



ALEXANDRIA HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Environmental Health Division

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MOBILE FOOD ESTABLISHMENT GUIDE

To obtain a permit for a Mobile Food Establishment (MFE), there are two main phases: the [plan review process](#) and the [application process](#). Both require a non-refundable fee and, depending on the situation, the phases may be completed at the same time. For more information, see the steps below.

Codes and Regulations

The City of Alexandria, Department of Health adopted the 2009 FDA Model Food Code and its annexes. In addition to this, the City has additional specific requirements for food establishments and mobile food units. Visit www.alexandriava.gov/11492 for more information.

Although mobile units are regulated by the Health Department, other city agencies also regulate them. Those agencies include, but are not limited to, the Departments of Fire, Code, Zoning, Environmental Quality, and the Business Tax Office. Many of these agencies maintain a desk at the Permit Center, so it may be more convenient to start there to ensure your MFE will be able to operate in the City as intended.

Permit Center
4850 Mark Center Dr, 2nd Floor
Alexandria, VA 22311
703.746.4200

Permit.Center@alexandriava.gov
<http://alexandriava.gov/PermitCenter>

MFE Permitted in Other Counties

Because the City of Alexandria has additional local food regulations, the Health Department is not able to reciprocate MFE permits issued in other Virginia counties. To operate an MFE in the city, the MFE must be permitted by the Alexandria Health Department.

Phase I : Plan Review Process

Plan Review Steps

The plan review process is used by the health department to examine the facility, equipment, processes, and products associated with a proposed establishment. By conducting a plan review, the health department can ensure that the proposed establishment will be able to operate safely and in compliance with our [codes and regulations](#) after permit. Sometimes this process is required when an existing MFE drastically changes its menu or equipment.

1. If the MFE currently holds an Alexandria Health Department permit, and the owner is selling the unit to another business, skip ahead to Phase II: Application Process.
2. At minimum, prospective MFE owners shall provide the following to the Health Department:

- a. Two (2) complete sets of [plans](#) for review and approval.
- b. Plan review documents such as [equipment cut sheets](#) or specifications
- c. Detailed information on the capacity of the hot water heater in the unit
- d. The non-refundable [plan review fee](#)
- e. A completed [MFE Menu](#) form (see website)

Plans will not be considered for review unless all required documents are submitted. For more information about these items, see below, or contact the Health Department.

Although not required at this point, prior to permit, the following additional information will be required and may be submitted early.

- A completed [MFE Routing](#) form
 - A completed [MFE Commissary](#) form for each commissary utilized
 - Copy of a [Northern Virginia Certified Food Manager \(CFM\)](#) card
 - Copy of the registration, if the MFE is a vehicle
3. The Health Department Environmental Health Specialist (EHS) will review plans and approve or reject the submission within ten (10) business days.
 - a. **Rejection:** If the plan is rejected, the Health Department will notify the applicant by phone and in writing (i.e., email, fax) about the cause of the rejection and required changes and revisions that must be submitted. If the revisions require a new set of plans to be submitted, then the **MFE owner must submit two (2) sets of revised plans or applicable sheets to the Health Department.**
 - b. **Approval:** If the plan is approved, the Health Department will notify the applicant via phone or email, and request the MFE owner begin the [application process](#). Code Administration's database will be updated automatically, should this be applicable.

Plans

A plan is a drawing of the facility that details the layout, size and arrangement of the unit and equipment inside the proposed MFE. Where required, the plan will also show:

- Mechanical, plumbing, electrical and fire protection system plans
- Finish schedule (materials to be used on the walls, floors and ceilings)
- Lighting schedule

When submitting a plan, the drawings must be both neat and legible, and must be drawn to scale. It must be large enough for the EHS to review, but no larger than 24" x 36". The Health Department will not make additional copies or enlarge existing plan sets to meet the specifications needed.

