



# Guide to Opening Your Business in Washington, PA



**City of  
Washington, PA**



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# Step-by-Step Guide

The steps provided should be completed in the order suggested. Submitting forms out of order may result in delays.

- 1) Submit Zoning Permit
- 2) Proof of Fire Alarm
- 3) Business Privilege Tax License
- 4) Mercantile Tax License
- 5) Structural Changes
- 6) Dumpster/Storage Unit Permit
- 7) Sign Permit
- 8) Food Based Businesses
- 9) Occupancy Permit
- 10) Transient Merchant License *(If Applicable)*



# Cost Breakdown

## Common Costs

Item	Initial Cost	Yearly Fee Thereafter
Zoning Permit	\$75	
Proof of Alarm	\$150 / location	\$75 / location
Business Privilege Tax License	\$75.00	\$50.00
Mercantile Tax License	\$50.00 (Retail or Broker) \$60.00 (Wholesale) \$110.00 (Both Retail and Wholesale)	\$35.00 (Retail or Broker) \$60.00 (Wholesale) \$95.00 (Both Retail and Wholesale)
Sign Permit	\$5% of the total cost of the sign including installation	
Commercial Occupancy Permit	\$100.00	



# Step 1) Zoning Permit

## Summary

Before you start using a property or building anything new, like a house, a sign, or even making changes to an existing structure, you need to get permission from the city called a "zoning permit" or "zoning letter" You must have this permit first before a building permit will be issued for you to start construction. This includes things like fences, swimming pools, out buildings (sheds), driveways, etc. It also is necessary for opening a business to determine if it is permitted in an area and requirements for things like parking area.

A zoning permit is the first step in the process for structure placement or development of a commercial space.

[Read more about Zoning Permits](#)

[Zoning Map](#)

## Cost

\$75

[Zoning Permit Application](#)

Please fill out the form and submit in-person at  
55 West Maiden St., Washington, PA 15301

