

Guide to Doing Business in Allentown, PA

A guide to planing your business, understanding the requirements, and preparing to open



Contact Us



With Love Mary

For general assistance, contact:

Business Development

3rd Floor, City Hall

435 W. Hamilton St.

Allentown, PA 18101

(610) 437-7610

business@allentownpa.gov

For Zoning, Licensing, and Permitting Requirements,
contact:

Zoning at (610) 437-7630 or

Building Standards & Safety at (610) 437-7592

For Space, Location Search, Development Assistance,
and Funding Sources, contact:

Business Development at

(610) 437-7610

business@allentownpa.gov

For Events and Ribbon Cutting Ceremonies, contact:

Allentown Chamber of Commerce at

(610) 841-5800

<https://www.lehighvalleychamber.org/>

Additional City Contacts

Bureau of Zoning

(610) 437-7630

4th Floor, City Hall

Bureau of Building

Standards & Safety

(610) 437-7592

4th Floor, City Hall

Bureau of Health

(610) 437-7759

4th Floor, City Hall

Fire Department (Code &

Inspections)

(610) 437-7758

4th Floor, City Hall

Bureau of Engineering

(610) 437-7584

3rd Floor, 641 S. 10th Street

Bureau of Planning (Historic
District, Subdivisions, & Land

Development)

(610) 437-7613

4th Floor, City Hall

Bureau of Revenue & Audit

(610) 437-7503

2nd Floor, City Hall

This document constitutes a summary of Allentown City codes 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 states 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.

Planning Your Business

As you develop your business plan, be sure to address the following concerns, which will form the foundation for every decision you make as you move forward.

- **What You Offer:** Clearly define the service your business will offer. What you do will impact where you locate, what your requirements will be, and, most importantly, how soon you can open.
- **Legal Structure:** How you organize your business (e.g. corporation, partnership, sole proprietorship, limited liability corporation, etc.) has important tax, liability, and accounting implications. Hiring an attorney is strongly suggested.
- **Assets:** What kind of resources do you have at your disposal to get your business started? You may not know now how much it will cost, but you need to know what you can afford and how to pay for each step as it arrives. Hiring an accountant is strongly suggested.
- **Financial Plan:** You will need to set realistic goals for profit based on your projected operational costs and needed funding sources.
- **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.
- **Location:** Investigate and select several sites within the City's limits where you are interested in operating your business. If you are not sure where to start, contact our Business Development Office for assistance. Be certain to have Zoning approval before leasing or purchasing your business location.



Understanding the Requirements

Once you have established a basic business plan, you will need to go through the licensing, permitting, and general approval process with the City of Allentown. While the process may seem complicated, 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.

Zoning and Business License

On the 2nd Floor of City Hall, fill out an In-City Business License application. You must be able to designate a location for your business in order to be approved for a license. The application will be processed by the Bureau of Revenue & Audit, for which a **Business License fee will apply**. In most cases, you will then be required to complete a Zoning Permit Application on the 4th Floor of City Hall. **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 **Zoning Permit Application 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,** Zoning will determine if your business 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 **Zoning Hearing Board fee will apply**.

Additional Resources

- **Business Planning:** Small Business Development Center at Lehigh University: <https://sbdc.lehigh.edu/>
- **Pennsylvania One Stop Shop:** <https://business.pa.gov/>
- **U.S. Small Business Association:** <https://www.sba.gov/>
- **Small Business Mentoring at Lehigh Valley SCORE:** <https://lehighvalley.score.org/>
- **Professional Licensing for Pennsylvania:** <https://www.dos.pa.gov/ProfessionalLicensing/>

Trash and Recycling

All businesses must recycle specific items and provide trash and recycling services at their own expense. Businesses that meet certain criteria **may apply for City curbside trash and recycling collection and pay an annual fee.** Services include trash collection twice a week (five-bag limit per collection night) and recycling once a week (unlimited). **Your other option is to contract with a private licensed trash and recycling hauler and submit a copy of the contract to the Bureau office.** Failure to notify the Bureau with your trash and recycling arrangement is a violation of City ordinance. Should you have any questions, contact the Bureau of Recycling and Solid Waste at (610) 437-8729.

Permits

The following upgrades do not require a permit: paint, wallpaper, tile, carpet, replacing windows in existing window wells (a Certificate of Appropriateness may be necessary in a Historic District: see "Additional Requirements on the next page), installing cabinets or countertops and similar finishing work. If you have any uncertainty, we will help you made 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 detailing the alterations to the City's building code office for review. Be aware that any change of use may still require a building code review even if you do not plan on making any changes! 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 online at dli.state.pa.us. All businesses must submit two (2) copies of their building plans (also refer to "Additional Requirements" on the next page).

