

Re Discover the city Allentown

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

From OPPORTUNITY to OPENING

A GUIDE TO STARTING YOUR BUSINESS IN ALLENTOWN, PA

This guide is designed to help you:

1. **Plan** for the most basic steps in starting a business
2. **Understand** the general licensing and permitting requirements for your business
3. **Manage** the pre-opening process and avoid pitfalls so you can open your business in a timely manner

The Department of Community & Economic Development seeks to partner with, educate, and empower business owners and entrepreneurs to pursue their endeavors by supplying them with the necessary tools to open and operate a successful and thriving business.

This document merely constitutes a summary of Allentown City Code and is not intended to be a full recitation of the requirements necessary to open a business or complete building alterations. Persons using this guide will be expected to comply with all City of Allentown Codes specific to their intentions whether expressly stated in this document or not. This document shall not be construed as a warranty or guarantee by the City of Allentown or by any of its established departments.

Starting a business, no matter the size or your previous experience, is no small undertaking. Attention to detail and organization early in your planning stages will help translate your vision into reality with greater efficiency.

1. *Plan* for the basics

The following planning concerns must be fully addressed along with all other aspects of your business development plan. They will form the basis for every decision you will have to make as you move forward.

What you do – Clearly define the of what services your business will offer. What you do will have an impact on where you can locate, what your requirements will be, and more importantly, how soon you can open.

Legal Structure – How you organize your business (e.g. corporation, partnership, sole proprietor, etc.) has important tax, liability, and accounting implications.

Assets – What kind of resources do you have at your disposal to get your business started? You may not know in the beginning how much each step will cost, but you need to know what you can afford and how it will be paid for as it arrives.

Requirements – Research the legal requirements for your type of business and what licenses and/or certifications may be required for you to operate. This will help you make the best decisions possible. With this knowledge, you will be more likely to save time, money, and avoid potentially frustrating situations. ***By reading this brochure, you are already on the right path!!!***

Location – Investigate and select several sites within the City's limits where you have interest in operating your business. If you are not sure where to start: contact our **Business Development Office (610) 437-7610** for assistance in locating available office/retail space. With a clear explanation of what your business will do and your list of preferred business sites, contact the **Zoning Office (610) 437-7630** to receive pre-approval for your business. Be certain you have Zoning pre-approval before leasing or purchasing your business location.

If you would like help in addressing any of the above issues and/or to develop an overall plan for your business, please contact the City's **Business Development Office (610) 437-7610** or the **Community Action Development Corp. (610) 433-5703**.

OTHER RESOURCES:

Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, Center for Entrepreneurial Assistance:

<http://www.newpa.com>

Pennsylvania Open for Business: <http://www.paopen4business.state.pa.us>

2. Understand *the requirements*

Once you have established a basic plan for your business, you will need to go through the licensing, permitting, and general approval process with the City of Allentown. Do not let yourself get overwhelmed! City staff are eager to make sure you succeed in starting your business as quickly as possible and are ready to assist you at every stage of the process. As you review the following information, keep in mind that it is a basic outline of steps to follow. Specific instructions for each kind of business are not described in this guide, but we will work to make sure you get the right information for your specific needs. **PLEASE, never hesitate to ask a question!**

Zoning & Business License – On the 2nd Floor of City Hall fill out a Business Request Questionnaire (BRQ). *You must be able to designate a location for your business in order to be approved for a license.* Take the completed BRQ to Zoning on the 4th Floor of City Hall for zoning approval. **Here's what you can generally expect:** A Zoning Officer will review your business location with you to determine if you will need a Zoning Permit for which **a fee will apply**. The issuance of a permit will be determined by the previous use of your location, your intended use, and any type of signs you plan to install to identify your business. **In all evaluations for approval,** Zoning will determine if your site meets the required parking ratio based on the nature of your operation. If your desired use, intended signage, or available parking does not comply with Zoning requirements, the Zoning Officer will direct you on how you may appeal your case to the Zoning Hearing Board, should you desire. **A fee will apply.** After receiving zoning approval, return with your signed BRQ to Finance on the 2nd Floor to pay your **Business License Fee**.