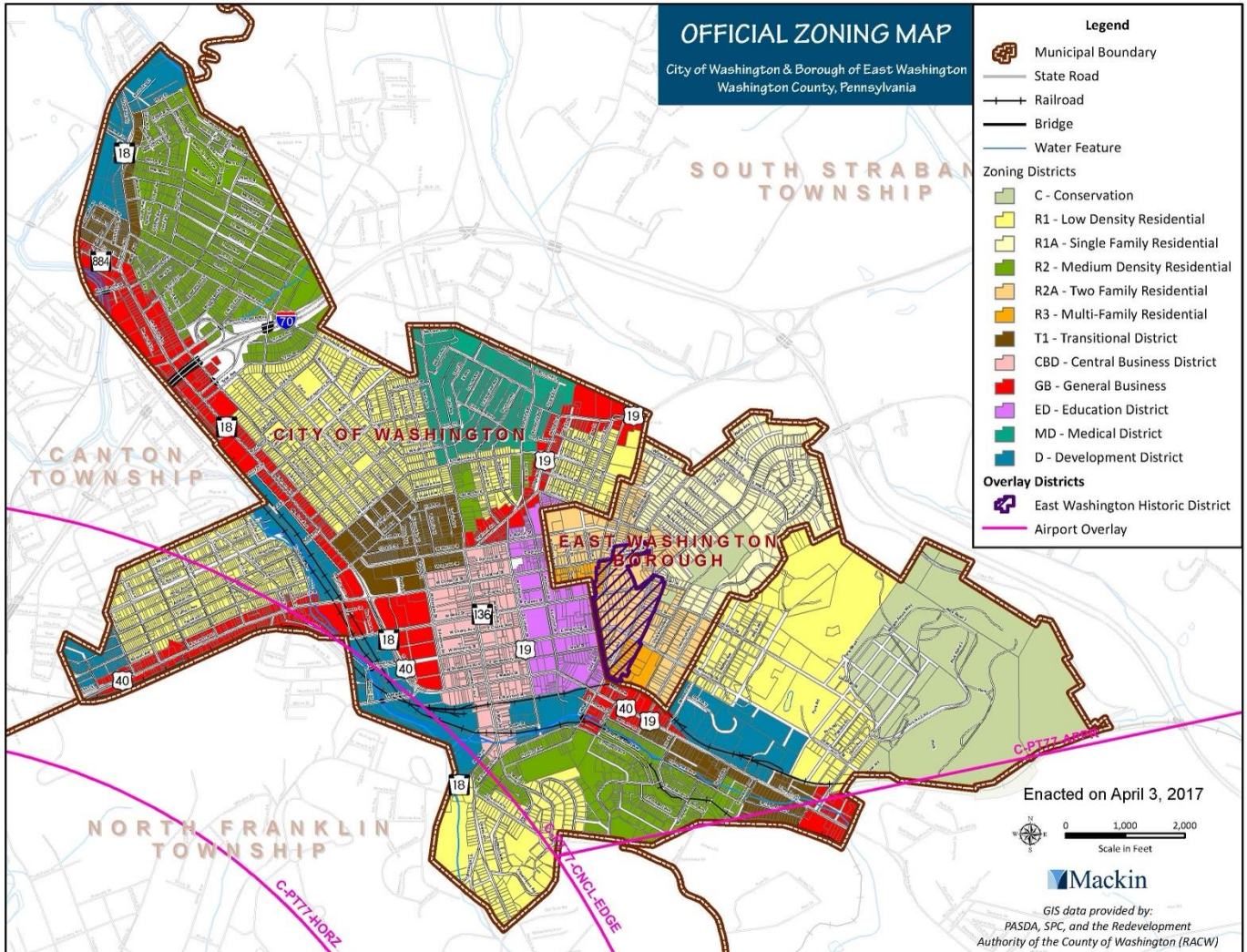
*Still have questions about Zoning?*

Email [jdonatelli@washingtonpa.us](mailto:jdonatelli@washingtonpa.us) or Call 724-225-2785

*Once you have submitted this form, move to the next step.*



# Step 1) Zoning Permit (Map)



Still have questions about Zoning?

Email [jdonatelli@washingtonpa.us](mailto:jdonatelli@washingtonpa.us) or Call 724-225-2785

Once you have submitted this form, move to the next step.



# Step 2) Proof of Alarm

## Summary

To ensure public safety, all non-residential occupancies must maintain a monitored indirect fire alarm system that meets the standards of Underwriters' Laboratories and/or the National Fire Protection Association. All businesses are required to have a fire alarm system that meets the standard set forth in the linked code below. There have been significant changes to the code to allow new fire alarm systems.

## Cost

\$150 / location (initial inspection)

\$75 annually

## [Fire Alarm Application](#)

Please fill out the form and submit along with payment in-person at 55 West Maiden St., Washington, PA 15301

*Still have questions about Fire Alarms?*

*Call 724-223-4227*

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*Once you have submitted this form, move to the next step.*

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# Step 3) Business Privilege Tax License

## Summary

Every person doing business in the City of Washington has to pay a yearly tax based on their gross annual earnings. The tax rate is four mills for every dollar of their total earnings. However, if part of their business is already taxed under the mercantile tax, they won't have to pay this additional tax on that part.

Applications need to be submitted by February 28st each year or before they start their business that year.

The tax rate for the City is four mills (.004) and the City also collects the School District rate of 1.5 mills (.0015) for every dollar of their total earnings.

## Cost

Initial Fee: \$75.00

Yearly Fee Thereafter: \$50.00

*Fees listed in ordinance are subject to change*

[Read more about Business Privilege](#)

## [Business Privilege Tax Application](#)

Please fill out the form and submit in-person or by U.S. Mail at  
55 West Maiden St., Washington, PA 15301

*Still have questions about the Business Privilege Tax?*

**Call 724-223-4218**

*Once you have submitted this form, move to the next step.*



# Step 3) Business Privilege Tax License

(continued)

## **Abatement**

New businesses opening in the City of Washington within **the boundaries of the Central Business District Authority** may be eligible for a reduction in Business Privilege taxes. A "new business" is any company or subsidiary starting a trade, business, profession, or any other kind of activity within the city that has never paid this tax before. Here's how the tax reduction works:

- Year 1: You don't have to pay any Business Privilege tax.
- Year 2: You only pay 25% of the usual Business Privilege tax.
- Year 3: You only pay 50% of the usual Business Privilege tax.
- Year 4: You only pay 75% of the usual Business Privilege tax.
- Year 5+: You pay 100% of the usual Business Privilege tax

[Read more about Business Privilege Abatement](#)

Applications for Business Privilege Abatement must be submitted within 90 days of receiving your Occupancy Permit.

