

Frequently Asked Questions

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. What is a business license?

A business license is proof that a business license tax has been paid. It does not, by itself, authorize the conduct or continuance of any business, nor does it avoid the need to obtain any required zoning permits, building permits, health permits, toxic code requirements, or fire inspections.

Generally, business licenses are effective January 1 to December 31 of the same year and need to be renewed annually.

2. What is a business license tax?

The business license tax is a revenue tax required by all businesses operating, directly or indirectly, in the City of Berkeley. The business license tax is not a regulatory permit. The City's business license tax is generally assessed on a business' gross receipts generated within Berkeley in a calendar year. Similar to income tax, the annual license tax is based on the prior year's receipts.

3. Do I need a business license?

All persons or businesses conducting business within the City of Berkeley, directly or indirectly, are required to have a current business license and pay an annual license tax.

4. What gross receipts do I need to report to the City of Berkeley?

If your company is physically located in the City of Berkeley, all gross receipts earned for your business must be reported.

If your business has locations outside of the Berkeley, report only the gross receipts earned within the city.

5. Can I apply and renew my license online?

Beginning with the 2020 business license season, the City of Berkeley allows rental of real property businesses licenses to renew and pay for their license online.

Renewing rental of real property license is as simple as 1-2-3!

1. Register for an account at <https://aca.cityofberkeley.info/BusinessLicense>
2. Link your business license to your account
3. Renew and pay for your license

The City of Berkeley does not accept online payments for any other business type. In order to process your application or renewal form, mail your application or renewal form, including a check for the applicable fees made payable to:

Finance Department
Revenue Collection
1947 Center Street, 1st Floor
Berkeley, CA 94704

Frequently Asked Questions

If you prefer to complete the application or renewal form in person, you are welcome to visit the Customer Service Center at 1947 Center Street, 1st Floor. The hours of operation are Monday to Thursday, 8:30AM to 4:00PM.

6. I have a valid business license in a different city. Do I still need one for Berkeley?

Yes, you are required to have a City of Berkeley business license if you are, directly or indirectly, operating in the City of Berkeley.

BUSINESS LICENSE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. How do I apply for a new business license?

Fill out a business license application which can be found at: [New Business License Application](#).

Mail your completed application, including a check made payable to City of Berkeley for the applicable fees to:

Finance Department
Revenue Collection
1947 Center Street, 1st Floor
Berkeley, CA 94704

If you prefer to complete the application in person, you are welcome to visit the Customer Service Center located at 1947 Center Street, 1st Floor. The hours of operation are Monday to Thursday, 8:30AM to 4:00PM.

2. Do I need to do anything other than complete the application form and remit the license tax?

Depending on your business type, additional licenses from other agencies may be required before you submit your business application to the City of Berkeley.

A Fictitious Business Name Statement may be required if the business name differs from the owner's name. The City of Berkeley does not issue fictitious business names. For more information, contact the County of Alameda at 510-272-6363 located at 1106 Madison Street, Oakland, CA or refer to the attached link: [County of Alameda - Fictitious Business Name Filing](#).

State licenses are required for various business types, such as, but not limited to, building contractors, barbers, automotive repair dealers, and retailers. Check with the California State Department of Consumer Affairs at 800-952-5210 or [California Department of Consumer Affairs](#) to confirm you have the required state license, if applicable.

If a business is operating within Berkeley's limits, various city departments' requirements and regulations apply. Businesses physically located in Berkeley require Zoning approval. It is the business' responsibility to obtain all necessary approvals, permits, licenses, and to pay all taxes and fees associated with the business. Payment of the business license tax does not constitute zoning, building, fire, health, or toxic review/approval.

Businesses may need to contact one or more of the following City offices for more information:

Frequently Asked Questions

Topic	Department – Unit	Days/Hours of Service	Telephone/Email
General	Finance Customer Service Center 1947 Center Street, 1 st Floor	Monday to Thursday, 8:30AM – 4:00PM	(510) 981-7200 buslic@cityofberkeley.info
General	Information Technology 311 Call Center	Monday to Friday, 8:00AM – 5:00PM	(510) 981-7200
Zoning Permit	Planning Permit Service Center 1947 Center Street, 3 rd Floor	Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, 8:30AM – 4:00PM Tuesday, 8:30AM - 2:00PM Closed every Friday	(510) 981-7410 planning@cityofberkeley.info
Building and Safety Review	Planning Building and Safety 1947 Center Street, 3 rd Floor	Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 8:30AM – 3:30PM Tuesday, Thursday, 8:30AM – 2:30PM	(510)981-7440 buildingandsafety@cityofberkeley.info
Fire Review	Fire Department Fire Prevention 2100 Martin Luther King, Jr. Way	Monday to Friday, 8:00AM – 5:00PM	(510) 981-3473 fire@cityofberkeley.info
Health Review (Inspections and Permits for food service and handling)	Environmental Health Permits and Inspection 2180 Milvia Street, 2 nd Floor	Monday to Friday, 8:00AM – 12Noon; 1:00PM to 4:00PM Inspectors available: Monday to Friday, 8:00AM – 9:30AM	(510) 981-5310 envhealth@cityofberkeley.info
Refuse Services (Commercial refuse, recycling, and composting information)	Public Works Zero Waste 1201 Second Street	Monday to Friday, 8:00AM – 5:00PM	(510) 981-7270 pwrecycle@cityofberkeley.info

3. What's the status of my business license application?

Depending on your type of business, the application process takes a few days to several weeks to complete the review and approval process.

Frequently Asked Questions

If you answered “yes” to any of the business questions (relating to building permits, tobacco, serving food/drink to the public, provide a swimming pool or spa to the public, or handling hazardous materials) or if your business is located in Berkeley, several departments may need to review your application before a license can be issued.

To find out the status of your application, call (510) 981- 7200.

RENEWAL QUESTIONS

1. How often do I need to renew my business license?

Generally, all licenses are effective January 1 to December 31 of the same year.

Each December, the Finance Department sends a courtesy business license renewal form to all active business license holders in the City’s database. However, if you do not receive this annual reminder, you are still responsible for the timely filing of your business license renewal, which is due to the Finance Department by January 1, with a grace period until February 28.

If full payment is not received/postmarked before March 1, a 10% penalty of the outstanding tax balance is added. If full payment is not received/postmarked before April 1, an additional 40% penalty of the outstanding tax balance is added. Interest at the rate of 1% per month on the amount of fees and penalties continue to accrue until the balance is paid in full.

2. I didn’t receive a renewal form in the mail. Can you re-send one to me?

Renewal forms are available online.

If your business type is non-profit or street vendors, use one the following Business License Renewal Form – Flat Fee forms:

1. [Business License Renewal Form Flat Fee With Calculations](#)
2. [Business License Renewal Form Flat Fee No Calculations](#)

If your business type is rental of real property, use one of the following Business License Renewal Form - Rental of Real Property forms:

- [Business License Renewal Form Rental with Calculations](#)
- [Business License Renewal Form Rental No Calculations](#)

For all other business types, use the one of the following Business License Renewal Form – General forms:

- [Business License Renewal Form General With Calculations](#)
- [Business License Renewal Form General No Calculations](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

If you would like to pick up or return a completed form, visit the Customer Service Counter at 1947 Center Street, 1st Floor. The hours of operation are Monday to Thursday, 8:30AM to 4:00PM.

3. How do I find my tax rate?

Tax rates are listed at the following link: [Business Licenses: Classifications & Tax Rates.](#)

4. I have multiple locations, how do I report my gross receipts?

A separate business license is required for each location. The gross receipts from each location should be reported accordingly on separate business license renewal forms.

For more information about gross receipts, refer to the Berkeley Municipal Code (BMC) Section 9.04.025, Gross Receipts. The BMC can be found at the following link: <http://www.codepublishing.com/CA/Berkeley/>.

Businesses physically located in Berkeley require Zoning approval. If you have not already received this approval, contact the Zoning information desk at (510) 981-7410 or visit them at 1947 Center Street, 3rd Floor, Berkeley, CA. Their hours of operations are Monday, Wednesday and Thursday between 8:30 AM and 4:00 PM; Tuesday between 8:30 AM and 2:00 PM; and Fridays by appointment.

5. How can I claim gross receipt deductions?

If your business has a tax code C (Construction contractor), M (Manufacturing), or P (Professional/semi-professional), you may deduct certain costs.

For tax codes C and P, allowable deductions include amounts paid to subcontractors to perform a job within the City. To claim deductions, you must attach a letter that lists subcontractors qualified for the deduction. Include the subcontractor's business name, address, contractor number (if applicable), Berkeley business license number, and the amount paid to the subcontractor.