Equipment Cut Sheets or Specifications

Every piece of equipment installed or used in a MFE should have a specification or cut sheet. These documents provide a detailed description of the equipment, including available types, models, dimensions, electrical or water requirements, add-ons, certifications, etc. When submitting a plan, these sheets must be included.

Plan Review Fees

The plan review fee is \$200 and is required at the time of plan submission and is non-refundable. Checks or money orders shall be made payable to the "City of Alexandria," and cannot be 'starter' checks. Cash payments must be made in person.

Phase II : Application Process

Application Steps

The application process is a process used by the health department to initiate the permitting process, update contact information, and re-affirm the conditions of an existing permit.

1. Confirm completion of the [plan review](#)
2. [Apply for a permit](#)
3. Schedule a [pre-opening inspection\(s\)](#)
4. [Issuance of permit](#)
5. [Permit inspection process](#)

Apply for a Permit

When applying for a MFE permit, the following documents shall be submitted:

- a. A completed [Permit Establishment Application](#) form. If this is a [change of ownership](#):
 - o Check the "Change of Ownership" box at the top of the form
 - o Write the estimated settlement date of closing (REQUIRED)
 - o Write the current name of the business you are buying (even if it is identical to what you will call the business)
- b. A completed [MFE Menu](#) form
- c. A completed [MFE Routing](#) form
- d. A completed [MFE Commissary](#) form for each commissary utilized
- e. The non-refundable [application fee](#)
- f. Copy of a [Northern Virginia Certified Food Manager \(CFM\)](#) card
- g. Copy of the registration, if the MFE is a vehicle

Some of these documents may already be submitted during the plan review process.

Change of Ownership

Alexandria Health Department permits are not transferable. *A new owner cannot operate a regulated facility without a new permit issued by the Health Department—the existing permit is only valid for the owner identified on the permit. This requirement also applies to a MFE that is undergoing an "administrative" change of ownership (ex: when an individual or sole-proprietor wants to transfer his/her permit to a new corporation or limited liability company).*

The change of ownership process is often confused with a name change or application update process. When a name change or application update occurs, the MFE's ownership entity does not change. When the entity changes, there is a change of ownership. Both the

Alexandria Health Department and the Business Tax Branch can walk you through specific examples of these differences.

Application Fees

The application fee is \$90 and is non-refundable. The application fee is required at the time of application submission. Checks or money orders shall be made payable to the "Alexandria Health Department," and cannot be 'starter' checks. Cash or credit payments must be made in person.

When renewing a year-round MFE permit, a \$25 late fee may be required. Your renewal notices will describe this circumstance in detail.

Pre-opening Inspection(s)

The Environmental Health Specialist (EHS) will review your application and accompanying documents. If he or she has additional questions, the EHS may contact you prior to the inspection. Once the EHS has thoroughly reviewed your application, he or she will contact you to schedule a final construction inspection at a time convenient for both you and the EHS.

Issuance of permit

If the facility is in compliance with the applicable health codes, the EHS will recommend issuance of a Health Department permit on the pre-opening inspection report. If you require a City of Alexandria business license, this inspection report can be given to the Business Tax Branch to satisfy the Health Department approval requirement.

New permits will be mailed to the designated mailing address, or can be provided in person at the Health Department upon request. The Health Department will also provide a MFE 'sticker' for your unit. This sticker shall be affixed to your unit in general view of the public.

Permit Inspection Process

Routine inspections (approximately every four months) are required to ensure compliance with the applicable food code. If the Health Department is not able to inspect your MFE unannounced, an EHS will mail your business a request to schedule an inspection.

Permit Renewal

Each year, the following documents must be submitted to maintain an active permit. Notification requesting this will be mailed annually in November.

- a. A completed [Permit Establishment Application](#) form.
- b. A completed [MFE Menu](#) form
- c. A completed [MFE Routing](#) form
- d. A completed [MFE Commissary](#) form for each commissary utilized
- e. The non-refundable [application fee](#)

If the permitted MFE operates seasonally, our office may require a pre-opening inspection before operating after the off-season. This situation is addressed on a case-by-case basis.