

# Boston Adopts State Law Allowing Beer & Wine License Conversions to All-Alcohol

By Adam Barnosky on September 29, 2025



This week, the Boston City Council approved a measure that will allow the city's roughly 375 existing beer and wine license holders to upgrade to full all-alcohol licenses, opening the door for them to serve liquor and cocktails in addition to beer and wine.

Boston was among the first to act on the **state's June 2025 law**, permitting restaurants and bars throughout Massachusetts to convert their Wine and Malt Beverage Licenses into non-transferrable All-Alcoholic Beverages Licenses.

The city's initiative, introduced by Councilor Gabriela Coletta Zapata, is designed to help small businesses compete in a market where liquor licenses have traditionally been limited and expensive. Under the measure, eligible businesses must be in good standing with tax and labor authorities and must also obtain state approval for the conversion. The proposal now heads to Boston's Liquor Licensing Board, which will draft regulations and work directly with businesses on how to pursue conversions.

For years, Boston's tightly capped licensing system has made full liquor licenses prohibitively expensive for some businesses, often trading for six-figure sums on the private market. Although the Legislature and City Council created a plan to roll out 225 new neighborhood-restricted licenses in 2024 (the largest single expansion since Prohibition), uptake in some areas has been slower than initially anticipated.

Allowing existing beer and wine license holders to upgrade provides an immediate pathway to more robust offerings, without the complexity of navigating the private market or the uncertainty of new license allocations.

Historically, a transferable beer and wine license in Boston carries a market value of roughly \$125,000-\$200,000 (depending on demand) and can be used as loan collateral or transferred in a business transaction. Converting to an all-alcohol license means relinquishing that asset value. When the business closes, the license returns to the city.

Boston's Licensing Board will set the fee structure and application requirements, likely in the coming months. Once regulations are in place, qualifying restaurants will be able to apply for the conversion with the city.

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