Trash & Recycling – You may choose to set up your trash hauling service with the **Bureau of Recycling & Solid Waste (610) 437-8729** at the time of receiving your business license or wait until a later date. If you choose to use the City service, pick-ups will be twice a week with a limit of five (5) bags/pick-up. **A service fee will apply.** You will not be approved to operate your business until you have established trash hauling arrangements with the Bureau of Recycling & Solid Waste or submitted proof of service with a private party which is approved by the Bureau.

Permits – **The following upgrades do not require a permit:** paint, wallpaper, tile, carpet, replacing windows in existing window wells, installing cabinets, counter tops and similar finishing work. If you have any uncertainty, we will help you make the right determination.

If you plan to do any interior or exterior alterations, additions, upgrades (other than those listed above), or new construction – you must submit plans to the City's building code official for review detailing the

alterations. Your plans must first undergo a third party review in order to be in compliance with the State Uniform Construction Code (UCC). A list of state approved third party agencies is available at the Permitting Counter or on the web at www.dli.state.pa.us. All businesses must submit two (2) copies of their building plans (also refer to “Additional Requirements” at the end of this section).

After your building plans have been reviewed and approved, you will be contacted to return to the 4th floor to pick up your plans. At that time you will be able to pull the necessary permits to complete the work approved. All building, electrical, plumbing, and mechanical permits must be pulled by and issued to properly licensed and insured contractors for each area of work required. **A copy of your approved building plans and all permits must be on the job site at all times.**



Inspections – Make certain that you communicate with the proper inspectors for each stage of work. Keep them informed and properly alerted so they can inspect your progress. This will help you avoid performing work that will not pass inspection and possibly need to be redone.

Call the Building Standards & Safety office (610) 437-7591 to schedule your final Certificate of Occupancy (CO) inspection after any/all rough inspections have been completed and you are nearing the end of your alterations work. ***You must call a minimum of five (5) days in advance.*** Inspection failure due to non-completion may result in penalties and fines being charged as a result of multiple inspections.

Minimum Required Building/Alteration Inspections


New Construction:

1. Footer – Prior to placement of concrete. Reinforcement must be in place if indicated on plans.
2. Foundation – Before backfill and after dampproofing or waterproofing is applied. Reinforced walls also require an inspection prior to placement of concrete.

New Construction & Alterations:

3. Rough Framing, Electrical, Plumbing, and/or Mechanical – Prior to concealment.
4. Firestop – Prior to concealment.
5. Insulation – Prior to concealment.
6. Wallboard – Prior to tape and spackle.
7. Final (Certificate of Occupancy)

ATTENTION: Any work performed without permits, regulated under the UCC, will be assessed a fine of \$100 / permit required in addition to the actual fee for the necessary permit.



Additional Requirements – Specific information is available for the following aspects of the business pre-opening process:

- **ADA Compliance:** Whether you are building a new structure or making upgrades to an existing one, strict accessibility requirements of the Federal and state governments may affect the property your business will be located in and must be addressed accordingly.
- **Engineering:** Any aspect of your business that will affect the public right-of-way will require review and approval from the Bureau of Engineering **(610) 437-7584. Fees will apply.**
- **Fire:** Your Design Professional is responsible to determine if your business location will require any fire protection systems, above and beyond standard Fire Code compliance. For every protection system required there will be a corresponding review fee assessed by the Allentown Fire Department **(610) 437-7758.**
- **Health:** If your business involves food service, child care, nursing home operation, or massage you will need Bureau of Health approval **(610) 437-7759.** This will require the submission of an extra set of building plans; three (3) total. **Fees will apply.**
- **Historic District:** If your business location is in one of the three Historic Districts of the City, any proposed alterations will need to be reviewed and approved by the Bureau of Planning **(610) 437-7613.**

OTHER RESOURCES:

Pennsylvania Uniform Commercial Code: <http://www.pacode.com>

ADA, Standards for Accessible Design: <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/stdspdf.htm>

3. Manage *the process*

Now that you have a basic knowledge of what is needed in the planning stages and a general understanding of what will be required, it is time to manage the process. We suggest that you create a pre-opening worksheet or use the City of Allentown's Business Pre-Opening/Information Worksheet (provided below) designed as a courtesy to help keep you on target until your opening day. If you have not done so already, we suggest that you meet with our **Business Development Specialist (610) 439-5964** and/or the **Development Liaison/Permits Specialist (610) 437-7534.**

Business Pre-Opening

Checklist/Information Worksheet

___ In a Business Plan or other formal document, I have clearly defined my business.

___ I have determined and established the type of legal entity for my business (e.g. corporation, partnership, sole proprietor, etc.).

