

How to start a small Business In Chester

This guide provides an overview of things to consider when starting a small business in Chester. We've included the procedures, regulations, and licenses that affect every small business, as well as the additional licensing and training required for businesses that sell or handle food.

Of course, every business is unique and regulations can change, so please consider this pamphlet as a guideline, not a comprehensive resource. It is important that you contact your township offices (listed in this guide) to make sure that you are in compliance with current procedures.

Welcoming Center for new Pennsylvanians

If you are considering opening a small business in Chester or elsewhere in the Philadelphia area, please contact the Welcoming Center.

We can help with:

- Information and referrals to business resources
- Small business seminars
- English language instruction and related customer service training for entrepreneurs
- Technical assistance to business associations with diverse membership
- Conflict resolution training

UNDERSTANDING THE REGULATIONS

All businesses are required to follow regulations, which are government rules. These regulations may differ depending on the type of business that you intend to open. It is important that business owners understand and comply with regulations to protect their customers and their business investments.

For all businesses

Zoning regulations specify what types of businesses can operate in a particular location, and set rules about signs and parking.

Building code regulations require that both the structure and the space within a business property are safe and accessible for customers and employees. Building codes specify how electrical, plumbing, heating, and fire safety systems must be installed and maintained.

For businesses that sell, serve, and/or prepare food (such as groceries, coffee shops, delis, restaurants, caterers)

Food establishments are highly regulated in the United States to prevent sickness.

Food establishment regulations specify how food storage, preparation areas, and equipment should be set up, and how systems like water supply and sanitation should be installed and maintained.

Important Resources

And Phone Numbers

Chester City Building Permits/Licenses & Inspections

Phone: 610-447-7751

Your Primary contact for opening a small business in Chester.

Chester City Finance Department

Phone: 610-477-7981

Chester City Public Health Department

Phone: 610-477-7888

If your business will sell, serve, and/or prepare food, contact the Health Department before investing in your business.

Steps to Take When Starting a Business

Step 1: Planning

Do Background Research

- Identify potential location(s)
- Know the laws
- Estimate cash flow
- Draft a business plan
- Locate sources for equipment and wholesale purchases
- Look into insurance options

Set Up Informal Meetings with Local Township Offices

- Chester L&I Department
- Chester City Public Health Department (if selling or handling food)



Step 2: ZONING APPROVAL

Get Zoning Compliance Review

- Apply for Use & occupancy Certification

Contact

- Chester City L&I Department



Step 3: OTHER APPROVALS AND REGISTRATIONS

Building Code Approval

- Apply for building Permits
- Undergo inspections

Contact

- Chester City L&I Department

Health Code Approval

- (if selling or handling food)
- Apply for Food license
- Undergo inspections

Contact

- Chester City Public Health Department

Business

Registration

- Register for taxes
- Apply for licenses

Contact

- Chester City Finance Department
- Pennsylvania Department of revenue



Get Final Inspections and Approvals

Contact:

- Chester City Building permits L&I Department
- Chester City Fire Department
- Chester City Public Health Department



OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Step 1: Planning your Business

Before You Begin

Think about basic business operations:

- **Identify your potential location(s)**, but do not invest money until you understand the zoning requirements. If your business is not correctly zoned, you will need to spend additional time and money seeking a zoning variance.
- **Know the law.** Federal, state, and local laws regulate business operations, including taxes, employees, and sale of controlled substances, such as alcohol or firearms.
- **Estimate your weekly revenue and expenses.** Get a general sense of how much you will be earning and spending during the first year of operation.
- **Consider creating a business plan.** With a business plan, you may be eligible for loans, grants, and other financing options. See page 12 for a list of organizations that can help you.
- **Find equipment sources** and develop relationships with wholesalers.
- **Look into business insurance options** to protect against damages, crime, or loss of income.

As You Plan

Meet with Chester township staff before you invest money in your business or finalize your plans. Building Permits/ License staff will help you understand the zoning regulations and identify the certificates, permits, and licenses you will need to open your business. If your business will sell or handle food, Public Health Department staff will help you understand food establishment regulations and what you will need to do to obtain your license.

Step 2: Zoning Approval

Getting Started

To operate a business in Chester, you need to get Use and Occupancy certifications showing that you have received zoning approval (Use) and that your business meets building code regulations (occupancy).

