

City of Palo Alto Business Registry

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Business Registry Certificate (BRC)?

Every business in the City of Palo Alto is required to obtain a Business Registry Certificate (BRC) annually. **A flat fee of \$51* and basic information about your business is required each year.** The BRC online tool was developed for the City of Palo Alto to obtain basic data regarding businesses located within Palo Alto. Most of the questions are basic to your business, so it should take just a few minutes to complete. Once you submit the questionnaire and pay the annual fee, your Business Registry Certificate (BRC) is sent via email to you for printing/saving.

** This fee includes a \$1 state mandated fee on any application for local business license or similar instrument or permit or renewal thereof. The purpose is to increase disability access and compliance with construction-related accessibility requirements and to develop educational resources for businesses in order to facilitate compliance with federal and state disability laws, as specified.*

Why does the City of Palo Alto need this data?

The data will help the City measure employment trends, business growth, and economic activity in a more comprehensive way. It is critical to have this data to develop and measure the effectiveness of programs to reduce traffic congestion, better utilize parking, and coordinate with other transportation-related efforts. The data will also help us to make better informed decisions on a host of critical issues including:

- ✓ Land use
- ✓ Economic development
- ✓ Public safety/emergency response/disaster preparedness
- ✓ Regional Water Quality Control Plant compliance
- ✓ Business outreach and support

Where did the idea originate?

In November 2014, the Palo Alto City Council passed **Ordinance #5379** which required every business in Palo Alto operating from a “Fixed Place of Business” (e.g., a place meant for business purposes such as an office or retail space) to register and pay a fee each year. If you have a **physical** business address in Palo Alto, you are most likely required to register and obtain a BRC. The ordinance is available for review at www.cityofpaloalto.org/businessregistry (scroll to bottom of page).

Do I have to complete/submit the BRC online questionnaire every year?

Yes, any business operating, or planning to operate, in a “Fixed Place of Business” (e.g., a place meant for businesses purposes such as an office or retail space) must register and complete the online questionnaire every year. This is to ensure the City has up-to-date information.

What questions will be asked of me?

To successfully complete the questionnaire, please have the following information available:

- Business name, description, structure, inception date

- Business owner/principal name, telephone number, email address
- Business address (primary plus all other locations in Palo Alto)
- Square footage** your business occupies in each location
- Number of employees on-site*** at each location
- Number of on-site parking spaces dedicated to your business at each location
- Number of annual parking permits purchased for employees at each location
- Federal EIN and/or Seller’s Permit #
- State of incorporation

*** The gross area in square feet your business occupies. You can find this information in your lease agreement or building floor plans. For assistance, contact your property management team.*

**** Total number of employees (full-time, part-time, contract, or volunteer – including Owner/Principal) at each location during peak times on a normal business day.*

Is this a one-time registration?

No, any business subject to the Business Registry is required to update their information and pay a fee on an **annual** basis by **March 31**. This is to ensure the City has up-to-date information.

What happens if I don’t register my business?

Businesses who do not register by the deadline of **March 31** each year can be subject to fees, penalties, and collection activities.

My Business Registry Certificate is about to expire....

Although we will attempt to notify your business using the contact information you provided in the last year’s questionnaire/form (e.g., owner’s email address), it is **your** responsibility to renew your Business Registry Certificate in advance of the expiration date – **March 31**. Simply visit the [Business Registry](#) web site to complete the questionnaire/form and submit payment with a major credit card.

What fees do I have to pay?

Each fixed-based business in Palo Alto shall pay a flat rate of \$51 each year*.

** This fee includes a \$1 state mandated fee on any application for local business license or similar instrument or permit or renewal thereof. The purpose is to increase disability access and compliance with construction-related accessibility requirements and to develop educational resources for businesses in order to facilitate compliance with federal and state disability laws, as specified.*

How can I pay?

Through the [BRC online tool](#) only major credit cards are accepted. If your business cannot submit payment with a major credit card, please contact the Business Registry Team at BusinessRegistry@cityofpaloalto.org.