For tax code M, allowable deductions include the value of raw materials (including the cost of energy) or the value of the partially completed product at the time it enters the manufacturing process within the City.

6. What's the status of my renewal?

Generally, renewals are processed within 15 days from the postmarked date.

During our peak season (January to April), renewals are generally processed within 30 days from the postmarked date.

PAYMENT OPTIONS

1. What type of payments do you accept?

For walk-in/in-person payments at the Customer Service Counter located at 1947 Center Street, 1st Floor, we accept payment by cash, check, debit card, or credit card (Visa or MasterCard). The hours of operation are Monday through Thursday, 8:30AM to 4:00PM.

To pay by mail, make checks payable to City of Berkeley and send to:

Frequently Asked Questions

Finance Department
Revenue Collection
1947 Center Street, 1st Floor
Berkeley, CA 94704

2. Can I pay online, by email, by phone, or fax my credit card payment?

In general, we do not accept payments online, by email, by phone, or fax.

Beginning with the 2020 business license season, the City of Berkeley allows rental of real property businesses licenses to renewed and pay for their license online.

Renewing rental of real property license is as simple as 1-2-3!

1. Register for an account at <https://aca.cityofberkeley.info/BusinessLicense>
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CHANGES TO BUSINESS

1. I moved my business to a different location in Berkeley. How do I update my business license?

The Zoning Division in the Planning Department must approve your new business location.

You may request an address change online <https://aca.cityofberkeley.info/Community/>.

If you would like to apply in person, visit the Permit Service Center, 1947 Center Street, 3rd Floor. The hours of operation are Monday, Wednesday and Thursday between 8:30 AM and 4:00 PM; Tuesday between 8:30 AM and 2:00 PM; and Fridays by appointment.

After receipt of the approved zoning certificate, provide a copy to the Finance Department:

- E-mail: buslic@cityofberkeley.info
- Mail: Finance Department, Revenue Collection, 1947 Center Street, 1st Floor, Berkeley, CA 94704
- In-person (Monday through Thursday, 8:30AM to 4:00PM) : 1947 Center Street, 1st Floor

Frequently Asked Questions

2. How do I update my mailing address?

Send a request with your business license number and new mailing address to:

- E-mail: buslic@cityofberkeley.info, or
- Mail: Finance Department, Revenue Collection, 1947 Center Street, 1st Floor, Berkeley, CA 94704.

3. I changed my business name, do I need a new business license?

You will need a new business license if the federal identification number (FEIN) or the social security number (SSI) has changed.

If the federal identification number (FEIN) or the social security number (SSI) has not changed, complete and return a [Change of Information Form](#) and a signed letter on official company letterhead which states the following:

- Business license number
- The requestor's name, title, and contact information
- New business name
- Previous business name

The form and letter may be submitted to the City in one of the following ways:

- E-mail: buslic@cityofberkeley.info, or
- Mail: Finance Department, Revenue Collection, 1947 Center Street, 1st Floor, Berkeley, CA 94704.
- In-person: Customer Service Counter, 1947 Center Street, 1st Floor; Monday to Thursday, 8:30AM to 4:00PM.

4. The ownership of my business has changed, but the Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN) did not change. Do I need to do anything?

While a new business license is not needed, you will need to complete the [Change of Information Form](#) and send a signed letter on official company letterhead which states the following:

- Business license number
- The requestor's name, title, and contact information
- Names of new owners
- Names of previous owners

The form and letter may be submitted to the City in one of the following ways:

- E-mail: buslic@cityofberkeley.info, or
- Mail: Finance Department, Revenue Collection, 1947 Center Street, 1st Floor, Berkeley, CA 94704.
- In-person: Customer Service Counter, 1947 Center Street, 1st Floor; Monday to Thursday, 8:30AM to 4:00PM.

5. The ownership of my business has changed, and the Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN) or Social Security number is different. Do I need to do anything?

Yes, the following actions must be taken:

Frequently Asked Questions

The former owner is required to complete a closing declaration, submit applicable form and pay the fees.

- For Rental Businesses, click here: [Business License Closing Rental with Calculations](#)
- For all other Business License types, click here: [Business License Closing Form General With Calculations](#)

The new owner is required to complete a [Business License New Application With Calculations](#) and pay the applicable fees.

- Send the completed forms and the applicable fees, to the Finance Department, Revenue Collection at 1947 Center Street, 1st Floor, Berkeley, CA 94704.