To obtain application forms for Use and occupancy certification from the Chester city Licenses & Inspections Department, call 610-447-7751. This will give you useful information in starting a new business or taking over a new business

- General information about licenses, permits, and certificates needed to get Use and occupancy approval
- General tips about what the building code requires for your business property and what will be inspected (such as exits, maintenance, fire protection, plumbing, and electrical, heating, or air conditioning systems)

You can also get the new business packet online at the Chester licenses and inspection Permits page. Visit <http://www.chestercity.com/index.php/forms-and-permits> and scroll through and select down to Permit applications/ business Permits.

Obtaining Zoning Approval

When you apply for Use certification for your business, you identify where your business will be located and what goods or services you will be selling. You also describe physical changes you are planning to make to the property and any signs you plan to add or change. This information is used for the zoning compliance review.

Zoning

In the United States, the government regulates how private property may be used through a system known as zoning. Zoning governs the “use” of property. For example, zoning indicates whether a property can be used as a restaurant, store, daycare, salon, home, or other function. Zoning also regulates the size, spacing, and other characteristics of lots and buildings, as well as signs and parking.

Before you invest in or lease a property or business, check with the Chester City Planning Department to find out if the zoning code allows this property to be used for the type of business you plan to operate — even if the same type of business is operating there now. If you do not get zoning approval early in the process, you may experience problems in the future with opening the specific type of business that you desire in your location. If you do not receive zoning approval, you may need to appear before the zoning board of appeal to seek a zoning variance.

Step 3: Other Approvals and Registrations

Obtaining Building Code Approval – For All Businesses

When you apply for Occupancy certification, you provide a floor plan of your business as well as details about the interior layout, physical systems, fire protection systems, and signs. Chester City Building L&I Department staff use this information to identify what building permits you will need to get and what inspections L&I staff will make.

Building Permits and Inspections

If you are making physical changes to the business property or changing the way the building will be used, you will need to apply for building permits before you begin work. Separate permits are required for work on plumbing, construction of walls or additions, and electrical, heating, or air conditioning systems. You may need to have plans and drawings prepared by an architect or engineer. L&I staff will do inspections as work proceeds. For permit applications or questions, contact the L&I Department by calling 610-734-7613.

Final Approval

Before you open, L&I staff will inspect your new business to make sure that it is compliant with building codes. Your fire protection systems will also need to be certified. Even if you have not made any physical changes, your new business will need to be inspected before you open.

A Note About Building Plans

Be sure to check with Chester City L&I (and the Health Department), if you will be selling or handling food) to find out the type of building plans or drawings needed for the changes you are making to your business space. While big changes will require drawings done by an architect or engineer, some small changes may not require professionally prepared drawings.

Obtaining Health Code Approval – Only for businesses Selling or Handling Food

Businesses that sell, serve, and/or prepare food items are classified as “food establishments” and must be licensed and approved by the Chester City Public Health Department. The Health Department regulates food handling processes and construction or alteration of food establishments to ensure compliance with the township health code. Contact the Health Department by calling 610-734-7640 to identify what you will need to do before opening for business.

The Health Department works closely with the Chester City L&I Department (responsible for building code compliance) during the inspection and approval process.

Be aware that, to ensure food safety, the Health Department regulates many aspects of food establishment activity, such as:

- Equipment design and installation
- Ventilation
- Flooring
- Utility lines
- Ceiling construction
- Beverage systems
- Vermin control
- Lighting
- Water and waste drainage
- Restroom and locker facilities
- Reuse and recyclables

Final Approval

Before you can open, the Health Department must do final inspections and approve your license to operate a food service establishment. Even if you have not made any physical changes, your new business will need to be inspected prior to opening. After you open, the Health Department will continue to do random inspections to ensure compliance with the health code.

Regulation of Food Establishments

Businesses that sell, serve, and/or prepare food are highly regulated in the US to prevent sickness and ensure safety. Businesses such as groceries, convenience stores, mini-marts, delis, restaurants, cafeterias, and caterers must all be licensed and must comply with health code regulations. These regulations can be complex, depending on the types of food you plan to sell and how these foods are packaged, prepared, stored, served, etc. The Chester City Health Department (610-734-7640) can help you understand which regulations apply to your specific business and what you will need to do to be in compliance.

Food Sanitation Manager Certification

Most food establishments are required to have a full-time employee certified as a Certified Food sanitation manager (CFSM). The employee must complete an approved food safety and certification course (typically 16 hours long). The certified employee does not need to be present at your business during all operating hours.

Contact the Upper Darby Public Health Department at 610-734-7640 for more information on the CFSM requirements for your business. They can give you information about approved certification courses offered in English and other languages.

Registering Your Business – For All Businesses

To conduct business in Chester City, you must register your new business with the Chester City Finance Department and get a business Privilege license. This license must be renewed each year. Contact the Finance Department by calling 610-447-7751 for an application.

