



## **Starting a Restaurant or Bar – Licenses & Permits**

*When starting a restaurant, it is important to obtain all of the required permits and licenses. Without the proper licenses in place, businesses may face delays, fines and penalties, or even have the restaurant shut down. Below are some of the licenses and permits required before starting a restaurant business, and sources for additional information.*

**Business License** – A Business Certificate of Use is required for all restaurants, bars, drugstores, food stores (less than 20,000 sf) and smoking establishments. The cost is \$500, renewable every two years. Application involves background check by the SPD, and inspections by the Fire Prevention Bureau, Code Enforcement, and Zoning.

- Link to application: [Certificate of Use Business License Application](#)

Central Permit Office  
201 E Washington St, Room 101  
Syracuse NY 13202  
315-448-8474 or email: [BusinessLicense@SyrGov.net](mailto:BusinessLicense@SyrGov.net)

**Zoning** – In most parts of the city, opening a restaurant requires a Special Permit, which must be approved by the Planning Commission and the Common Council. These reviews are required to protect the surrounding area from adverse consequences of development.

- Contact the Zoning Office or consult the [Zoning Atlas](#) to determine the zoning designation for the property:
  - *Downtown* – A Special Permit is NOT required in these downtown zoning districts: CBD-R, CBD-GS, CBD-HDR, CBD- OS, CBD-SB, CBD-OSR, CBD-SB
  - *Armory Square* – A Special Permit IS required for restaurants in the CBD-GSA district.
  - *Lakefront* – Restaurants are allowed in the Lakefront zoning districts (T4, T5, T5-1, T5-2), but are subject to Site Plan Review (not a Special Permit).
  - Most properties in *all other zoning districts* (those not listed above) require a Special Permit.
- Links to Zoning Applications and Guides:
  - [Special Permit Application](#) and [Guide](#)
  - [Project Site Review & Site Plan Review Application](#) and [Guide](#)
- Entertainment – the Special Permit application will include a review of stages, dance floors, disc jockey booths, and other areas designated primarily for entertainment. Also see **Entertainment License**.
- Outdoor seating areas should be shown on plans submitted with Special Permit application. Also see **Sidewalk Café Permit**.
- Signs – Zoning approval of restaurant signs is included with the Special Permit application, or other zoning review as applicable. Also see **Sign Permit**.

Zoning Office  
201 E Washington St, Room 211  
Syracuse NY 13202  
315-448-8640 or [Zoning@SOCPA.net](mailto:Zoning@SOCPA.net)

## **Starting a Restaurant – Licenses & Permits (continued)**

**Building Permit** – Permits are required prior to performing the work items below. This is not an exhaustive list – please contact the Code Enforcement staff in the Central Permit Office for more information about building permits.

- structural work
- add, remove, or relocate interior or exterior walls
- add, remove or change the wall opening for windows and doors
- exterior projects such as decks, fences, ramps, roof replacement, paving, retaining walls, etc.
- electrical work – must be done by an electrician licensed by the City of Syracuse
- HVAC – must be done by a mechanical contractor licensed by the City of Syracuse
- Plumbing – see **Plumbing Permit**
- Signs – see **Sign Permit**
- Examples of projects requiring a permit: [Before You Build](#)

Central Permit Office  
201 E Washington St, Room 101  
Syracuse NY 13202  
315-448-8600 or [DOCEPermits@SyrGov.net](mailto:DOCEPermits@SyrGov.net)

**Change of Occupancy** – If the space was used previously for anything other than a bar or restaurant, even another public use, a NYS licensed architect must do a code review for a Change of Occupancy. This code review, required by NYS law, will be reviewed by the Code Enforcement staff in the Central Permit Office to ensure the building is safe for all occupants.

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201 E Washington St, Room 101  
Syracuse NY 13202  
315-448-8600 or [DOCEPermits@SyrGov.net](mailto:DOCEPermits@SyrGov.net)

**Sign Permit** – Sign permits are applied for at the Central Permit Office, and require approval by both the Zoning Office and the Code Enforcement staff in the Central Permit Office. A sign permit can be applied for separately when no other Zoning review is required.

- [Zoning Ordinance Part C](#), Section VI, Article 14 addresses sign regulations for Special Permit restaurants, including limits on how many signs are allowed, and limits on their size, type, and other factors.
- Step-by-Step guide to sign permits: [How to Apply for a Sign Permit](#)
- For rented locations, check with the landlord, who may have certain requirements that tenants must follow.

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201 E Washington St, Room 101  
Syracuse NY 13202  
315-448-8600 or [DOCEPermits@SyrGov.net](mailto:DOCEPermits@SyrGov.net)

**Plumbing Permit** – The Onondaga County Plumbing Control office issues plumbing permits and conducts plumbing inspections.

[Onondaga County Department of Water Environment Protection](#)

## Starting a Restaurant – Licenses & Permits (continued)

Plumbing Control  
7120 Henry Clay Blvd  
Liverpool NY 13090  
315-435-5425

**Sidewalk Café Permit** – If you plan to have outdoor seating in the public Right-of-Way (ROW) you need a Sidewalk Café Permit, issued by the Department of Public Works at the Central Permit Office.

- For an application, instructions, sample plans, rules & regulations, and fee information, please visit the Public Works section of the “Documents & Forms” page on the city’s website: [Documents and Forms](#)

Central Permit Office  
201 E Washington St, Room 101  
Syracuse NY 13202  
315-448-4715 or [CentralPermitOffice@SyrGov.net](mailto:CentralPermitOffice@SyrGov.net)

**Entertainment License** – Restaurants and bars offering bands, DJs, dance floors, etc., must apply for an annual entertainment license, the Dance/Floor Show/Entertainment license. The fee schedule is listed on the application. Application involves background check by the SPD, and inspections by the Fire Prevention Bureau, Code Enforcement, and Zoning.

- Link to application: [Dance / Floor Show / Entertainment License Application](#)

Central Permit Office  
201 E Washington St, Room 101  
Syracuse NY 13202  
315-448-8474 or email: [BusinessLicense@SyrGov.net](mailto:BusinessLicense@SyrGov.net)

**Amusement Device License** – Restaurants and bars offering jukeboxes, video games, pinball machines, electronic bowling, and other games must display Amusement Device license certificates, which are applied for by the owner of the devices. Bar and restaurant owners who own their own devices must also apply for the Amusement Device Operator License, which has an annual fee of \$100.

- Link to application: [Amusement Device Operator License Application](#)

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201 E Washington St, Room 101  
Syracuse NY 13202  
315-448-8474 or email: [BusinessLicense@SyrGov.net](mailto:BusinessLicense@SyrGov.net)

**Health Department Permit** – This permit is issued by the Onondaga County Health Department. Before issuing a permit, the health department will inspect the restaurant for things like food storage, food preparation, cleanliness, and proper installment of equipment. Periodic inspections will continue as long as the restaurant is open.

[Community Environmental Health](#)  
John H. Mulroy Civic Center, 12<sup>th</sup> floor  
421 Montgomery St  
Syracuse NY 13202  
315-435-6617

## **Starting a Restaurant – Licenses & Permits (continued)**

**Liquor License** – The NYS Liquor Authority, Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control, issues liquor licenses. Retailers are those licensees who can purchase, stock and sell alcoholic beverages for consumption on or off-premises. Additional information is available online:

[NYS Liquor Authority](#)

[NYS Liquor Authority - Contact Directory](#)

[NYS Liquor Authority - Handbook for Retail Licenses](#)