***\*\*Business Privilege Abatement is subject to City Council Approval\*\****

*Still have questions about the Business Privilege Tax?*

**Call 724-223-4218**

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*Once you have submitted this form, move to the next step.*

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# Step 4) Mercantile Tax License

## Summary

Any person wanting to sell goods (wholesale or retail), run a restaurant, operate place of amusement, or work as a broker in the City must obtain a license. The rate of tax for retail is 1.5% (.0015) and 1% (.001) for wholesale. They need to do this by February 28th each year or before they start their business that year. You must submit a separate license for each location they operate in the city. This license must be displayed where people can see it in the business.

### [Mercantile Tax Definitions](#)

### [Read more about the Mercantile Tax License](#)

## New Business Cost

Retail or Broker: \$50.00

Wholesale: \$60.00

Both Retail and Wholesale: \$110.00

*Fees listed in ordinance are subject to change*

## Renewals

Retail or Broker: \$35.00

Wholesale: \$60.00

Both Retail and Wholesale: \$95.00

## [Mercantile Tax Application](#)

Please fill out the form and submit in-person or by U.S. Mail at  
55 West Maiden St., Washington, PA 15301

*Still have questions about the Mercantile Tax License?*

**Call 724-223-4218**

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*Once you have submitted this form, move to the next step.*

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# Step 4) Mercantile Tax License

*(definitions)*

## **Broker**

Any merchandise broker, factor or commission merchant, but shall not include any stockbroker, bill broker, note broker, exchange broker, real estate broker or agent.

## **Place of Amusement**

Any place indoors or outdoors where the general public or a limited or selected number thereof may, upon payment of an established price, attend or engage in any amusement, entertainment, exhibition, contest, recreation, including among other places, theaters, opera houses, motion-picture houses, amusement parks, stadia, arenas, baseball or football parks or fields, skating rinks, circus or carnival tents or grounds, fairgrounds, bowling alleys, billiard or pool rooms, shuffleboard rooms, nine- or ten-pin alleys, riding academies, golf courses, bathing and swimming places, dance halls, tennis courts, archery, rifle or shotgun ranges and other like places. The term, for the purpose of this article, does not include any exhibition, amusement, performance or contest conducted by a nonprofit corporation or association organized for religious, charitable or educational purposes.

## **Retail Dealer or Retail Vendor**

Any person who is a dealer in or vendor of goods, wares and merchandise who is not a wholesale dealer or vendor.

## **Wholesale Dealer**

Any person who sells to dealers in, or vendors of, goods, wares and merchandise and to no other persons.

## **[Back to Mercantile Tax Details](#)**

*Still have questions about the Mercantile Tax License?*

**Call 724-223-4218**

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*Once you have submitted this form, move to the next step.*

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# Step 4) Structural Changes

## Summary

Building Permits are required for any Structural Changes to be made to a building.

Structural Changes include but are not limited to:

- Additions to existing structures
- Alterations and renovations to existing structures
- Installation or alteration of plumbing, heating, or electrical systems
- Any work to an existing roof
- Changes of means of egress

[Read more about Building Permits](#)

*If the construction will require a dumpster/storage unit, you must submit a [Construction Dumpster/Storage Unit Permit](#)*

[Building Permit Application](#)

*Still have questions about Building Permits?*

Email [jdonatelli@washingtonpa.us](mailto:jdonatelli@washingtonpa.us) or Call 724-225-2785

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*More information about Structural Changes on the next page*

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# Step 5) Sign Permit

## Summary

Any person or entity displaying any signage is required to submit a Sign Permit Application.

[General Sign Regulations](#)

[Read more about Sign Regulations](#)

## Cost

5% of the total cost of the sign including installation

## [Sign Permit Application](#)

Please fill out the form and submit in-person at  
55 West Maiden St., Washington, PA 15301

*Still have questions about Sign Permits?*

Email [jdonatelli@washingtonpa.us](mailto:jdonatelli@washingtonpa.us) or Call 724-225-2785

*Once you have submitted this form, move to the next step.*



# Food Based Businesses

Food Based businesses require several additional steps. We are working on a guide specifically for Food Based Businesses. Until that is complete, the links below will provide insight into your next steps.

Most food-based regulations are not handled by the City of Washington.

[How to Start a Restaurant \(ToastTab Guide\)](#)

*\*This is not an endorsement of the ToastTab service.\**

[PA Department of Agricultural](#)

*Questions about Food Based Businesses?*

Email [jpopielarc@pa.gov](mailto:jpopielarc@pa.gov) or Call 717-319-8475

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# Step 6) Commercial Occupancy Permit Summary

This permit is the final step in opening your business. This can only be completed once all previous steps have been completed.