What is the fee used for?

The fee is used for administering the program and maintaining the BRC online tool at <http://registermybusiness.cityofpaloalto.org>. This is *cost-recovery* program tool, not a revenue-generating tool for the City.

Is the fee tax deductible?

Please consult with your individual tax advisor.

Where can I find help with the Business Registry?

The City has developed a website at www.cityofpaloalto.org/businessregistry to help with basic details and provide contact information. We have also developed this set of FAQs. If you need further assistance, send email to the Business Registry Team at BusinessRegistry@cityofpaloalto.org or dial (650) 329-2360.

If I'm using the BRC online tool and run into an issue, how do I get help?

To get help while navigating the online registration tool, hover your mouse over the  sign to display help text. If you encounter an issue or problem while completing the online questionnaire/form, click  to send a Help Request or send email to BusinessRegistry@cityofpaloalto.org.

Who is exempt from the Business Registry?

For exemptions approved by the City Council, you may review Palo Alto Municipal Code [Chapter 4.60](#) and [Ordinance #5379](#).

In January 2016, the City Council amended the ordinance to exempt:

- Very small businesses and non-profit organizations with less than 1 Full-Time-Equivalent employee, i.e., 2080 hours of annual on-site working time for all employees, including owner/principal
- Religious organizations with **no** ancillary business on-site.

Other exemptions which have been in effect since 2015 are:

- [Home-based businesses](#)
- Transitory (or virtual) businesses

Note: **Transitory** businesses include contractors/sub-contractors who perform work from time to time in the City and do not have fixed places of business in Palo Alto.

How do I claim an exemption?

To claim your exemption: Visit the [Business Registry](#) web site, select your exemption status by answering the questions below and provide some basic information such as business name, address, etc. Note: You must claim your exemption each year.

- Are you a very small business or non-profit with less than 1 Full-Time-Equivalent employee on-site (including owner/principal)? Y/N
- Are you a home-based or transitory (virtual) business? Y/N
- Are you a religious organization with no ancillary business on-site? Y/N

- Has your business relocated outside the City of Palo Alto in the past year? Y/ N
- Is your business permanently closed? Y/N

Do I have to claim an exemption every year?

Yes. This is to ensure the City has up-to-date information. For example, you may move to another location in Palo Alto, move outside Palo Alto, or close your business.

I am a general or sub-contractor based in another city (i.e., my office is not located in Palo Alto) but working (or planning to work) on a project in Palo Alto. Do I need to register?

Although you should make sure your project is permitted through our Development Services team and your state or other licensure is up-to-date, you are **not** required to register with the City of Palo Alto through the Business Registry program. At this time, you are **not** required to claim an exemption on the [Business Registry](#) web site.

The Development Services team is located at 285 Hamilton Avenue – 1st Floor and available Monday-Friday, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. Their phone number is (650) 329-2496. You can find more information at <http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/ds/default.asp>.

I operate a business out of my home. Do I need to register?

At this time, home-based businesses are not required to register and pay an annual fee. **However, home-business owners are required to claim an exemption on the [Business Registry](#) web site as explained above – see “How do I claim an exemption from the Business Registry?”**

You should also be familiar with the City’s municipal code section that addresses home-based businesses. [\[PAMC Section 18.42.060\]](#)

Does a non-profit corporation need to register?

If your non-profit organization has 1 or more Full-Time-Equivalent employees (including owner/principals, executives, full-time, part-time, contractors, and/or volunteers) regularly located in an office or commercial building in Palo Alto, you are required to register and pay an annual fee. If this is not applicable to your non-profit organization, you are not required to register and pay an annual fee. **However, you are required to claim an exemption on the [Business Registry](#) web site as explained above – see “How do I claim an exemption from the Business Registry?”**

Does a religious organization need to register?

