helpful Links For This Process

Alton Building and Zoning Department – <https://www.cityofaltonil.com/page/building-and-zoning/>

Alton Ordinances (Including Zoning Laws) – https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/alton_il/latest/overview

Madison County Health Department – <http://www.madisonchd.org/>

GIS Mapping: <https://www.cityofaltonil.com/page/gis-mapping/>

Ameren (Electricity) – <https://www.ameren.com>

Illinois American Water Company – <http://www.amwater.com/ilaw/>

Republic Services (Trash Service) – <https://www.republicservices.com/locations/illinois/alton>

Robert Sanders Waste Systems (Trash Service)- <https://www.sanderswaste.com/>

Spectrum (Cable, Telephone, and Internet) – <https://www.spectrum.com/>

AT&T (Cable, Telephone, and Internet) – <http://www.att.com>

Local Commercial Realtors (Select Real Estate) – <https://www.riverbender.com/directory>

Steps 3 & 4

Step 3: Determine the Legal Structure of Your Business

Consult with an attorney and an accountant to determine which form of ownership best suits your needs.

- **Sole Proprietorship** refers to a person who owns the business and is personally responsible for its debts.
- **Partnership** is an operation between two or more individuals who share management and profits.
- **Limited Liability Company (LLC) - L3C corporation** is a corporation in which the owners are not personally liable for the company's debts or liabilities.
- **S Corporation** refers to a type of corporation that meets specific Internal Revenue Code requirements. The requirements give a corporation with 100 shareholders or less the benefit of incorporation while being taxed as a partnership.
- **Nonprofit organization** are tax exempt or charitable, meaning they do not pay income tax on the money that they receive for their organization. They can operate in religious, scientific, research, or educational settings.
- **Cooperative** is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

Step 4: Finance Your Business

Financing is extremely important when starting a business. There are three main documents needed when planning to open a business. When developing your business plan (Step 1), you should create 24-month projections of the following financial statements.

- 1) Balance Sheet: A statement of what a business owns, what it owes to others, and how much value the owners have invested in it
- 2) Statement of Cash Flow: A statement of the sources and uses of cash in a business for a specific period of time
- 3) Income Statement: A statement that lists revenues and expenses and shows the amount of profit a business makes for a specified period of time

Useful links for creating your financial statements

Financial Statement Templates: <https://www.score.org/resource/business-planning-financial-statements-template-gallery>

Accounting in Focus: <https://accountinginfocus.com/financial-accounting/introduction/creating-financial-statements/>

Useful links for this process

- City of Alton, Planning & Development – <https://www.cityofaltonil.com/planning-and-development/>
- Madison County Community Development – http://www.co.madison.il.us/departments/community_development/index.php
- Madison County Treasurer's Office – <http://www.madcotreasurer.org/>
- Madison County Small Business Micro Loan Program – https://www.co.madison.il.us/news_detail_T3_R61.php
- Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity – <https://www.illinois.gov/DCEO/Pages/default.aspx>
- Southwestern Illinois Development Authority – <http://www.swida.org/>
- Justine PETERSEN – <http://www.justinepetersen.org/>
- Local Banks and Financial Institutions (select Banking & Finance): <https://www.riverbender.com/directory>

Steps 5 & 6

Step 5: Register Your Business

This step involves registering a business name and obtaining a tax identification number

- If the business name is different than the owner's name, you will need to apply for an Assumed Name Certificate through the Madison County Clerk's Office. There are fees involved which vary depending on the business. To start this process, please visit: <http://www.madisonvotes.com/assumed-business-name.shtml>
- An application for a Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN) is available online. To start this process, please visit: <https://www.irs.gov/filing>
- Applying for an Illinois Business Tax Identification Number will take 6-8 weeks, if handled through the mail. To register online, please visit: <http://www.revenue.state.il.us/Businesses/register.htm> to register online.

*Please be advised that the sales tax rate in Alton is higher at Alton Square Mall compared to the rest of the City.

Step 6: Obtain Business Licenses & Permits

Depending on the nature of the business, various federal and state licenses and permits may be required. Please consult an attorney regarding specific federal and state regulations.

For the City of Alton, prospective businesses must apply for a business license through the City Treasurer's Office at City Hall (101 E Third Street). Opening a business before obtaining a business license is a violation of the Alton City Code. In addition to the requirements in Step 3, prospective businesses must complete the business license application, schedule an inspection of the premises where the business will be located, pay the application fee, pass a background check by the Police Department, and not have any outstanding bills with the City of Alton.

For businesses desiring a license to sell alcoholic beverages, the Mayor's Office is responsible for issuing liquor licenses. In order to obtain a liquor license, a prospective business must complete the requirements listed in Step 3 and do the following:

1. Collect signed consent forms (available at the Mayor's office).
2. Complete the application and have it notarized.
3. Pay the application fee.
4. Pass a background check by the Police Department.
5. Have a driver's license or other photo identification.
6. Have a purchase or lease agreement for the property intended for the business.
7. Articles of Incorporation (if applicable).
8. Pass a Seller/Server Training Course (if applicable).
9. Certificate of Liquor Liability Insurance with the City of Alton listed as Certificate Holder (if applicable).
10. Complete the emergency contact form.
11. Prospective business applicant must not have any delinquent fines or fees from the City of Alton.

Alton City Treasurer's Office – <https://www.cityofaltonil.com/page/city-treasurer/>

Alton Mayor's Office – <https://www.cityofaltonil.com/page/mayor/>

Seller/Server Training – <http://www.bassetcertification.org>

Step 7

Step 7: Additional Useful Links

If you are testing a business idea or are otherwise not ready to commit to a brick and mortar location, Alton offers an abundance of opportunities that will help prepare you for your next step. Consider joining community events as a vendor to test the market and build brand awareness! There are also a number of consignment shops and other pop-up opportunities to sell your products and spread the word about your services.

*Visit www.DowntownAlton.com/Events for details,
and for personalized assistance please contact the Alton Main Street office:
618-463-1016 or sara@altonmainstreet.org*

Guide for Starting a New Business in Illinois

<https://www2.illinois.gov/dceo/SmallBizAssistance/BeginHere/pages/stepbystepguide.aspx>

There are several business associations within the City of Alton ready to assist you

- Alton Main Street – www.DowntownAlton.com
- Upper Alton Association – www.UpperAlton.com
- North Alton-Godfrey Business Council – <https://godfreyil.org/businesses/business-council/>
- The River Bend Growth Association – www.GrowthAssociation.com

If your business is related to hospitality, shopping, dining or entertainment

Connect with the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau — <https://www.riversandroutes.com/>

Links to media outlets in the Alton area:

- The Telegraph – www.TheTelegraph.com
- WBGZ Radio (107.1 FM & 1570 AM) – www.AltonDailyNews.com
- Riverbender.com – www.Riverbender.com
- Advantage News – www.AdvantageNews.com

