

HOW TO START A SMALL BUSINESS in Norristown



Welcoming
Center *for*
NEW PENNSYLVANIANS

*Connecting immigrants, employers,
and communities*

HOW TO START A SMALL BUSINESS IN NORRISTOWN

Many Philadelphia-area entrepreneurs start out by opening a small business in the suburbs, such as Norristown, PA. Whether you are a newcomer to the area, or locally born and raised, there is a lot you'll need to know before opening your doors.

The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians works with receiving communities and immigrants to promote economic development, and can be a resource in helping you start your business.

This guide provides an overview of things to consider when starting a small business in Norristown. 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 city or county offices (listed in this guide) to make sure that you are in compliance with current procedures.

Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians

The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians is a nonprofit economic development organization that works with work-authorized immigrants and native-born Americans to foster economic vitality in the Philadelphia region. In addition to employment services, legal clinics, and resource referrals, the Welcoming Center provides small business support to local entrepreneurs of all backgrounds.

If you are considering opening a small business in Norristown 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 investment.

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, mobile food vendors)

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

Norristown Office of Business Development

266 East Main St., Suite 3
Norristown, PA 19401
Phone: 484-614-0393

Norristown's Business Development Coordinator can help you locate space and assist you with zoning and building code requirements.

Norristown Planning Department

Norristown Building Code Enforcement Department

Norristown Municipal Building
235 East Airy St.
Norristown, PA 19401

Phone: 610-270-0450 (Planning) / 610-270-0441 (Building)
www.norristown.org (click on Government Departments)

The Planning Department can help you understand zoning regulations. The Building Code Enforcement Department can give you information on the certificates, permits, and licenses you need to open your business.

Montgomery County Health Department

1430 DeKalb St.
Norristown, PA 19404
Phone: 610-278-5117
www.health.montcopa.org

If your business will sell, serve, and/or prepare food, contact the Health Department's Plan Review Coordinator for Norristown before investing in your business.