___ I have investigated, visited, and selected potential sites in Allentown to locate my business.

My top 4:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

___ I have contacted and received pre-approval from the **Zoning Office, (610) 437-7630** for the location I desire to do business. (place a * next to the above locations pre-approved by Zoning)

___ Contacted the **Building Code Official (BCO), 610-437-7602** for approval and a basic understanding of the code requirements based on my intended use.

___ I have acquired/started a lease for my business location.

Address: _____

Lease start/Purchase Date: _____ Monthly Cost:\$ _____

___ I have obtained my business license. Date: _____

___ I have established my trash hauling service: **Bureau of Recycling & Solid Waste, (610) 437-8729** (circle one).

CITY or OTHER: _____

___ I have complete drawings for construction/alterations of the property where my business will be located.

Date: _____

Architect: _____ Phone: _____

Engineer: _____ Phone: _____

Third Party Reviewer _____ Phone: _____

___ I have submitted drawings for review for construction/alterations to the property.

Date Submitted to City: _____

Date Approved by City: _____

Your approved FIELD COPY must be on the jobsite at all times. No inspections will occur without an approved field copy.

___ I have pulled all the necessary permits to complete my work – using licensed and insured contractors (check all that apply).

___ **Building/Alterations (BP/AP)** Inspector: _____ Phone: _____

___ **Electrical (EP)** Inspector: _____ Phone: _____

___ **Plumbing (PP/SC)** Inspector: _____ Phone: _____

___ **Mechanical (HE/PA)** Inspector: _____ Phone: _____

___ **Health** Inspector: _____ Phone: _____

___ **Engineering** Inspector: _____ Phone: _____

___ **Fire (SS/TP)** Inspector: _____ Phone: _____

___ **Other(s)** Inspector: _____ Phone: _____

___ I have determined when and for what work I need to have inspectors approve my progress. ***Call 72 hours in advance for all inspections.***

Inspection Type: _____ Date: _____

NOTES: _____

Inspection Type: _____ Date: _____

NOTES: _____

Inspection Type: _____ Date: _____

NOTES: _____

Inspection Type: _____ Date: _____

NOTES: _____

Inspection Type: _____ Date: _____

NOTES: _____

___ I have scheduled my final CO Inspection. ***Call a minimum of five (5) days in advance.***

Date: _____

___ **PM READY TO OPEN!!!** Date: _____

ATTENTION: Any work performed without permits, regulated under the UCC, will be assessed a fine of \$100 / permit required in addition to the actual fee(s) for the necessary permit(s).

Contact Us

For questions regarding business plan development, financing, location selection, and more contact:

Business Development Office

(610) 439-5964 or (610) 437-7610

businessdevelopment@allentowncity.org

For questions regarding licensing and permitting requirements and general pre-opening process concerns contact:

Development Liaison/Permits Specialist

(610) 437-7534

PermitsAndInspections@allentowncity.org

Bureau of Zoning

(610) 437-7630

Bureau of Building Standards & Safety

(610) 437-7591

Bureau of Health

(610) 437-7759

Fire Department (Code & Inspections)

(610) 437-7758

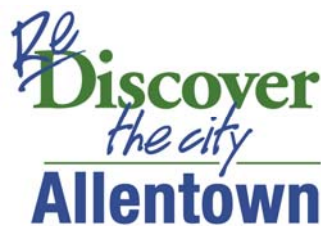
Bureau of Engineering

(610) 437-7584

Bureau of Planning (Historic Districts)

(610) 437-7613

We wish you much success! We are always eager to assist you in the future, whatever your needs may be. Do not hesitate to contact us.



www.allentownpa.gov

Has this guide been helpful? Please write or email us with your comments and suggestions:

Development Liaison/Permits Specialist
4th Floor, City Hall
435 W. Hamilton Street
Allentown, PA 18101

PermitsAndInspections@allentowncity.org