



Doing Business in Allentown, PA

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



Welcome

Thank you for considering the City of Allentown when choosing a place to do business. We strive to foster an atmosphere for business growth and development all while meeting the needs of businesses from a government perspective.

In this guide you will find the basics needed to begin a business. Please note that this is not a comprehensive guide and further information can be found by contacting us in the Business Development Office at business@allentownpa.gov. We look forward to seeing your business thrive!



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Planning Your Business



As you develop your business plan, be sure to address the following concerns, which will form the foundation of every decision you make as you move forward. There are several entities that can assist you in developing your business plan.

What You Offer

Clearly define the service your business will offer. What you do will impact the location of your business, what your requirements will be, and 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. *Engaging an attorney is strongly encouraged.*

Assets

What kind of resources do you have at your disposal to get your business started? You may not know how much it will cost, but you will need to know what you can afford and how to pay for each step as it arrives. *Engaging an accountant is strongly encouraged.*

Financial Plan

You will need to set realistic goals for profit based on your projected operational costs and needed funding sources. *Speaking with the Small Business Development Center with Lehigh University is encouraged.*

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

When selecting a location be sure to look into alternative options. If you are not sure where to begin, contact our Business Development Office for assistance. Be certain to have zoning approval before leasing or purchasing your business location.

Understanding Requirements

Establish a business plan

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.

Instructions in this guide may not apply to all situations. Refer to Allentown Business Roadmap for concise checklist located on final page.

Zoning

When considering the location of your business, you will need to determine where the business use is permitted.

- Check the Zoning Map to see if your business type is permitted
- Speak with zoning officer to receive verbal permission and requirements for specific location
 - A zoning application may be required
 - A zoning permit is determined by previous use, intended use, and signage
- Business parking ratio requirements will be determined by the Zoning Department
- Non-conforming zoning circumstances may be appealed to the Zoning Hearing Board at the direction of a Zoning Officer
 - A Zoning Hearing Board fee will apply

Business License

Once approved, apply for a Local Business License.

- A business license application fee will apply.



Additional Requirements

Permits

When determining the need for permits the work needed to complete the space must be evaluated. A **Certificate of Appropriateness may be necessary in Historic Districts.**

The following work **DOES NOT** require permits:

- Painting
- Wallpaper
- Tile
- Carpet
- Cabinet Installation
- Counter Top Installation
- Finishing Work
- Window Replacement

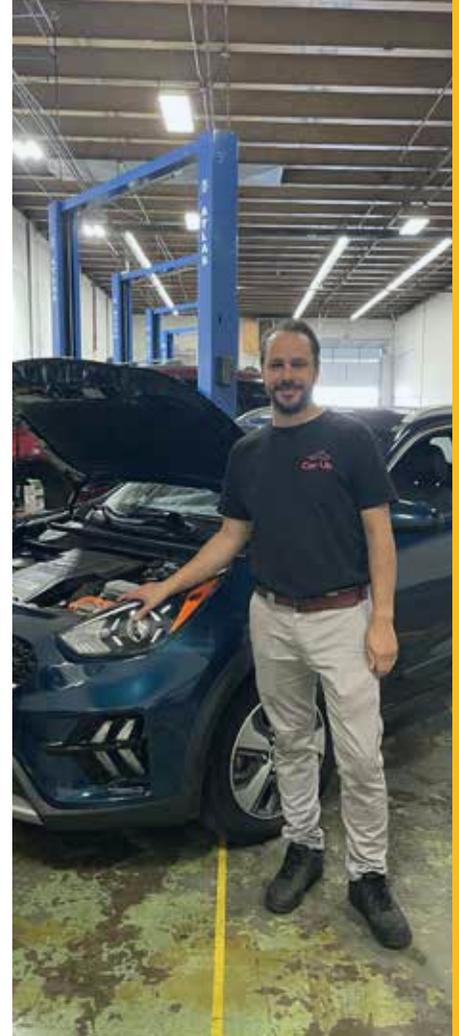
If you have any uncertainty that the work you are doing requires permits, please contact a permit technician in the Building Standards and Safety Department who will answer your questions.

