



**Inspectional Services Department**  
**Peter McLaughlin, Commissioner**  
831 Massachusetts Ave  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
Phone: 617-349-6100

**City of Cambridge**  
Inspectional Services Department

# FOOD ESTABLISHMENT OPENING GUIDE

A Guide to Starting Your Food Establishment and Getting Permits, Licenses & Inspections

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Thanks for considering opening your food establishment in the City of Cambridge! Our team at the Cambridge Inspectional Services Department is here to help!

This guide gives an overview and describes the restaurant-specific permitting and inspection process in the City of Cambridge. For questions, please contact [Cambridge Inspectional Services Department Sanitary Division](#), and the [Community Development Department](#).

## STEPS

### 1

#### Starting the Process

- The [Inspectional Services Department](#) (ISD) offers guidance and support for those looking to open a restaurant. Contact a sanitary inspector to request information about the process and requirements for opening a restaurant in Cambridge.
- Start by contacting the [Community Development Department](#) (CDD). CDD offers assistance and resources for businesses in the City of Cambridge, including the [Small Business Assistance](#) and [Retail Strategic Plan](#), both of which offer resources to establish, open, and grow businesses in Cambridge.
- Contact your Neighborhood Business Association. Cambridge Business Associations are key resources for businesses in Cambridge and can provide guidance on how to open a restaurant in Cambridge. [Contact a business association](#) to learn more about local events, meetings, networking opportunities, and support for local businesses.
- The [Economic Development Division](#) offers workshops to increase access and opportunities.

### 2

#### CHOOSING A LOCATION

- Check zoning district online by searching for your parcel on the Cambridge [CityViewer](#) or by locating your parcel on the City of Cambridge [Zoning](#) District Map.
- Check whether the Retail or Consumer Service Establishment uses are Allowed, Prohibited, or Conditional in the [City of Cambridge Zoning Ordinance](#). (Article 4.000 Section 4.30 Table of Use Regulations).
- Check the building's existing legal use and occupancy by visiting the City of Cambridge's Record Room Coordinator, located in the Lombardi Building at 831 Massachusetts Ave.
- File a building permit application for any necessary construction. For more information on building permit types, visit [here](#). (See next step for details.)
- Once construction is complete, obtain a Certificate of Occupancy by submitting your [Certificate of Occupancy Application](#). If you have any questions, please reach out to the Inspectional Services Department.

# 3

## CONSTRUCTION PERMITS AND INSPECTIONS

- If you plan to do any construction work in your space, you will need to apply for [Building Permits](#).
- A list of building permits can be found [here](#). Permits commonly required for restaurant construction include:
  - Addition/Alteration Building Permit
  - Electrical Permit
  - Gas Permit
  - Plumbing Permit
  - Mechanical Permit
  - Sheet Metal Permit
- All permits must be applied for by licensed and insured contractors/tradespeople. The permit applicant will be instructed to supply documentation as part of the application process. For a better understanding of the process and permit application requirements:
  - Overview of permit application process: [Steps to a Building Permit](#)
  - List of requirements: [Building Permit Application Checklist](#)
- Once your building permits have been approved and issued, work can begin! Throughout the construction process, inspections will be conducted by ISD inspectors. These inspections should be scheduled by the licensed contractors/tradespeople who obtained the permits and include:
  - Rough electrical, gas, plumbing, and building
  - Insulation
  - Final electrical, gas, plumbing, sanitary, fire prevention, and building
- Upon receipt of all passing final inspections, the building permit is ready to be closed out. The space is now ready for a Certificate of Occupancy and (if applicable) a Certificate of Inspection.

# 4

## CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY AND CERTIFICATE OF INSPECTION

- Once construction is complete, obtain a Certificate of Occupancy by submitting your [Certificate of Occupancy Application](#).
- If you plan to serve alcohol and/or if the total occupancy of your space will be 50 or more people, you will need to apply for and obtain a [Certificate of Inspection](#).
  - A Certificate of Inspection, otherwise known as a “CI” is an annually renewed certificate required by the MA State Building Code and Fire Code.
  - You can (and are encouraged to) apply for the CI prior to the final inspection/ building permit close-out process.
  - For the initial CI, a stamped architectural floorplan will need to be provided. This floorplan must detail:
    - Occupancy limitations for seated, standing, and staff areas
    - Egress paths and sizing
    - Bathroom fixture count
  - Once a CI has been applied for and approved, an inspection from ISD and Cambridge Fire Department can be conducted. When permitted construction work is being done to a space, these inspections are generally part of the final building inspection process.
    - To prepare for your inspection, please review this [list of requirements](#).

