



## **STARTING A BUSINESS IN WILLITS**

*updated 7/13/2021*

### **Things to Know About Local Regulations**

If you are thinking about starting a business within the city limits of the City of Willits, you can get some basic information by checking with the appropriate city, county or state departments:

1. **Zoning**: Every parcel in the City is located within a specific zoning district which governs the uses for that property. Zoning regulations are found in the Zoning Ordinance, Chapter 17 of the Willits Municipal Code (<https://library.municode.com/ca/willits>). As a general rule, most retail sales, business and professional offices, light repairs, restaurants, and visitor accommodations are allowed in either the *Community Commercial (C1)* or *General Commercial (C2)* zoning districts. Except for *Home Occupations*, there are very limited opportunities for businesses in residential zones. Industrial zones allow for the heavier repair and manufacturing businesses. Special restrictions may apply if your property is located in a flood hazard area or earthquake fault zone. You can determine the zoning on a particular parcel by visiting or calling the Community Development Department, upstairs in City Hall.
2. **Building Permits**: Not all buildings are constructed to commercial occupancy standards. Check with the Building Inspector in the Community Development Department, upstairs in City Hall, to make sure the building you are intending to use meets the necessary building codes for the use you are intending (for example; special requirements for fire suppression, access to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements may need to be provided). Also, prior to any new construction or making any alterations to an existing building, including wiring and plumbing, check with the Building Inspector to obtain the necessary building permits. For special fire requirements you may also need to check with the Little Lake Fire Protection District. Fees for building permits depend on the size and type of construction.
3. **Water & Sewer Permits**: If your business requires new or upgraded water or sewer connections, permits for those connections will be issued by the Building Inspector. Fees for those permits depend on the size and nature of the water or sewer service.
4. **Business License**: Once you know that the zoning and building codes will allow your proposed business, check with the Business License Clerk in the Finance Department, downstairs in City Hall, to discuss the requirements for obtaining a City business license. Requirements and fees may vary depending on the nature of your business.

5. Sign Permits: Signs regulations are found within the Zoning Ordinance, Chapter 17.54 in the Willits Municipal Code. These regulations govern such things as the size, location, appearance, and method of illumination for signs that are not exempt from the regulations. Prior to changing the copy on an existing sign or erecting a new sign, you should check with the Community Development Department to see if a sign permit is required and with the Building Inspector to see if a building permit is required.
6. Health Permits: Businesses involved in serving food and beverages may need a permit from the Mendocino County Division of Environmental Health, which is located in Ukiah.
7. Encroachment Permits: Prior to placing any materials or doing any work within a City Street right-of-way, including sidewalks, you should check with the Department of Public Works to see if an Encroachment Permit is required. This also pertains to features such as signs and awnings that project out into or over the right-of-way. A similar Encroachment Permit is required from Caltrans for any work within the Highway 20 right-of-way (south of Safeway) and from the Mendocino County Department of Transportation for any work within County road rights-of-way.
8. Alcoholic Beverage License: Establishments that sell or serve alcoholic beverages are required to obtain an ABC permit from the State Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control in Santa Rosa.
9. Solid Waste: Garbage and recycling services within the City are provided by Solid Waste of Willits. You should discuss your business plans with SWOW to insure that proper waste handling facilities can be provided.
10. Air Quality Permits: Businesses that produce dust, fumes, or other air emissions (fuels, diesel generators, etc.) should contact the Mendocino County Air Quality Management District in Ukiah. Also, the AQMD should be consulted prior to any major building demolition or remodeling project to check for air quality hazards such as asbestos.
11. Underground Storage Tanks: In bygone years, there were many service stations in Willits, commonly on street corners along Main Street and many of those stations had underground fuel storage tanks. Other businesses had fuel tanks for heating and other purposes. Through Underground Storage Tank programs administered by the Mendocino County Division of Environmental Health in Ukiah and the California Regional Water Quality Control Board in Santa Rosa, these old tanks were removed and the property "cleaned up" so that no residual contamination remains on the property. If you are not sure about the historical use of the property you are proposing to occupy, you are advised to contact the Division of Environmental Health and the RWQCB.

#### CONTACT INFORMATION FOR REGULATORY AGENCIES

##### City of Willits:

- Building Code Information & Permits: Community Development Department, Building Inspector, City Hall, 111 East Commercial Street, Willits, CA 95490, phone (707) 459-7122.

- Business License Information: Finance Department, City Hall, 111 East Commercial Street, Willits, CA 95490, phone (707) 459-4601.
- Encroachment Permits: Public Works Department, 380 East Commercial Street, Willits, CA 95490, phone (707) 459-4605.
- Fire Code Information: Little Lake Fire Protection District, 74 East Commercial Street, Willits, CA 95490, phone (707) 459-7777.
- Planning & Zoning Information: Community Development Department, City Planner, City Hall, 111 East Commercial Street, Willits, CA 95490, phone (707) 459-7125.
- Solid Waste & Recycling: Solid Waste of Willits, 351 Franklin Avenue, Willits, CA 95490, phone (800) 694-2722.

County of Mendocino:

- Air Quality Information & Permits: Air Quality Management District, 306 East Gobbi Street, Ukiah, CA 95482, phone (707) 463-4354.
- Building Inspection Information & Permits: Department of Planning & Building Services, Building Inspection Division, 501 Low Gap Road, Room 1440, Ukiah, CA 95482, phone (707) 234-6650.
- Business License Information: Treasurer-Tax Collector, 501 Low Gap Road, Room 1440, Ukiah, CA 95482, phone (707) 234-6875.
- Encroachment Permits: Department of Transportation, 340 Lake Mendocino Drive, Ukiah, CA 95482, phone (707) 463-4363.
- Health, Food Service, and Hazardous Waste Information & Permits: Division of Environmental Health, 501 Low Gap Road, Ukiah, CA 95482, phone (707) 234-6625.
- Planning & Zoning Information: Department of Planning & Building Services, Planning Division, 501 Low Gap Road, Room 1440, Ukiah, CA 95482, phone (707) 234-6650.

State of California:

- Alcohol Information & Permits: Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, 50 D Street, Room 130, Santa Rosa, CA 95404, phone (707) 576-2165.
- Encroachment Permits: Caltrans, District 1, Ukiah Permits Office; phone (707) 463-4743.
- Underground Storage Tanks: Regional Water Quality Control Board, North Coast Region, 5550 Skylane Blvd, Suite A, Santa Rosa, CA 95403, phone (707) 576-2220.