City's building code review is required for:

- Interior alterations
- Exterior alterations
- Additions
- Upgrades
- New Construction

Submitting Building Plans

Plans submitted must be completed by a design professional in accordance with the State Uniform Construction Code. Plans should be submitted along with the appropriate Permit Applications (Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing, building and sprinkler.) Once completed, they can be submitted to Building Standards and Safety for a full review. A Plan Review fee will apply. These plans can be submitted via the Allentown Citizens Self Service Portal, or in person on the 4th Floor of City Hall. Alternatively, you have the option of submitting plans that have been reviewed by a third party agency to the city for ordinance review.



Inspections

Once all work affiliated with each permit is completed and inspected, a final Certificate of Occupancy (CO) inspection is required to certify the space built or modified. You must make sure all work is complete before scheduling the Certificate of Occupancy (CO) Inspection.

Keeping the inspectors informed of any issues or setbacks is key to a timely completion of the project.

All applications can be submitted through the Allentown Citizens Self Service Portal (CSS) OR in person at City Hall located at 435 Hamilton St. Allentown, PA 18102.

Business license & full zoning approval will be issued upon completion of all work.

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. A Trash and Recycling Fee will apply to those who opt into City collection.

Services

Include trash collection twice a week (five bag limit per collection night) and recycling services once a week (unlimited).

Alternatively, you can contract with a private licensed trash and recycling hauler. A copy of the contract MUST BE submitted to the Bureau of Recycling and Solid Waste. Failure to notify the Bureau of Recycling and Solid Waste may result in penalty fees.

Any questions concerning trash and recycling can be directed to the Bureau of Recycling and Solid Waste at (610) 437-8729.



Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance (ADA)

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. All new construction or alterations must follow ADA compliance. Ensure the design professional works in accordance with current ADA standards.

Engineering

Any aspect of your business that will impact 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. Encroachment or Easement fees may apply.

The Bureau of Engineering can be reached at (610) 437-7584.

Fire

Your design professional is responsible for determining if your business location will require any fire protection system 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. This may include suppression systems, sprinkler systems, hood systems, etc.

The Fire Department can be reached at (610) 437-7758.



Health

If your business involves food service or preparation, childcare, nursing home operation, or public access to pools, you will need approval from the Allentown Health Bureau. These will require a separate Health License. Any renovations or construction on these operations will require approval from the Health Bureau. Separate Plan Review fees as well as Health License fees will apply.

Allentown Health Bureau can be reached at (610) 437-7760.

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 the public right-of-way (street, alley, walkway, etc.) may require a Certificate of Appropriateness. A Certificate of Appropriateness can take a minimum of one month to secure and is required prior to securing building and zoning permits. Please call the Bureau of Planning to discuss your project early on in your design to avoid delays.

Bureau of Planning can be reached at (610) 437-7613.

Taxes

As a business owner, you are responsible for filing your taxes in a timely manner. Includes records of yearly earnings, business license renewals, business privilege taxes, etc. If you have any questions regarding taxes please contact the Bureau of Revenue and Audit. Business privilege taxes must be submitted yearly. Failure to submit could result in legal penalties.

Bureau of Revenue and Audit can be reached at (610) 437-7507.



Opening Day

Upon completion of the compliance process, your business license will be released via email through the Citizen Self Service Portal which allows you to open your business and operate in the City of Allentown.

Operating Your Business

With the many moving parts of your everyday business activities, it is crucial to remember to remain in compliance with City of Allentown's licensing and ordinances.

Every year, you will be required to renew your Business License with the department of Revenue and Audit. This is a yearly fee for your business license and can be done online on the Customer Self-Service Portal.