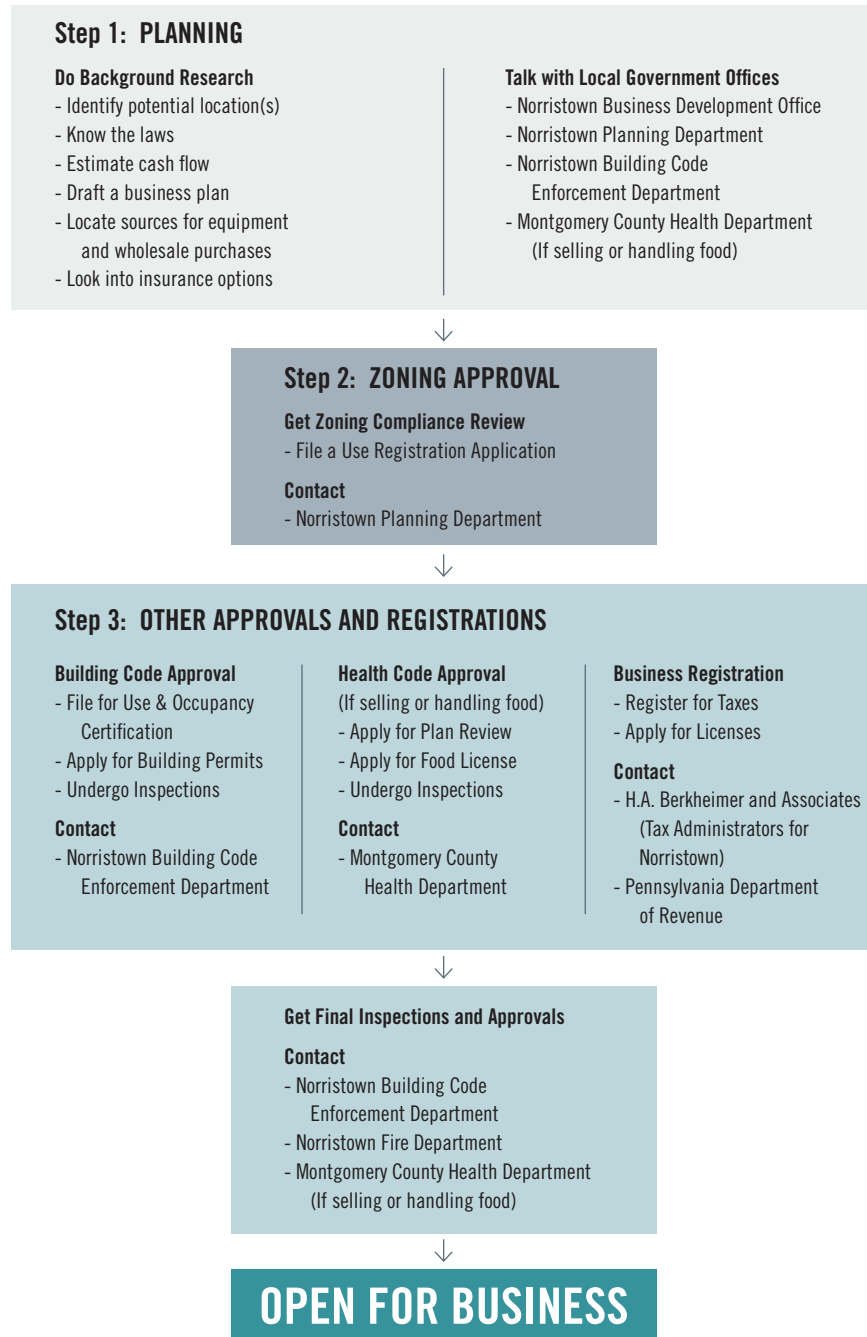
H.A. Berkheimer and Associates

Tax Administrators for Norristown

63 W. 4th St.
Bridgeport, PA 19405
Phone: 610-279-7500 or 800-360-7214

H.A. Berkheimer and Associates can help you register your Norristown business.

Steps to Take When Starting a 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 pages 11–12 for a list of organizations that may be of assistance.
- **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

Talk with the Norristown Business Development Office, Planning Department, Building Code Enforcement Department, and the Montgomery County Health Department (if your business will sell or handle food) before you invest money in your business or finalize your plans. They can help you understand zoning regulations and what you will need to do to bring the business property into compliance with regulations and to obtain your licenses.

Important: Confirm the Norristown Location

Sometimes the city named in the mailing address of a property is not the same as the township or municipality where the business is physically located. Check with the Norristown Planning Department by calling 610-270-0450 to confirm that your new business is actually located within the boundaries of Norristown and Montgomery County. This is important because the township and county where your business is located set the rules you will need to follow to set up your business legally.

STEP 2: ZONING APPROVAL

Obtaining Zoning Approval

Get a Use Registration form and file it with the Norristown Planning Department. On this form, 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. This information is used for the zoning review for your business.

To obtain this form, call the Planning Department at 610-270-0450 or download it from the Norristown website: www.norristown.org. Click on Government Departments, Norristown Planning/Municipal Development, and then scroll down to Zoning.

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 Norristown 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

To operate a business in Norristown, you need to apply for a Use and Occupancy Permit and show that the property where your business will be located meets building code regulations. This permit is required for every new business even if you do not plan to make any physical changes to the property. To get an application, call the Building Code Enforcement Department at 610-270-0441.

If you plan to sell or handle food, you must contact the Montgomery County Health Department at the same time you are contacting the Building Code Enforcement Department (see page 8).

Building Permits and Inspections

If you are making physical changes to the business property, you will need to apply for building permits before you begin work. Based on your Use and Occupancy application, the Norristown Building Code Enforcement Department will identify the permits you need. Separate permits are required for work on plumbing, construction of walls or additions, electrical, heating, or air conditioning systems. You may need to have plans and drawings prepared by an architect or engineer. You also may need to get a permit for adding or changing a sign or for trash dumpsters for your business. Building Code Enforcement staff will do inspections as work proceeds. Get permit applications from the Building Code Enforcement Department by calling 610-270-0441.

Final Approval

Before you open, Building Code Enforcement staff will inspect your new business to ensure compliance with building codes. The Norristown Fire Department will also inspect your fire protection systems. Even if you have not made physical changes, your new business must be inspected before you open.

A Note About Building Plans

Be sure to check with the Norristown Building Code Enforcement Department (and the Montgomery County Health Department, if 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, 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 Montgomery County Health Department before opening. Contact the Health Department’s Environmental Field Services office by calling 610-278-5117 to identify what you will need to do to comply with the health code and obtain your license. The Health Department requires that you have a plan review before doing any remodeling or construction.

Plan Review and Inspections

The first step is to file an application for a Food Establishment Plan Review. Call the Health Department at 610-278-5117 and ask for the Plan Review Coordinator for Norristown to get an application form and for help with the plan review process. You can also get the plan review packet online. Go to www.health.montcopa.org, click on Permitting and Licensing, then on Eating and Drinking Establishments. 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 before opening. After you open, the Health Department will continue to do random inspections to ensure compliance with the health code.

Food Sanitation Manager Certification

Most food establishments are required to have a full-time employee certified by the Health Department as a Certified Food Sanitation Manager (CFSM). The employee must complete a county-approved food safety course (typically 16 hours long), or pass a proficiency exam. County certification is required. The certified employee does not need to be present at your business during all operating hours.