If you would like to submit these forms in person, visit the Customer Service Center located at 1947 Center Street, 1st Floor. The hours of operation are Monday to Thursday, 8:30AM to 4:00PM.

BUSINESS CLOSURE QUESTIONS

1. I'm closing my business, how do I inform the City of Berkeley?

Complete a Closing Business Declaration Form which can be found at:

- For Rental Businesses, click here: [Business License Closing Rental with Calculations](#)
- For all other Business License types, click here: [Business License Closing Form General With Calculations](#)

Or, if you received a Business License Renewal Form, you may close your business by completing the entire form.

Fees are based on your gross receipts from January 1 to the end of business operation in the same calendar year.

Upon completion, mail either form along with payment to:

Finance Department
Revenue Collection
1947 Center Street, 1st Floor
Berkeley, CA 94704

Upon receipt of the form and payment, the Finance Department will close your business license for the City of Berkeley.

MISCELLANEOUS

1. How can I obtain a list of all active City of Berkeley business licenses?

Visit the City of Berkeley's Open Data Portal (<https://data.cityofberkeley.info/>) where you can download or view a list of all businesses with an active City business license.

The database is updated daily and provides non-confidential, public data.

Frequently Asked Questions

2. I received the City of Berkeley business license vehicle decals. Where can I park my car and for how long?

The vehicle decal allows you to use the yellow curb for up to 20 minutes and you must be actively loading and/or unloading.

For additional information, see the below excerpt from the City of Berkeley's Parking Enforcement & Restrictions page [Parking Enforcement & Restrictions - City of Berkeley, CA](#).

Yellow Curbs: Curbs marked by yellow are for commercial use and are for loading and unloading merchandise or materials. These zones are enforced from 7:00 AM to 6:00PM, Monday to Saturday except when otherwise designated by appropriate signs. Some metered parking spaces may be yellow zones during certain hours. In order to use a yellow zone for up to (20) twenty minutes drivers must have any one of three requirements:

- i. A City of Berkeley Business license decal affixed to the left rear bumper of the vehicle,
- ii. A marked commercial vehicle with logo or lettering, or
- iii. Commercial plates issued by Department of Motor Vehicles.

Drivers must be actively engaged in loading or unloading. Non-commercial vehicles may load or unload passengers only for up to three minutes at a yellow curb.”

3. Can I get a parking permit for my business?

Businesses with a current business license that are within a designated Merchant Permit Range may purchase 1 permit annually for the period March 1 – February 28. Permits are issued year round.

For more information, go to the following link: [RPP: Merchant Parking - City of Berkeley, CA](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

4. How can I get a copy of my previous renewal form? How much did I pay in business license taxes last year?

The business license renewal form and tax amount are confidential information.

The business owner will have to formally make the request on letterhead, provide a copy of his/her official state identification or license, and provide the last four digits of the SSN/FEIN that was used to establish the business license before the Finance Department can release that information.

The form and letter may be submitted to the City in one of the following ways:

- E-mail: buslic@cityofberkeley.info, or
- Mail: Finance Department, Revenue Collection, 1947 Center Street, 1st Floor, Berkeley, CA 94704.
- In-person: Customer Service Counter, 1947 Center Street, 1st Floor; Monday to Thursday, 8:30AM to 4:00PM.

5. I overpaid my business license tax. Can I get a refund?

Refund claims for business license taxes must be filed within one year after making the payment sought to be refunded.

If your payment was made within a year:

- Complete a business license renewal form and recalculate the tax due
- Write “amended” at the top of the page
- Submit a [Refund Claim Form](#)

6. Can I file an amended business license renewal form for prior years?

The City will accept amended business license renewal forms if payment for that license has been made within the year.

Per the City’s refund policy, refund claims for business license taxes must be filed within one year after making the payment sought to be refunded.

If your payment was made within a year:

- Complete a business license renewal form and recalculate the tax due
- Write “amended” at the top of the page
- Submit a [Refund Claim Form](#)

7. I want to schedule a hearing request. Should I pay the penalty and interest?

We recommend that you pay the business license tax and State Mandated Fee. It is your decision if you would like to pay the penalties and interest. However, please note if the hearing decision is not in your favor, you may be subject to additional penalties and interest.

8. I lost my license. How can I get a replacement?

Please complete and return the [Reprint Request Form](#). There is a \$10 fee for each reprint.