If your religious organization does not have an ancillary business on-site (e.g., book store, gift shop, child care center, after school program, day care services, etc.), you are not required to register and pay an annual fee. **However, you are required to claim an exemption on the [Business Registry](#) web site as explained above – see “How do I claim an exemption from the Business Registry?”**

Note: Child care businesses leasing/renting space on property owned by a religious organization (e.g., church) are required to register as an individual business and pay an annual fee.

I just have a P.O. Box, or use a virtual office address, in Palo Alto to receive business mail. Do I need to register?

If you do not have a physical address in Palo Alto, and just use a PO Box or a virtual office address to receive business mail, you are not required to register and pay an annual fee. **However, you are required to claim an exemption on the [Business Registry](#) web site as explained above – see “How do I claim an exemption from the Business Registry?”**

Due to the nature of my business, my company receives mail for a number of companies. Do each of them need to register at my address?

Unless they have employees at your address, they do not need to register at this time. They are considered Transitory (or Virtual) businesses which are exempt from the Business Registry at this time.

IMPORTANT: Each company is required to claim an exemption on the [Business Registry](#) web site as explained above – see “How do I claim an exemption from the Business Registry?” Please advise your customers.

I have multiple locations in Palo Alto. Do I need to register multiple times?

No. When completing the questionnaire, reply “**Yes**” to the question “**Does your business have more than 1 location in the City of Palo Alto?**” You will be prompted to enter the address and furnish the following information for each location:

- Square footage** your business occupies in each location
- Number of employees on-site*** at each location
- Number of on-site parking spaces dedicated to your business at each location
- Number of annual parking permits purchased for employees at each location

*** The gross area in square feet your business occupies. You can find this information in your lease agreement or building floor plans. For assistance, contact your property management team.*

**** Total number of employees (full-time, part-time, contract, or volunteer – including Owner/Principal) at each location during peak times on a normal business day.*

My business is a large company with a campus of buildings. Do I need to list each building individually?

If your campus can be identified at one address, you can list the main address and provide all of the information for your company using the main address. If you have buildings in multiple sites, reply “**Yes**” to the question **Does your business have more than 1 location in the City of Palo Alto?** You will be prompted to enter the address and furnish the following information for each location:

- Square footage** your business occupies in each location
- Number of employees on-site*** at each location
- Number of on-site parking spaces dedicated to your business at each location
- Number of annual parking permits purchased for employees at each location

*** The gross area in square feet your business occupies. You can find this information in your lease agreement or building floor plans. For assistance, contact your property management team.*

**** Total number of employees (full-time, part-time, contract, or volunteer – including Owner/Principal) at each location during peak times on a normal business day.*

I have several business entities (fictitious business names, other business structures, etc.) listed for my business activity. Do I need to register each of them individually?

If you have multiple businesses essentially incorporating the **same** people at the **same** location, you only need to complete/submit one questionnaire/form and pay the annual flat fee of \$51. When completing the questionnaire, reply “**Yes**” to the question “**Do you have any other registered businesses or entities on site?**” You will be prompted to list the legal names of all business entities related to your business in the section named “**Additional Business Entities.**”

I’m in a building with many different businesses. Do we each need to register?

Most likely, yes. Unless the different businesses are employing the **same** people, each business is required to obtain a Business Registry Certificate, i.e., register individually by completing the questionnaire and paying the annual fee of \$51 by March 31 each year.

My business is a property management company that services multiple addresses throughout Palo Alto—do I need to obtain a Business Registry Certificate?

If your office (where your employees are based) is located in Palo Alto, you would likely need to register your business and obtain a Business Registry Certificate. If your Main Office is located outside Palo Alto, but you have employees dedicated on-site at a location (or locations) in Palo Alto, designate the most appropriate address as the Primary Address.

