Starting a Business in Santa Monica

CITY OF SANTA MONICA
Don’t Worry, it’s not as hard as they say it is!

Follow these simple steps:

• Do your research
• Get your permits
• Open your business!
STEPS FOR OPENING A BUSINESS IN SANTA MONICA
Follow these practical steps to easily and successfully open your business!

**STEP 1: CHECK ZONING**
Before you sign a lease, visit the City's Interactive Zoning Portal: www.smgov.net/opencounter
Or contact the City Planning Division (planning@smgov.net) to verify zoning.

**STEP 2: VERIFY PERMITTED LAND USES**
Once you have determined the zoning of the subject property, verify if the land use is permitted and you meet the parking requirements.

**STEP 3: BUSINESS CLASSIFICATION**
Verify the type of business category you fall into with respect to the type of use (i.e. restaurant, office, and personal services).

**STEP 4: OBTAIN BUSINESS LICENSE**
If the use is permitted and you meet the parking requirements, you will then apply for a business license and the applicable regulatory permits.

**STEP 5: TENANT IMPROVEMENTS?**
Any electrical or plumbing or building renovations will require a building permit through the Building and Safety Division. Any physical alteration to the exterior of the building along with signage will require Architectural Review Board (ARB) review.

**STEP 6: TDM REQUIREMENT**
If you have 50 or more employees, you will need to submit an Employee Transportation Plan to the City’s Transportation Demand Team.

**OPEN!**
Once your business license has been issued, you may open your business.
STEP 1: CHECK ZONING
Before executing a lease for a space, please confirm that the location is zoned as suitable for the business (i.e., land use).

Start by visiting the City's Interactive Zoning Portal: www.smgov.net/opencounter

Or contact the City Planning Division: https://311.santamonica.gov/csp

If you are considering a home office or home-based business from your residence certain criteria must be met for a "Home Occupation" business license.
STEP 2: VERIFY PERMITTED LAND USES

Types of Land Uses
Retail
Restaurant
Offices
Personal Services
Medical Services
Home Occupation
Building Contractors
Sidewalk Vending

Related Information
Building Permits
Business Improvement District
Transportation Demand Management
Buy Local Santa Monica and Green Business Program
STEP 3: LAND USE (BUSINESS) CLASSIFICATION

RETAIL

Retail involves retail sales or rental of merchandise. Examples include retail sales of clothing, footwear, housewares, cosmetics, jewelry, appliances, building materials, and rental of building supplies and equipment, etc.

• For additional information regarding various categories of retail sales, click here.
• Modification to the exterior façade (click here) and new signage (click here) will require Architectural Review Board (ARB) review.
STEP 3: LAND USE (BUSINESS) CLASSIFICATION

RESTAURANT

Includes full and limited service, "quick-serve", take-out, café, bakery, desserts, etc.

- For additional process details, please see Restaurant: Establish New Restaurant
- Seeking an Alcohol License? The business may qualify for an Alcohol Exemption if it meets all the specific AE criteria or it may require a Conditional Use Permit (CUP).
- Modification to the exterior façade (click here) and new signage (click here) will require Architectural Review Board (ARB) review.
- Outdoor Dining Information

*Bars and nightclubs may be subject to additional requirements, please contact the City Planning Division. Restaurants greater than 5,000 SF will need additional processing, contact City Planning. New drive-thru establishments are not permitted.

*Restaurant health inspection is conducted through the Los Angeles County Health Department. Alcohol sales requires issuance of an ABC license by Alcohol Beverage Control (ABC). Please contact these agencies for further details.
STEP 3: LAND USE (BUSINESS) CLASSIFICATION  
OFFICE

Offices of firms, organizations (for-profit and non-profit), and public agencies providing professional, executive, management, administrative or design services providing professional, executive, management, and design services such as accounting, architectural, computer software design, interior design, investment, insurance, and legal offices.

- For additional information regarding various categories of office uses, click here.
- Modification to the exterior façade (click here) and new signage (click here) will require Architectural Review Board (ARB) review.

*Office use is limited to the upper floors. The ground-floor street frontage of buildings on commercial boulevards shall accommodate commercial uses and activities, subject to active use requirements.

*Please refer to “Home Occupation” if you are interested in preparing food to sell at various locations outside of your residence (Home Cottage business).
Personal Services provide recurrently needed services of a personal nature including barber shops and beauty salons, tailors, dry cleaners, self-service laundries, and travel agencies mainly intended for the consumer.