To get the Health Department’s list of approved courses offered in English and other languages, call 610-278-5117 or go to www.health.montcopa.org (click on Permits and Licensing, then click on Certified Food Sanitation Manager).

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, caterers, and mobile food vendors must all be licensed and 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 Plan Review Coordinator for Norristown at the Montgomery County Health Department (610-278-5117) can help you understand which regulations apply to your specific business and what you will need to do to be in compliance.

Registering Your Business – For All Businesses

To do business in Norristown, you must register your new business and get a license, which must be renewed each year. Norristown also requires payment of an annual Business Privilege Tax. H.A. Berkheimer and Associates handles business registration, licenses, and tax payments for Norristown. For an application to register your business in Norristown, contact H.A. Berkheimer and Associates by calling 610-279-7500 or 800-360-7214.

You must also register your new business entity and business name with the State of Pennsylvania and obtain a sales tax license. To get application forms, contact the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue by calling 610-270-1780 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 610-270-1780 or 717-787-1064 or go to: www.paopen4business.state.pa.us

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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 based on the estimated cost of the work to be done. Contact the Norristown Building Code Department by calling 610-270-0441.

Business Privilege Registration and License — \$65

Allows you to do business in Norristown. Must be renewed each year. Contact H.A. Berkheimer and Associates by calling 610-279-7500 or 800-360-7214.

Business Privilege Tax — Fees Vary

A Norristown tax on gross business receipts. Get more information from H.A. Berkheimer and Associates by calling 610-279-7500 or 800-360-7214.

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 at 610-270-1780 or 717-787-1064.

Use Registration — \$20

All businesses must register property use with the Norristown Planning Department for zoning purposes. Contact the department by calling 610-270-0450.

Use and Occupancy Certification — \$110 to \$500

All businesses must apply for certificates of Use and Occupancy from the Norristown Building Code Department. Contact them by calling 610-270-0441.

Food Establishment License (If selling or handling food) — \$94 to \$600+

If you sell, serve, and/or prepare food, you are required to get a Food Establishment License from the Montgomery County 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's Environmental Field Services Office by calling 610-278-5117. You can also get the license application at the Health Department website: www.health.montcopa.org (click on Permitting and Licensing, then on Operating an Eating and Drinking Establishment, then scroll down to Download License Application).

Food Safety/Sanitation Course Certification

(If selling or handling food) — \$150 to \$180 plus textbook
Depending on the type of food service business you operate, you may be required to have a full-time employee who is a Certified Food Sanitation Manager (CFSM). Contact the Montgomery County Health Department's Environmental Field Services office by calling 610-278-5117.

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 certifications 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

Norristown has an office devoted to helping small businesses in Norristown. This is a partnership between Norristown and Widener University.

Norristown Small Business Assistance Center

208 Dekalb St., Suite 301
Norristown, PA 19401
Phone: 610-277-4455

See next page for more listings.

Small Business Assistance (continued)

Other organizations that offer free or low-cost services to Philadelphia-area entrepreneurs include:

ASSETS Montco

Phone: 610-275-3520

A nonprofit service based in Norristown offering self-employment training and support.

CADCOM (Montgomery County Community Action Development Commission)

Phone: 610-277-6363

CADCOM's Microenterprise Resource Center offers business start-up information and training for aspiring business owners.

Empowerment Group

Phone: 215-427-9245

Nonprofit organization providing entrepreneurship education, on-the-job training, and business development.

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.

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.

Philadelphia Development Partnership

Phone: 215-545-3100

Nonprofit organization providing training and technical assistance, small loans, and a network of peers, service providers, and consultants.

SCORE

Phone: 215-885-3027

A Montgomery County chapter of SCORE, a national nonprofit organization — offering free one-on-one business counseling and seminars for small business entrepreneurs.

Temple University Small Business Development Center

Phone: 215-204-7282

Low-cost or free consulting and training services to help plan and grow your business.

Wharton Small Business Development Center

Phone: 215-898-4861

Low-cost or free consulting and training services to help plan and grow your business.

Women's Business Development Center

Phone: 215-790-9232

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.

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 www.welcomingcenter.org

The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians is a nonprofit organization that works to promote immigrant participation in the region's economic, political, and social life. These individuals enhance the productivity, profitability, and stability of the region's businesses and contribute to the state's overall economic growth. Our work recognizes that immigrant integration is a two-way process that must include the receiving community of native-born Americans.

MAIN OFFICE

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1617 John F. Kennedy Boulevard
13th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19103
phone 215-557-2626
fax 215-557-2825

DELAWARE COUNTY OFFICE

7000 Walnut St.
Upper Darby, PA 19082
phone 610-734-7715 or 215-557-2841
fax 215-557-2825

www.welcomingcenter.org

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