

Starting and Growing Your Business in Santa Barbara

Your Guide to City Business Regulations and Services



Santa Barbara is known for its high standards, aesthetics, and environmental leadership. Local businesses play a significant role in ensuring Santa Barbara's uniqueness and quality of life. Each business takes steps to protect the safety of its customers and employees.

This guide covers essential information to help you understand City regulations and services available for your business needs. Together with information and instructional videos on the City's website, you can find answers to frequently asked questions and learn activities that require approval.

Good customer service is a priority to us. We welcome your questions and want to provide you with the resources you need to make informed decisions and spend wisely for your business. We want to be a partner in your success.

Information and videos available at
SantaBarbaraCA.gov/Business



Obtaining a Business License

Business license taxes are an important local revenue source, supporting critical public safety services such as police and fire, and many general community services like libraries, parks, and recreation services.

Who Needs a Business License

- Anyone with a valid State Board of Equalization Seller's Permit with a business address within city limits or conducting business within the City
- Retail and service businesses
- Independent contractors (based on IRS Form 1099)
- Residential property owners with 3 or more rental units
- Commercial property owners with 1 or more units
- Real estate agents
- Sole proprietorships, limited liability companies, partnerships and corporations
- Home-based businesses
- Professionals with a State License, a Santa Barbara address and not working as an employee of an existing business:
 - » Doctors, Attorneys, Engineers, Certified Professional Accountants, Contractors, Architects, Security Services, Massage or Beauty Services
- Non-profit organizations*
- Banks and credit unions*
- Businesses exempt by the State or Federal Government*
- Veterans or Individuals with a Disability*
- Artists with gross sales less than \$5,000*

** Exempt from payment, registration required*

Every business is unique and staff welcomes the opportunity to assist and provide guidance to address your specific questions.

- ✓ The business license tax amount depends on your business type. Most retail and service businesses pay an amount based on gross receipts while other business types pay a flat rate.
- ✓ A business license is required when you open your business location, sell goods and services, or lease property in the City. In your first year, the amount is based on estimated gross receipts.
- ✓ A business license is required for each business location.
- ✓ If you move or close the business, change ownership, the business name, or mailing address, contact the Business License Office.
- ✓ Some business types undergo a separate review process and pay a separate fee, including: taxicabs, massage therapists, security services, tobacco retailers, nightclubs, live entertainment, towing services, vending machine operators, handbill distributors, firearms, pawn shops or secondhand dealers, solicitors or businesses selling door-to-door.
- ✓ To apply for a business license, visit the Business License Office at City Hall, or download the application from the City's website and mail it. Call 564-5346 for assistance.



Business Operations and Safety

- ✓ To establish **utility services** for your business, contact the appropriate provider.
 - Water and sewer service: call City Billing at 564-5343
 - Trash and recycling service: call Marborg at 963-1852
 - Electric service: contact Southern California Edison
 - Gas service: contact Southern California Gas
- ✓ **Fingerprinting and LiveScan services** for employee security are available at the Police Station at 215 E. Figueroa St. for a fee. Call 897-2355 to schedule an appointment.
- ✓ Building **alarm systems** must be registered with the Police Department. Complete a registration form from our website and mail with a check.
- ✓ A **fire and life safety inspection** is required for any business with a physical facility, office, or store every two years, with an inspection fee by business type. **Operational permits** are also needed for filming and special effects, tents and temporary structures, trade shows and exhibits, and performing hazardous work such as welding, open burning, and woodworking. Call 564-5702 to schedule an appointment.
- ✓ To report a **fire, medical emergency, or crime**, call 9-1-1 for immediate assistance.
- ✓ To address **safety concerns related to transients** disturbing or loitering near your business, call 882-8900 to provide information and arrange for a visit from a police officer. The Police Department needs information and cooperation from business owners to prevent business disruption or nuisance behavior.
- ✓ Create a **disaster plan** to ensure your business is prepared for earthquakes, fires, or other emergencies.

Leasing Space From the City

At the airport and waterfront, the City manages properties that can be leased with favorable terms as vacancies are available. Lease information is available on the City's website for:

- ✓ **Airport properties** for office, storage, light industrial, research and development uses, as well as aviation needs; call 692-6022
- ✓ **Waterfront properties** at the Harbor and Stearns Wharf for visitor-serving and ocean-related businesses; call 897-1961



Your Business Location

When You Need City Approval

Certain activities or improvements require a permit or approval from the City in advance of the work. Learning the rules before improving or expanding your building will save you time and money. Approvals are needed for the following:

- Installing any type of sign
- Making exterior building changes or adding mechanical equipment
- Adding space or new floor area to an existing building
- Changing the type of business operating on a property
- Adding chairs or tables to the sidewalk for outdoor dining
- Using the street, sidewalk, beach, park or public property for an event
- Planting, maintaining, or removing trees and vegetation on the sidewalk or public property
- Conducting business that involves dancing or alcohol service

Tips Before You Sign a Lease

Leasing or purchasing a new space is an important first step in securing a location to operate your business. Business owners should carefully research the property, building requirements, and the cost of needed improvements before committing to a lease.

