

# Checklist for Opening a Restaurant in the City of Alexandria Planning & Zoning & Code Administration Issues

*Prepared by:*

**Alexandria Small Business Development Center**  
(Contact Information on Reverse)

- Contact the Office of Planning & Zoning to be sure that the location you have chosen is zoned for restaurant use. **Do not sign a lease on a property until you are familiar with all of the permits and requirements that must be met.** If you need assistance in finding a location, contact the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP) at [www.alexecon.org](http://www.alexecon.org).
- If the location was not previously used as a restaurant, you will need to file a "Change of Use" permit.
- All restaurants in the City of Alexandria must go through the Special Use Permit (SUP) process. You may also need a separate SUP for parking issues.
  - Work with the Office of Planning & Zoning and Code Administration during this process. It is very important to establish an early relationship with these offices as you work on your permit application.
  - Restaurants outside of the Old Town area that meet certain criteria may qualify for Administrative approval of their Special Use Permit, which can reduce the time period for approval. Contact the Office of Planning & Zoning to see if you qualify for Administrative Approval.
  - For the regular Special Use Permit process there will be two public hearings on your permit, one before the Planning Commission and one before City Council. It takes several months to review and process a SUP application. Since your new neighbors will have a say in the conditions governing the approval of your SUP, it is important to inform them of your plans and gain their support.
- If your proposed location is in one of the City's Old & Historic districts, you will need to go through Board of Architectural Review (BAR) process for any planned changes to the exterior of the building. This process can proceed at the same time as the SUP process. (see Planning & Zoning)
- All restaurants must apply for a permit from the Health Department.
- Once the SUP, Health Department and BAR (if necessary) permits have been obtained, you can apply for a Building Permit.
  - The Office of Code Administration will inform you of all requirements needed. It is best to begin your work with Code Administration during the SUP process, so that you have a good understanding of all issues that may arise such as:
    - Accessibility requirements
    - Sprinkler requirements
    - Elevator requirements
    - Special commercial kitchen requirements

- Restroom requirements
  - Special electrical and plumbing requirements
  - Mechanical requirements (HVAC, ventilation, hood systems, etc.)
- It is very important that you work with professionals in designing your space. Plumbing, mechanical, and electrical applications must be signed by a master craftsman. Look for architects, engineers, contractors, electricians, plumbers etc., who are familiar with both Alexandria Code requirements and restaurant construction. See Appendix “A” for some leads.(Note: Appendix A will be available at a later date)
  - You will be required to file 6 sets of plans with the Office of Code Administration and pay the required fees. They will forward one set of plans to the Health Department for their approval.
  - City inspectors must make periodic inspections during the building process to verify that your work is being performed in compliance with the permit that has been issued. The person whose name is listed on the permit application must contact Code Administration for necessary inspections. When you file your permit you will be informed of the points during construction when inspections are necessary.
  - At the time of the scheduled inspections, be sure that the address is posted, the permits and approved plans are on site and that the job foreman or contractor will be present for the inspection.
- Apply at the Code Administration for a “Sign Permit” for any signage you wish to have at your site. There are strict guidelines that must be followed for all signage, particularly in the historic districts, where BAR approval may be necessary.
  - At any time in the process you may file the application for a Certificate of Occupancy. This will include a required separate inspection after all building permit inspections have been completed. When all permits have been obtained, all construction and inspections are completed, and you are in compliance with all conditions of your Special Use Permit (SUP), Code Administration will issue a Certificate of Occupancy (CO). You are then able to open your business. Be sure that you allow enough time for this process before you schedule any “grand openings”.

### **Important Contact Information**

Planning & Zoning  
 301 King St., Room 2100  
 703-746-4333  
[www.alexandriava.gov/Planning](http://www.alexandriava.gov/Planning)

Code Administration  
 301 King St., Room 4200  
 703-746-4200  
[www.alexandriava.gov/Code](http://www.alexandriava.gov/Code)

Health Department  
 Environmental Health Division  
 4480 King Street, #360  
 703-838-4400 ext. 254  
[www.alexandriava.gov/health](http://www.alexandriava.gov/health)

Alexandria SBDC  
 625 N. Washington St., #400  
 Alexandria, VA 22314  
 703-778-1292  
[www.alexandriasbdc.org](http://www.alexandriasbdc.org)