The Finance Department also can help you understand the local taxes you will need to pay for your business.

You must also register your new business entity and business name with the state of Pennsylvania and get a sales tax license. To get the forms you will need, contact the Pennsylvania Department of revenue by calling 610-619-8018 or 717-787-1064 or go to the Pennsylvania open for business website: www.paopen4business.state.pa.us

If you plan to hire employees, you will need to get an employer identification number (ein) from the U.S. internal revenue service (irs). For an application, call the irs at 800-829-4933 or apply online at www.irs.gov/businesses/small/article/0,,id=102767,00.html

As an employer you will also have tax obligations such as tax withholding and unemployment compensation. To learn more and get the forms you need, contact the Pennsylvania Department of revenue by calling 610-619-8018 or 717-787-1064 or go to: www.paopen4business.state.pa.us

Licenses, Taxes, and Certifications

NOTE: These costs may change in the future.

Building Permit — Fees Vary

Required if you are making changes to the property. Fee is usually based on the cost of the work to be done. Contact the Chester City Building Permits/L&I Department by calling 610-447-7751

Business Privilege/Mercantile Registration and License — \$15

Allows you to do business in Chester City. Must be renewed each year. Contact the Chester City Finance Department by calling 610-447-7751.

Business Privilege/Mercantile Tax — Fees Vary

An Chester City tax on gross business receipts. Get more information about business taxes from the Upper Darby Finance Department by calling 610-447-7751.

Sales Tax License — no Fee

The Pennsylvania sales tax license is required for most retail businesses. For more information, call the Pennsylvania Department of revenue by calling 610-619-8018 or 717-787-1064.

Use and Occupancy Certification – \$100

All businesses must have certificates of Use and occupancy from Chester City township. Contact Chester City L&I by calling 610-447-7751

Food Establishment License (if selling or handling food) — \$30 to \$450 if you sell, serve, and/or prepare food, you are required to get a Food establishment license from the Upper Darby Public Health Department. the type of license you will need depends on the type of food service business you plan to operate. to get a license application, contact the Health Department by calling 610-734-7640.**Food Safety/Sanitation Course Certification**

(if selling or handling food) — \$150 to \$180 plus textbook if you sell, serve, and/or prepare food, you may be required to have a full-time employeewho is a Certified Food sanitation manager (CFSM). By calling the Upper Darby Public Health Department at 610-734-7640, you can get more information on what is required for your business and about certification courses offered in English and other languages.

Other Licenses or Certifications — Fees Vary Depending on the industry or type of business you are opening, you or your employees may need to get other licenses or certification from the state or county. For example, beauty salons and operators are licensed by the state of Pennsylvania.

Fees

Every application for a permit, license, and certification is likely to require you to pay a fee. The fee depends on the type of permit required, the number of inspections needed, and/or the cost of physical changes you are proposing. There are additional fees if you open a food establishment or seek a zoning variance.

Small Business Assistance

These organizations offer free or low-cost services to Philadelphia- area entrepreneurs.

Empowerment Group

Phone: 215-427-9245

A nonprofit organization providing entrepreneurship education, on-the-job training, and business development

Widener Small Business

Development Center

Phone: 610-619-8490

free consulting and training services to help your business start, grow and prosper.

E-Business Institute U.S. Small Business Administration

www.sba.gov/training an online “virtual campus” offering free tutorials, workshops, and educational resources to assist entrepreneurs with business start-up.

Women’s Business Development Center

Phone: 215-790-9232

A nonprofit organization providing financial, management, technical, procurement, and certification assistance.

Women’s Opportunities Resource Center

Phone: 215-564-5500

Nonprofit organization offering training, individual business assistance, and access to business and financial resources.

The Enterprise Center

Phone: 215-895-4000

A nonprofit resource center offering a minority entrepreneurship program.

The Merchants Fund

Phone: 215-399-1339

Loan matching and limited economic assistance for eligible merchants.

SCORE Delaware County

Phone: 215-344-6910

Delaware County chapter of Score, a national nonprofit organization, offering free one-on-one business counseling and seminars for small business owners.

Entrepreneur Works

Phone: 610-499-7528

A non-profit organization focused on growing businesses and jobs in our local communities. Our mission is to cultivate and promote successful entrepreneurs in underserved areas of the Greater Philadelphia region – entrepreneurs who then become economic engines in their own neighborhoods.

In addition to these contacts and organizations, the welcoming Center for new Pennsylvanians is a resource for aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners.

Learn more about how we can help you at CEDA.CC & www.welcomingcenter.org.