In addition to your renewal, you will be required to report earnings through your gross receipts and pay a yearly Business Privilege Tax.

Finally, if your business requires any additional licenses such as Reoccurring Fire Permits, Health License or Childcare License those must be renewed yearly, and a separate inspection must be conducted to remain in compliance. Please be aware of any other required renewals that may arise in your annual renewal process.



Additional Resources

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

How To Contact Us

General Assistance

Business Development
3rd Floor, City Hall 435 W. Hamilton St.
Allentown, PA 18101
(610) 437-7610 | business@allentownpa.gov

Zoning, Licensing & Permitting Requirements

Zoning
(610) 437-7630
Building Standards & Safety
(610) 437-7592

Events & Ribbon Cutting Ceremonies

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

Space, Location Search, Development Assistance & Funding Sources,

Business Development at
(610) 437-7610 | business@allentownpa.gov

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) 437-7574
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) 437-7506
2nd Floor, City Hall

Partner Contacts

**Allentown Economic
Development
Corporation (AEDC)**

(610) 435-8890

www.allentownedc.com/

**Lehigh Valley Economic
Development
Corporation (LVEDC)**

(610) 266-6775

www.lehighvalley.org/

**Community Action Development
Corporation Committee of
Allentown
(CADCA)**

(610) 433-5703

www.cadca.caclv.org/

Allentown Chamber of Commerce

(610) 841-5800

[www.lehighvalleychamber.org/
allentownchamber.html](http://www.lehighvalleychamber.org/allentownchamber.html)

Lehigh County

(610) 782-3000

www.lehighcounty.org/

Financing Contacts

City of Allentown Loan Fund

Citywide loan for equipment, real estate purchases/improvements at low interest rates

(610) 437-7610

www.allentownpa.gov/Work/Capital

Enterprise Zone Loan

Low-interest loans for business improvements within the Enterprise Zone

(610) 435-8890

www.allentownedc.com/urban-made/

**Allentown Development
Company Loan Fund**

For new or existing small businesses pursuing physical and/or equipment upgrade

(610) 435-8890

www.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

www.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

www.therisingtide.org/

Other Contacts

Allentown Parking Authority

(610) 841-9090

www.allentownparking.com/

Police (Non-Emergency)

(610) 437-7751

www.allentownpa.gov/Police

PPL (Electric)

(800) DIAL-PPL (800-342-5775)

www.pplweb.com/

UGI (Gas)

(800) 276-2722

www.ugi.com/



STEP 1

- Obtain Location**
 - Ensure location is within City Limits (*verify location before payment*)
 - Check County Map for Potential Business Zone - Use GIS Viewer & Click on Address in County Assessment
 - Scroll to Zoning District to verify zoning
- Consult Zoning Department**
 - Obtain all necessary requirements and limitations for location
 - Obtain Zoning Application if Necessary (*Note: Zoning is located on the Floor 4 of City Hall*)

- Commit to Location**

- Obtain Permits & Certificate Occupancy**
 - Consult with Building Department on the 4th Floor or at 610-437-7690 and detail any work being done in the space. (*Note: Any work being done like electrical, plumbing, or framing requires a building permit*)
 - Ensure an application for an Existing Building Certificate of Occupancy is obtained and designation has not changed



STEP 2

- Apply For Business License**
 - Ensure you have LLC, INC, etc. prior to applying for Local Business License
 - This can be done on the 2nd floor or online at <https://css.allentownpa.gov>
- Consult City Departments for Additional Licensure**
 - Consult the Health Department, Fire Department & Recycling Department for additional licensure
 - Health: 610-437-7760 | Fire: 610-437-7765 | Recycling at Bridgeworks on 10th St. (610-437-8729)



STEP 3

- Congratulations, you are ready to open your business!**

(Note: Ensure you remember to pay your annually assessed Business Privilege Tax and ensure you renew your Business License yearly)



www.allentownpa.gov