

Implementation of Updated Licensing and Zoning Regulations for Bars, Restaurants and Entertainment Venues

Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS), with support from City Planning (CP) and Economic Development and Culture (EDC)
Presentation to the Toronto Music Advisory Committee (TMAC)

December 1, 2025



Overview

- In December 2023, City Council adopted [2023.EC8.13](#) and [2023.PH8.2](#), which modernized licensing and zoning regulations for bars, restaurants and entertainment venues
 - Amendments went into effect on **January 1, 2025**
- **Purpose of presentation:** provide an update on cross-divisional work to clarify the zoning and licensing categories for venues presenting live music, including re-adjusted communications and outreach to bars, restaurants, and entertainment venues

Context

At its **October 2025** meeting, TMAC requested that staff bring forward an update to (i) clarify zoning and licensing definitions for venues presenting live music and (ii) work to align communications and outreach to venues

Through **Item [2025.EC24.7](#)** introduced by Councillor Fletcher and adopted by City Council in **November 2025**, the Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS) Division was directed to establish a streamlined process to transition existing business owners to new licence classes established under the updated framework, where they have otherwise not altered their business practices

Background: Zoning for Live Music Venues

	Definition	Conditions
Entertainment Place of Assembly	(235) <u>Entertainment Place of Assembly</u> means premises used to provide entertainment and performing arts, such as a theatre, cinema, opera, ballet, concert hall, or live music venue. Food or beverages may be offered for sale. An adult entertainment use, a cabaret, an eating establishment, a place of assembly, or a nightclub is not an entertainment place of assembly.	Commercial Residential Zones (CR & CRE) • 400 sqm maximum interior floor area when the property is within 6.1 metres of a residential zone. Institutional Education Zone (IE) • Must be in association with a post-secondary school. Open Space Zone (ON) • Must be in combination with a park or agricultural use. • Can't be in a wholly enclosed building.
Eating Establishment	(225) <u>Eating Establishment</u> means premises where food or beverages are prepared and offered for sale to patrons for immediate consumption on the premises while they are seated, and which may include an incidental take-out service.	Commercial Residential Zones, Open Space Zones and Employment Zones abutting a major street • 25% up to 250 sqm of interior floor space can be used for entertainment uses (stage, dancefloor, DJ area, etc.). Commercial Local Zone and Employment Zones not abutting a major street • 6% up to 50 sqm of interior floor space can be used for entertainment uses (stage, dancefloor, DJ area, etc.).

Background: Licensing for Live Music Venues

***NEW LICENCE CATEGORY* - ENTERTAINMENT PLACE OF ASSEMBLY**

Summary	Operating Requirements
- Category expands previous “Public Hall” licence and clearly distinguishes businesses from a bar or restaurant Definition: A. A performing arts space, live music performance venue, or any other establishment that offers entertainment or performances for patrons, including but not limited to a theatre, cinema, opera, concert hall, circus, or ballet; B. A space offered to other persons or entities to host entertainment or performances for patrons, including banquet halls or event venues.	- If there are frequent forming of queues at entry, have a uniformed attendant present to regulate - If serving alcohol, notify MLS of any change to the terms of the liquor licence - Submission of insurance policy
If a business has 150+ occupancy, serves liquor, and within a 7-day period operates past 12 a.m. for most of its operating days, it would be considered an *EXPANDED* ENTERTAINMENT PLACE OF ASSEMBLY and must comply with additional administrative plans, including a noise control plan and patron management plan	

Communications and Outreach

- As part of the transition period for the Bylaw updates, staff updated City webpages, questionnaires, and conducted staff training on the new framework, and as part of licence renewal notices (that are provided 90 days before an existing licence's renewal date), specific content was included on the new licence requirements and resources available to businesses.
- The City also:
 - Developed a Licence Finder Tool to help businesses understand which licence or licences are suited to their operations;
 - Conducted a pre-implementation education campaign in October and November 2024;
 - Hosted two virtual public information sessions in February and April 2025 to provide an overview of the changes;
 - Sent out communications through industry newsletters (BusinessTO and CultureTO) and directly to Councillors Offices; and
 - Conducted in person visits to certain businesses that may have required an updated licence

Communications and Outreach Enhancements

- MLS staff are committed to improving how the City communicates with business owners about the licensing process, including through increasing direct outreach and communication opportunities with licensing staff
 - Staff recognize the importance of a clear and consistent approach as part of the continued transition to the new licensing framework and have re-issued training to ensure consistent communication to businesses by enforcement staff
 - MLS will also be launching a business licensing call centre in 2026 to intake public inquiries and support licensees in real-time

2025.EC24.7 and Transitioning Existing Businesses

- As a result of the Item and motion from Councillor Fletcher, MLS is developing streamlined processes for situations where existing businesses are required to move into a new licensing class. This new process will consider how to reduce burden for these business owners by:
 - Removing the need to submit a full new application, focusing instead on only documents required to support the change in licensing class
 - Enhancing the referral process between enforcement staff and licensing staff to provide better education and consistent advice once the need for a licence conversion is identified
- The Economic Development and Culture Division (EDC) has also launched the [Red Tape Hotline](#) pilot, which is gathering data on regulatory burdens and process challenges
 - The outcome from this pilot will be shared with MLS to facilitate a more streamlined and business-friendly experience for small businesses
 - City Council directed EDC report back on the Red Tape Hotline as part of a progress report on the Action Plan for Toronto's Economy in **Q2 2026**

Next Steps

- MLS will be reporting back in **Q2 2026** on actions to improve licensing and permitting, in line with the City's Business Licence and Permit Applications Action Plan ([2025.EC22.7](#))
- Report will outline the efforts to improve implementation of the licensing and zoning regulatory changes, as well as training and education activities related to small business owners and operators

For more information:

[City webpage on the Licensing and Zoning Changes for Bars, Restaurants, and Entertainment Venues](#)

Red Tape Hotline is available at toronto.ca/redtape

Thank you!





Appendix

Zoning for Nightclubs

Definition	Conditions
(490) <u>Nightclub</u> means premises used to provide amplified music for patron entertainment and dancing, such as a dance hall, dance club, or disco, and where food and beverages may be served. A cabaret, an eating establishment, an entertainment place of assembly, a place of assembly, or an adult entertainment use is not a nightclub.	• Must be in a non-residential building. • Maximum interior floor area of 400 sqm when 6.1 m of a lot in the Residential Zone. • Maximum of 1 nightclub per building. • Must not be located above the 1st storey. ○ Except a mezzanine, offices, storage rooms or staff rooms.

Licensing for Nightclubs

ENTERTAINMENT ESTABLISHMENT/NIGHTCLUB

Summary	Operating Requirements
• Updated definition as of January 1, 2025: • Premises used to provide amplified music for patron entertainment/dancing • Also considered a nightclub if the establishment provides bottle service, advertises as a club, nightclub, disco, or dance hall, is equipped with a lighting system, sound system, or disc jockey booth greater in scope than one expected in an eating or drinking establishment, and has a stage, dance floor, or other area used for patron entertainment and dancing	• Provide security guards • Each entrance equipped with a functioning metal detector used to permit entry • Maintain a list of 'persons of authority' • Comply with a Level 2 Noise Control Plan • Comply with a Patron Management Plan • Submission of insurance policy • Notify MLS of any change to the terms of the liquor licence