Once your application is received, we will be in touch to schedule an Inspection of your facility.

Cost  
\$100

## [Application for Commercial Occupancy](#)

Please fill out the form and submit in-person at  
55 West Maiden St., Washington, PA 15301

*Still have questions about Commercial Occupancy Permits?*

Email [mcservices111@gmail.com](mailto:mcservices111@gmail.com) or Call 724-263-0377

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*Once you have submitted this form, move to the next step.*



# Transient Merchant Permit *(if applicable)*

## Summary

This is for anyone or any company who wants to do short-term or temporary business in this city. This could be in one fixed location or moving around the city. It allows them to sell things like products, food, or drinks. This includes people who rent or use buildings, vehicles, or land temporarily to showcase and sell their goods

[Read more about Transient Merchant Permits](#)

## Cost

\$75.00 / month or \$400.00 / year

## Transient Merchant Application

Please fill out the form and submit in-person at  
55 West Maiden St., Washington, PA 15301

*Still have questions about the Transient Merchant Permit?*

Call 724-223-4200 Option 1 ext 6

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*Once you have submitted this form, move to the next step.*

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# Amusement Device License *(if applicable)*

## Summary

If anyone wants to have jukeboxes or other amusement devices for public use, like arcade games or electronic games, they need a license from the City of Washington. They have to apply for this license with the City Clerk and pay a fee. The City Clerk will provide the necessary form for the application.

[Read more about Amusement Device License](#)

## Annual Cost

Jukebox – \$100.00 each

Mechanical/Electronic Amusement Device – \$300.00 each

## Amusement License Application

Please fill out the form and submit in-person at  
55 West Maiden St., Washington, PA 15301

*Still have questions about the Transient Merchant Permit?*

*Call 724-223-4200 Option 1 ext 6*

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*Once you have submitted this form, move to the next step.*

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# Amusement Device License

*(definitions)*

## **Jukebox**

Any music vending machine, contrivance or device which, upon the insertion of a coin, slug, token, plate, disc or key into any slot, crevice or other opening, or by the payment of any price, operates or may be operated, for the emission of songs, music or similar amusement.

## **Mechanical Amusement Device or Electronic Amusement Device**

Any machine which, upon the insertion of a coin, slug, token, plate or disc, may be operated by the public generally for use as a game, entertainment or amusement, whether or not registering a score. It shall include such devices as marble machines, pinball machines, skill ball, electronic skill games, and all games, operations or transactions similar thereto under whatever name they may be indicated.

[\*Back to Amusement Tax Details\*](#)

*Still have questions about the Amusement Device License?*

*Call 724-223-4200 Option 1 ext 6*

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*Once you have submitted this form, move to the next step.*

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# Construction Dumpster/Storage Unit Permit

Any person or entity placing a storage unit upon any property within the City of Washington shall first obtain a permit from the City Clerk or Code Enforcement Official of the City of Washington, complete any application and provide any and all information requested by the City.

## Cost

\$50.00 / Storage unit

## [Construction Dumpster/Storage Unit Permit](#)

Please fill out the form and submit in-person at  
55 West Maiden St., Washington, PA 15301

*Still have questions about the Dumpster/Storage Unit Permit?  
Call 724-223-4200 Option 1 ext 6*

*Once you have submitted this form, move to the next step.*



# Façade Grants

## Summary

- Grants are offered on an annual basis, as funding allows. Funding for Façade Improvement Grants (FIGs) is provided through the [Washington County Local Share Account](#) and the Washington Business District Association. While the Local Share Account has a grant application process, FIGs are awarded in bulk to the WBDA, and businesses requesting funds must process requests through us.
- Applications are typically due July 15 of the granting year. Awards are announced in September, and funds are available for use up to one year after the award date. Dates are subject to change without notice.

*\*Only businesses in the City of Washington within the boundaries of the Central Business District Authority may be eligible for a FIG.\**

[Read more about the Façade Improvement Grant](#)

*Still have questions about the Façade Grants?*

Email [info@downtownwashingtonpa.com](mailto:info@downtownwashingtonpa.com)

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*Once you have submitted this form, move to the next step.*

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# Links to All Forms

[Zoning Permit Application](#)

[Fire Alarm Application](#)

[Business Privilege License Application](#)

[Mercantile Tax Application](#)

[Building Permit Application](#)

[Sign Permit Application](#)

[Application for Commercial Occupancy](#)

[Transient Merchant Application](#)

[Construction Dumpster/Storage Unit Permit](#)