- ✓ **Visit the Planning Counter at 630 Garden Street.** Learn the history of the property, check the building records and archives, and ask questions to become familiar with the planning and permitting process.
- ✓ **Understand the space thoroughly.** Don't assume you're leasing or purchasing a property where everything is permitted and up to current code requirements. Regulations change frequently.
- ✓ **Know where your business can legally operate.** Different business types are allowed to operate in certain areas of the City and need to provide sufficient parking for their employees and customers.
- ✓ **Anticipate basic building improvements.** Upgrades to the building, its mechanical systems, and the site may be needed to comply with building and safety requirements and address aging building needs. Some improvements are expensive. Examples include:
 - ADA accessibility for individuals with a disability
 - Electrical system, HVAC system (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning), and plumbing
 - Roof, doors, and windows
 - Mitigating mold, lead, asbestos, or termite infestations
 - Adequate space for trash enclosure
 - Connections to water, sewer, and other utilities
 - Fire sprinklers, irrigation system, waterwise fixtures, and stormwater drainage
 - Adapting a building to withstand potential flooding in a flood zone or coastal area
- ✓ **Create a plan and budget for building improvements.** You're committed to a property once you sign a lease. Pay close attention to when regular lease payments begin. Having a detailed plan, budget, and timeline that allows for contingencies is critical to limiting unforeseen costs and opening your doors on time and within budget. Anticipate possible delays and additional costs.
- ✓ **Hire local professionals and monitor their work.** Local architects, engineering and planning professionals have the best understanding of City regulations and timelines. They can help you manage tenant improvements and the project planning process. Stay engaged in your project at various stages.
- ✓ **Be flexible and anticipate extensive review of your project.** Some improvements can be approved over the counter. Other improvements need to be reviewed more carefully by building professionals or engineers. Exterior changes are reviewed by design advisory boards comprised of professionals volunteering their time to maintain Santa Barbara's aesthetics.





Business Improvement Districts

Business improvement districts have been established for businesses in the downtown area and lodging establishments. If your business is part of an improvement district, an assessment fee is paid for specific services and benefits for your business. Benefits may include marketing and promotional services or public parking for customers. The district boundaries and assessment methods are available on the City's website.

Doing Business With the City

The City organization purchases supplies and services at the lowest possible cost, consistent with the quality and reliability needed for a variety of municipal needs. Local businesses can take steps to be considered for City purchasing needs.

- ✓ **Register as a vendor** on the City's website to be considered when purchases are made for City supplies and services.
- ✓ **Monitor bid announcements** for construction and public works contracts on the City's website.

Special Requests

Some business needs require an approval or permit for a temporary or ongoing basis.

- ✓ Restaurants can use a portion of the sidewalk for **outdoor dining** by applying for an outdoor dining license so the City can determine how the sidewalk will be shared by the business and general public.
- ✓ **Filming** motion pictures, television shows, or catalogue photos on streets, sidewalks and public property requires logistical coordination and a film permit.
- ✓ If your business is **planning a special event** where either dancing or alcohol is featured, out-of-town vendors will sell products, or traffic or public parking will be impacted, special permits and approvals are needed in advance of the event. Information is available on the City's website to help you get organized.



Community Resources

Library Databases and Information

With your library card, you can access online databases for consumer research, competitive analysis, and marketing plan development. Visit the Central Library Reference Desk at 40 E. Anapamu St.

MAPS Interactive Mapping Tool

Use this Web-based tool on the City's website to create custom maps with properties, streets, zoning, aerial photos, and other geographic information.

Locate Your Business on Google Maps

Resources are available on the City's website to help your business have a presence on Google maps.

Organizations Providing Startup Assistance

- **Small Business Development Center**, free individualized consulting, training, and business loans, Santa Barbara City College, 721 Cliff Dr. SS280D, 892-3643, sbcountysbdc.org
- **Women's Economic Ventures**, business training, consulting, and loans, 333 S. Salinas St., 965-6073, wevonline.org
- **SCORE** (Service Corps of Retired Executives), small business counseling and mentorship, sbSCORE.org
- **Startup SB**, networking, connecting and inspiring entrepreneurs, startupsb.com
- **Mentorship Works**, mentorship resources and networking events, 104 W. Anapamu St., Ste K, mentorshipworks.com

Incubator Spaces

Low-cost work spaces, meeting areas, and general office amenities for entrepreneurs

- **Synergy Business and Technology Center**, 1 N. Calle Cesar Chavez, Ste 102, 452-9542, synergybtc.com
- **Workzones**, 351 Paseo Nuevo, 2nd Floor, 966-3722, workzones.com
- **Impact HUB**, 1117 State St. coming soon, impacthubsantabarbara.com

Business Associations

- **Chamber of the Santa Barbara Region**, 104 W. Anapamu St., Ste. A, 965-3023, sbchamber.org
- **Hispanic Chamber of Commerce**, 1435 San Andres St., 899-2711, sbhcc.org
- **The Greater Santa Barbara Lodging and Restaurant Association**, 881-3385, gsblra.org
- **Visit Santa Barbara**, 500 E. Montecito St., 966-9222, santabarbaraca.com
- **American Institute of Architects**, Santa Barbara Chapter, 229 E. Victoria St., 966-4198, aiasb.com
- **Santa Barbara Contractors Association**, 424 Olive Street, 884-1100, sbcontractors.org
- **805 Connect**, 805connect.com
- **Downtown Organization**, 27-B E. De la Guerra St., 962-2098, downtownsb.org
- **Milpas Community Association**, 636-0475, mcasb.org
- **Coast Village Business Association**, 969-7854, coastvillageroad.com
- **Harbor Merchants Association**, 125 Harbor Way #13, 962-2826
- **Stearns Wharf Merchants Association**, 219-B Stearns Wharf, 963-7253, stearnswharf.org



For more information, call **(805)564-5305**,
or visit **SantaBarbaraCA.gov/Business**

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