

City Of Millbrae
Community Development Department
Planning Division

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: Non-RESIDENTIAL

(updated September 2005)

1) How do I start a business in Millbrae?

Call or visit the Planning Division of the City's Community Development Department for basic zoning information and requirements. If your business will be located in a non-residential location, you will need to verify that your proposed business is of the type allowed in that specific location. If you propose a business which is considered a more intense land use than the previous business at that location, you may need to provide additional parking. If you want to alter either the interior or the exterior of the building, you will need to submit construction plans for all such changes in order to obtain a Building Permit. Extensive exterior modifications require Planning Commission approval before applying for a Building Permit. You will also need to consider exterior signage for your business as part of the building and/or site modifications you propose. For some types of businesses, you may also need to contact San Mateo County or the State of California for additional permits/licenses. Your last step will be to apply for a City Business License. Ideally, you would obtain all governmental approvals before signing a lease. If your business will be located at your place of residence in Millbrae, you will need to apply for a Home Occupation Permit as well as a City Business License.

2) What is a Conditional Use Permit and why might I need one?

If your proposed business is located within the area designated as the "Downtown Improvement Area" (DIA), you may need to apply for Planning Commission approval of a "Conditional Use Permit" (CUP). A CUP is required for certain restricted uses such as drug stores, grocery stores, theaters, bars, and restaurants. The DIA includes the west side of El Camino Real and both sides of Broadway between Victoria Avenue and Taylor Boulevard. Use Permits are also required for certain land uses, such as schools and churches, anywhere in the city.

3) How many signs can I have for my business and how large can they be?

Signs may be attached to a building or can be free-standing. Total allowed sign area is calculated at a rate of 1½ square feet per linear foot of primary building frontage and ¾ square feet per linear foot of secondary building frontage. Every building has one primary frontage; all other sides of the building are considered secondary frontages. Window signage is also allowed up to 25% of the window area. One free-standing sign is allowed per parcel, except that an additional free-standing sign is allowed for street frontages longer than 250 feet. Other sign options may be possible. The number and

size of signs for your business requires an examination of your building and site. Approval of a Sign Permit and a Building Permit are required for all signs and some signs first require Planning Commission approval. No signage is allowed for businesses within a residence.

4) What is “lot coverage”?

“Lot coverage” is the total square footage of all the footprints of all the structures on a lot divided by total lot area and results in a percentage. Open projections such as eaves, canopies, and balconies are excluded. Different zoning districts have different lot coverage maximums.

5) What is a building setback?

A “building setback” is a line parallel to a property line which limits how close to the edge of the property a structure can be built. All setbacks are measured inward from all property boundaries. Certain building projections, such as porches, eaves, bay windows, and fireplaces, may be allowed to encroach a few feet into required setbacks.

6) In order to comply with building setbacks, how do I determine where my property lines are?

A property line is invisible. The street curb or sidewalk edge are often close to the true location of a front or side commercial property line. Measuring half the distance of the known right-of-way width of a street from the centerline of that street towards your building can provide the approximate position of a property line, provided the street is centered within its right-of-way. Call the Public Works Department at (650) 259-2339 to find out the right-of-way width of your street. However, the best way to accurately determine property lines is to hire a licensed surveyor to locate existing benchmark points and measure the boundaries of your property based upon the legal description contained in the official deed.

7) How long does it take to get a permit to alter my building or my tenant space?

If you want to alter either the interior or the exterior of the building, you will need to submit construction plans for all such changes in order to obtain a Building Permit. Extensive exterior modifications require Planning Commission approval before applying for a Building Permit. You will also need to include any new exterior signage for your business as part of the building and/or site modifications you propose. Planning Commission approval typically requires two to three months, followed by another month or so for Building Permit approval. Especially complicated or controversial projects may take somewhat longer.

8) What is the process for Planning Commission review of my project?

The Planning Commission usually holds at least two meetings on every project. The first meeting is a Study Session where the project is fully discussed and all issues are identified. Additional Study Sessions may be required for especially complicated or controversial projects. As a courtesy, the City mails notices of upcoming Study Sessions to all property owners within 300 feet of the project site. After one or more Study Sessions, the Commission will set a Public Hearing date for the project and the City will again send out meeting notices. The Commission may approve or deny a project only after an official Public Hearing. Applicant representation is required at all meetings. All meetings are open to the public and anyone may speak.

9) When will the Planning Commission meet on my project?

The Planning Commission meets twice a month, on the 1st and 3rd Mondays, at 7p.m. in the City Council Chamber at City Hall. The first meeting on a project usually occurs about a month after the date that a complete project application is submitted.

10) What are the chances that the Planning Commission will approve my project?

The Planning Commission approves over 95% of the non-residential projects it reviews; however, modifications are made to most approved projects.

11) What happens after the Planning Commission approves my project?

If the approval is on a matter for which the Planning Commission is authorized to take the final action, you will receive a letter for your signature indicating you accept all the conditions of project approval. You are then authorized to apply for a Building Permit. If the approval is on a matter for which the Commission does not have final action authority, the Commission approval is a recommendation to the City Council and the matter will automatically be scheduled for Council action.

12) What happens if the Planning Commission denies my project?

If the denial is on a matter for which the Planning Commission is authorized to take the final action, the decision may be appealed to the City Council by anyone within 10 calendar days. If the denial is on a matter for which the Commission does not have final action authority, the Commission denial is a recommendation to the City Council and the matter will automatically be scheduled for Council action. If the Council also denies your request, you may apply for a new project to the Planning Commission.

13) How do I appeal a decision I don't agree with?

Planning staff decisions may be appealed to the Planning Commission by contacting the Community Development Department. All final actions of the Planning Commission may be appealed to the City Council and must be submitted in writing to the City Clerk

within 10 calendar days. All actions of the City Council are final, but you may have other options available to you through the court system.

14) Can the City recommend a good architect for my project?

The City does not endorse the services of any particular person or firm, but strongly recommends that you hire a California licensed architect for any building design project, especially one that requires Planning Commission approval.

15) What is the size of the parcel at _____?

Lot area may be obtained from the official deed for the property or from the San Mateo County Tax Assessor Office in Redwood City.

The following information can be obtained from the parcel address table on the City's web site at www.ci.millbrae.ca.us

16) What is the parcel number for the property at _____?

17) What is the zoning for the property at _____?

The following information can be obtained from the Municipal Code on the City's web site at www.ci.millbrae.ca.us

18) What are the development regulations for the _____ Zone?

19) How many parking spaces are required for a _____?

20) Where can I operate a _____ business?

21) How does the City regulate adult entertainment establishments?