After your building plans have been reviewed and approved, you will be contacted to return to the 4th floor of City Hall to pick up your plans. At that time, you will be able to secure/acquire 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 jobsite at all times. Permit fees will apply and vary depending on the scope of the work to be performed.**

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 need to be redone.

Call the Bureau Building Standards and Safety at (610) 437-7592 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.** Make sure your work is complete. Multiple inspections may result in penalties and fines charged.

Minimum Required Building/Alteration Inspections

New Construction

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

New Construction and Alteration

- Rough Framing, Electrical, Plumbing, and/or Mechanical: Before covering
- Firestop: Before covering
- Insulation: Before covering
- Wallboard: Prior to tape and spackle
- 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.



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Additional Requirements

Please review the following additional requirements that may also apply.

Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance

Whether you are building a new structure, making upgrades to an existing one, or changing the use of a structural space, strict accessibility requirements of the federal and state governments may affect the property in which your business will be located and must be addressed accordingly.

Engineering

Any aspect of your business that will affect the public right-of-way (e.g. a protruding sign or awning, planters, or outdoor furniture) will require review and approval from the **Bureau of Engineering**, (610) 437-7584. **Fees will apply.**

Fire

Your design professional is responsible for determining 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 or preparation, childcare, nursing home operation, or massage, you will need approval from the **Bureau of Health**, (610) 437-7759. This will require a separate Health License. Any renovation or construction will require the submission of an extra set of building plans - three (3) total. **Fees will apply.**

Historic District

If your business is located in one of the three Historic Districts of the City, any proposed exterior alterations, including but not limited to windows, signage, and doors, visible from a public right-of-way (street, alley, walkway, etc.) may require a Certificate of Appropriateness. A Certificate of Appropriateness can take at least one month to secure and is required prior to securing building and zoning permits. Please call the **Bureau of Planning**, (610) 437-7613 to discuss your project early on in your design process to avoid delays.

Taxes

As a business owner, you are responsible for filing your taxes in a timely manner. For further information, contact the **Bureau of Revenue and Audit**, (610) 437-7507.

Photos provided by Allentown Economic Development Corporation, Eastern Surfaces, Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation, Lehigh Valley Style, The Morning Call, and Tacos Y Tequila.

Additional Resources

- Pennsylvania Uniform Commercial Code: <http://www.pacodeandbulletin.gov/>
- International Code Council: <https://www.iccsafe.org/>

Partner Contacts

Allentown Economic Development Corporation (AEDC)
(610) 435-8890
<https://allentownedc.com/>

Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC)
(610) 266-6775
<https://lehighvalley.org/>

Community Action Development Corporation Committee of Allentown (CADCA)
(610) 433-5703
<https://cadca.caciv.org/>

Allentown Chamber of Commerce
(610) 841-5800
<https://www.lehighvalleychamber.org/allentownchamber.html>

Lehigh County
(610) 782-3000
<https://www.lehighcounty.org/>

Other Contacts

PPL (Electric)
(800) DIAL-PPL (800-342-5775)
<https://www.pplweb.com/>

UGI (Gas)
(800) 276-2722
<https://www.ugi.com/>

Allentown Parking Authority
(610) 841-9090
<https://www.allentownparking.com/>

Police (Non-Emergency)
(610) 437-7751
<https://www.allentownpa.gov/Police>

Financing

City of Allentown Loan Fund
Citywide loan for equipment, real estate purchases/improvements at low interest rates
(610) 437-7610
<https://www.allentownpa.gov/Work/Capital>

Enterprise Zone Loan
Low-interest loans for business improvements within the Enterprise Zone
(610) 435-8890
<https://allentownedc.com/urban-made/>

Allentown Development Company Loan Fund
For new or existing small businesses pursuing physical and/or equipment upgrade
(610) 435-8890
<https://allentownedc.com/urban-made/>

Pennsylvania Minority Business Development Authority (PMBDA)
Revolving loan fund designed to stimulate the creation, retention, and expansion of minority-owned businesses
(610) 435-8890
<https://allentownedc.com/urban-made/>

Rising Tide Community Loan Fund
Microloans set at terms to assist businesses having difficulty obtaining traditional bank financing
(484) 893-1039
<https://therisingtide.org/>

Retail Mosaic Program
Self-forgiving loan program that supports new retail business growth in Allentown with job creation requirements
(610) 437-7610
<https://www.allentownpa.gov/Work/Capital>

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