# 5

## FOOD ESTABLISHMENT PERMIT AND INSPECTION

- Prior to scheduling your pre-operational inspection with the Sanitary Inspector, please provide all required certificates, licenses and/or permits.

Required documents may include the following:

- Certificate of Occupancy or a Certificate of Inspection.
  - A completed Food Establishment Permit Application.
  - A copy of your Food Protection Manager Certification and Allergen Awareness Certification. Please note that a Food Handler Certification is not an acceptable replacement for the Food Protection Manager Certification.
  - A copy of your certificate that demonstrates training in manual choke-saving procedures (if applicable).
  - Your Common Victualler License (if applicable).
- If all your paperwork is in order, please contact ISD to request a pre-operational inspection. The Sanitary Division will help you set up your pre-operational inspection and confirm your appointment. At the time of inspection, the Sanitary Inspector will ensure that you are compliant with the Food Code and answer any questions you may have.

**Please make sure that there are no food products on the premises until the Sanitary Inspector has completed and passed the pre-operational inspection.**

# PRE-OPERATIONAL INSPECTION – FOOD ESTABLISHMENT PERMIT

Establishments must ensure compliance with the **2013 Federal Food Code** with the **2015 supplement** and have access to the regulations at the facility.

## **READY TO OPERATE? PLEASE REVIEW THE FOLLOWING TOPICS PRIOR TO YOUR PRE-OPERATIONAL HEALTH INSPECTION:**

- Person in charge (PIC), knowledgeable, monitors food safety risks and takes corrective actions. PIC available all operational hours
- Employee illness policy to inform in a verifiable manner requirement to report
- Separate hand wash sinks accessible and supplied for food preparation, dispensing and warewash areas; in addition to the restrooms
- Food contact surfaces properly designed, maintained, installed
- Adequate NSF equipment for cooking, holding food hot & cold and to properly cool.
- Non-food contact surfaces properly designed, maintained, installed
- Proper storage of clean and soiled pots and pans
- Adequate number of refuse containers, clean, covered, adequate storage area.
- Clean and organized
- Employee lockers or designated area to store clothing and personal care items
- Sufficient storage for dry goods, equipment, utensils, maintenance items, chemicals
- Light fixtures above food products have protective shields properly installed, are coated or otherwise shatter-resistant
- No evidence of rodents or insects
- Outside storage area clean



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

# CONTACTS

AGENCY	WEBSITE	PHONE
ISD Sanitary Division	<a href="https://www.cambridgema.gov/inspection/foodandsanitarypermits">https://www.cambridgema.gov/inspection/foodandsanitarypermits</a>	617-349-6123
ISD Building Division	<a href="https://www.cambridgema.gov/inspection/buildingelectricplumbingpermits">https://www.cambridgema.gov/inspection/buildingelectricplumbingpermits</a>	617-349-6100
License Commission	<a href="https://www.cambridgema.gov/departments/licensecommission">https://www.cambridgema.gov/departments/licensecommission</a>	617-349-6140
Fire Prevention	<a href="https://www.cambridgema.gov/cfd/firedeptdivisions/firepreventionbureau">https://www.cambridgema.gov/cfd/firedeptdivisions/firepreventionbureau</a>	617-349-4900
Community Development Department	<a href="https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD">https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD</a>	617-349-4600
City Clerk	<a href="https://www.cambridgema.gov/Departments/CityClerksOffice">https://www.cambridgema.gov/Departments/CityClerksOffice</a>	617-349-4260

BUSINESS ASSOCIATION	WEBSITE	PHONE
Cambridge Center of Commerce	<a href="https://www.cambridgechamber.org/">https://www.cambridgechamber.org/</a>	617-876-4100
Cambridge Local First	<a href="https://cambridgelocalfirst.org/">https://cambridgelocalfirst.org/</a>	857-998-7392
Cambridge-Somerville Black Business Network	<a href="https://www.sbnmass.org/cs-black-business-net">https://www.sbnmass.org/cs-black-business-net</a>	617-395-0250
Central Square Business Association	<a href="http://www.centralsquarecambridge.com/">http://www.centralsquarecambridge.com/</a>	617-864-3200
East Cambridge Business Association	<a href="https://eastcambridgeba.com/">https://eastcambridgeba.com/</a>	
Harvard Square Business Association	<a href="https://www.harvardsquare.com/">https://www.harvardsquare.com/</a>	617-491-6976
Kendall Square Association	<a href="https://kendallsquare.org/">https://kendallsquare.org/</a>	617-945-9434
Porter Square Neighbors Association	<a href="https://www.portersquare.net/">https://www.portersquare.net/</a>	