



HOW TO OPEN A BUSINESS IN CHARLESTON

1 Find location.

Prior to committing to a property, you are **strongly advised** to confirm that the zoning and physical layout of the building and site comply with City codes for the intended use. This includes understanding applicable restrictions, limitations, and guidelines and any necessary modifications. *If you plan to run your business out of your home, you may only need to complete the **Application for Home Occupation** and return it to the Revenue Collections - Business License office with the fee. Be sure to check that the business is zoned for home occupation first.*

Learn more about resources and processes.

Projects always go smoothest when applicants communicate with the City at the beginning of the process. In the **Permit Center**, representatives from all relevant departments are available to discuss plans and provide guidance on compliance. The **Business Services Division** supports and promotes new businesses in the community by connecting them to city offices and resources. The **Charleston Local Development Corporation** helps entrepreneurs providing small business lending.

3 Submit BLCO application.

The **Business License Certificate of Occupancy** process confirms that the proposed use is permitted in the zoning district and that the structure meets code requirements. A BLCO is required for all businesses and non-profits located within the City. Applications can be obtained online or from the Revenue Collections – Business License Office, which is also where they must be submitted. After submittal, it will be routed to the Zoning, Fire Marshal, and Building Inspections Divisions for review. You may be contacted with questions regarding your application and to schedule inspections.

2 Check zoning.

The City's Zoning Ordinance permits certain types of businesses in specific areas, and all new signage requires Zoning, BAR, or DRB approval and a building permit. Zoning staff will determine whether a location is zoned for your type business and the applicable sign standards. Staff will also decide if a review by the Board of Architectural Review or the Design Review Board is required for any exterior modifications.

If work is needed, include these steps:

Submit plans to building department.

A permit is required to construct, enlarge, alter, repair, move, remove or demolish any building, structure or part thereof. Please note that a business license will not be issued until a **Construction Certificate of Occupancy** is obtained.

Construction.

Complete inspections (including fire marshal).

Move to Step 6.

4 Receive zoning approval.

A floorplan and/or site plan is required for approval for a business of assembly (such as a restaurant) or transient accommodation uses.

5 Complete fire marshal review.

All BLCO applicants are subject to a fire safety inspection. A fire marshal will contact you to schedule the inspection. To facilitate this process, please complete the **fire inspection self-survey** prior to inspection.

6 Complete building department review.

Pay fee & pick up business license.

7

ADDITIONAL APPROVALS

Some businesses may require additional approvals from external agencies.

- Charleston Water Systems (CWS) requires payment of impact fees based on water usage. This requirement often impacts restaurants and beauty salons. Please contact Theresa Gadson at gadsonte@charlestoncpw.com or (843) 727-7134. CWS also requires the installation of a grease trap for all businesses that prepare food. CWS will determine the size needed. Please contact John Pellenz at PellenzJM@charlestoncpw.com or (843) 308-8205.
- Any business serving food requires a SC Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) permit and inspection. Contact the SCDHEC Food Protection Division at (803) 896-0640 or www.scdhec.gov.
- A license from the state of South Carolina is required if you intend to sell or serve alcoholic beverages. Contact the SC Department of Revenue Alcohol Beverage Licensing Division at (803) 898-5864 or www.sctax.org.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Make sure to utilize these contacts throughout the process!

Building Inspections

2 George Street, 1st Floor, Charleston
843-724-7320

Fire Marshal

2 George Street, Suite 3800, Charleston
843-724-3429

Revenue Collections - Business License Office

2 George Street, Suite 1700, Charleston
843-724-3711

Charleston Local Development Corporation

2 George Street, Suite 3600, Charleston
843-973-7298

Permit Center

2 George Street, 1st Floor, Charleston
843-577-5550

Zoning Division

2 George Street, Suite 3100, Charleston
(843) 724-3781

This information is a service of



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**BUSINESS
SERVICES**
YOUR KEY TO THE CITY