Medical Services provide consultation, diagnosis, therapeutic, preventive, or corrective personal treatment services by doctors, dentists, and mental health care providers.

- For additional information regarding various categories of personal services and medical uses, click here.
- Modification to the exterior façade (click here) and new signage (click here) will require Architectural Review Board (ARB) review.

*The personal services classification also includes massage establishments that are in full compliance with the applicable provisions of Chapter 6.104, Massage Regulations, of the Santa Monica Municipal Code."
Home occupation (a.k.a a home-based business) is intended to allow for home enterprises that are clearly incidental and secondary to the primary residential use of a dwelling unit and compatible with surrounding residential uses.

Examples of a home occupation business include administrative office for consulting business, internet sales, and food cottage business. For further details, please click on the attached link regarding home occupation: [HOME OCCUPATION](#).
STEP 4: OBTAIN A BUSINESS LICENSE

Click the link below to apply for either a Commercial Business License Application or a Home Occupation Application.

1. [Commercial Business License Application](#)

2. [Home Occupation Application](#)

3. Depending on your business activity, you may be required to pay for and obtain regulatory permits. The permits applications are submitted with your business license application. For more information, see [Associated Fees](#).

For fast and easy processing, you may submit using the [Online application](#).
If you are a general contractor or subcontractor doing construction work in the city, you will need to apply for a business license. To obtain a business license, please complete the following steps:

1. Ensure that your California Contractors License is current. This information can be verified by visiting the Department of Consumer Affairs contractor State License Board website which is [HERE](#).

2. Complete the Santa Monica Business License Application For Out of City Location or submit an Online Application.
If you are interested in Sidewalk Vending

A sidewalk vendor is a person who sells food or merchandise from a pushcart, stand, display, pedal-driven cart, wagon, showcase, rack or other nonmotorized conveyance, or from one’s person, upon a public sidewalk or other pedestrian path. To ensure a seamless transition into full and compliant operation, Sidewalk vendors must complete the following steps:

1. Food Vendors Only - Contact the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health-Environmental Health to apply for your Public Health Permit.

2. Contact the California Department of Tax and Fee Administration to apply for your Seller’s Permit.

3. Complete the Santa Monica Sidewalk Vending Application

For more information on the Side Vending Program, click HERE.
Planning on modifying the interior or exterior of a tenant space or building?

A building permit will be required. The plans must be prepared by a licensed architect or engineer (or designer, depending on the proposed improvements) and approved by various divisions/departments before a building permit can be issued. Prior to applying for a building permit, ensure that all land use approvals from the City Planning Division (Conditional Use Permit, Architectural Review Board, etc.) have been obtained.

For more information, including submittal requirements and plan check process times visit the following links:

Plan Review Types and Timelines
Establish a New Restaurant
Commercial TIs
If you have 50 employees, you will need to submit an Employee Transportation Plan to the City's Transportation Demand Team. For more information visit:

https://www.santamonica.gov/GoSaMo
What is a Business Improvement District (BID)? Santa Monica's businesses have organized to establish special assessment districts to raise funds for marketing, supplemental cleansing services, parking and promotions--all factors that help to create more vibrant and viable business districts. Check out the Map of the Business Improvement Districts to see if your business is within a BID.

Business Improvement District Information
Buy Local Santa Monica
Buy Local Santa Monica was created by representatives of the Santa Monica business community and the City of Santa Monica to support local businesses and raise awareness of the community, economic and environmental benefits of choosing local first.
www.buylocalsantamonica.com

Green Business Program
In an effort to recognize and certify the outstanding green businesses in our community and promote their services, the City of Santa Monica, the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce, Sustainable Works and the Santa Monica Convention and Visitors Bureau have teamed up to create the Green Business Certification Program.
www.smgbc.org
At each step in the process, we want customers to know that they can always talk to staff about any questions that they may have about opening their business.

Planning Division
www.smgov.net/Departments/PCD/About-Us/City-Planning/

Building and Safety Division
www.smgov.net/Departments/PCD/About-Us/Building-and-Safety/

Business License Office
www.smgov.net/businesslicense

Transportation Demand Management
www.smgov.net/Departments/PCD/Transportation/Employers/

Economic Development Department
econdev@santamonica.gov | (310) 458-8906

Contact staff from any of these divisions:
311@santamonica.gov