If you have at least one Full-Time-Equivalent employee dedicated on-site (i.e., staff for an office, lobby, or front desk) at **other** locations in Palo Alto, you should also list them in the space provided for Secondary Locations. When filling out the questionnaire, reply “**Yes**” to the question “**Does your business have more than 1 location in the City of Palo Alto?**” You will be prompted to enter each location and furnish the following information for each location:

- Square footage** your business occupies in each location
- Number of employees on-site*** at each location
- Number of on-site parking spaces dedicated to your business at each location
- Number of annual parking permits purchased for employees at each location

*** The gross area in square feet your business occupies. You can find this information in your lease agreement or building floor plans. For assistance, contact your property management team.*

**** Total number of employees (full-time, part-time, contract, or volunteer – including Owner/Principal) at each location during peak times on a normal business day.*

NOTE: If generally you do not have employees on-site at other locations in Palo Alto (i.e., only for repairs or maintenance), you do not need to list any additional locations.

I have other locations outside Palo Alto, but I do business in Palo Alto too. How do I register the other locations?

At this time, the City of Palo Alto Business Registry pertains only to businesses physically located in a fixed place of business in Palo Alto. Businesses based in other cities, but operating here (such as contractors or sub-contractors, consultants, real estate agents, etc.) do not need to register in Palo Alto. You should check the

local requirements of the other cities where you're located and/or doing business to see if there is a registry or license requirement there.

I want to close or sell my business...what should I do?

Please notify the Business Registry Team at BusinessRegistry@cityofpaloalto.org so we can update your record in our system and advise the **new** owner to visit the [Business Registry](http://BusinessRegistry) web site and register as the owner. A Business Registry Certificate is non-transferable.

Do I have to register and obtain a Business Registry Certificate (BRC) even if I just purchased an existing business, i.e., became the new owner?

Yes, a Business Registry Certificate is non-transferable. Upon change of ownership, you are required to register and pay the annual fee of \$51 to obtain a Business Registry Certificate.

I want to move my business to a new location within the City of Palo Alto or add another site/location. Will I need to register again and obtain a second BRC?

No. If you have already registered and obtained a Business Registry Certificate (BRC) for a location in Palo Alto, please send email to the Business Registry Team at BusinessRegistry@cityofpaloalto.org and provide the following information for your new location or for each additional location:

- Business Name:
- Street number/name:
- Floor business is located:
- Suite number:
- Square footage:
- Number of employees at this location (including owner):
- Number of annual parking permits purchased from the City for your employees at this site:
- Number of parking spaces on-site dedicated to your business:
- Main business telephone number (if different):
- Date of Move:

The BR team will make the changes to your record and send an updated Business Registry certificate/payment receipt.

I completed my registration and payment, but now some information has changed. What do I do?

Once you have submitted your questionnaire/form, you cannot make changes yourself. Please send email to the Business Registry Team at BusinessRegistry@cityofpaloalto.org and identify the old information and the new or changed information. The BR team will make the changes to your record and send an updated Business Registry certificate/payment receipt.

Our business has moved (or we plan to move) to a new location in Palo Alto. How do I update our address?

Once you have submitted your questionnaire/form, you cannot make changes yourself. Please send email to the Business Registry Team at BusinessRegistry@cityofpaloalto.org and provide the following information:

- Business Name
- Street Number/Name
- Floor business is located
- Suite number

- Square footage
- Number of employees at this location (including owner)
- Number of annual parking permits purchased from the City for your employees at this location
- Number of parking spaces on site dedicated to your business
- Main Business Telephone Number (if different)
- Date of Move

The BR team will make the changes to your record and send an updated Business Registry certificate/payment receipt.

I plan to close my business in Palo Alto or move outside Palo Alto (e.g., to another city). What do I do?

Send email to the Business Registry Team at BusinessRegistry@cityofpaloalto.org and provide the following information:

- Business Name
- Business Street Number/Name
- Owner Name
- Owner Email Address
- Owner Telephone Number

Note: Please advise the *new* owner to visit the [Business Registry](#) web site and register as the new owner. A Business Registry Certificate is non-transferable.

How will the City use my contact information?

The City will use your email address to reach you with information related to the annual renewal. We may also contact you with information related to City business, collection activities, or emergencies.

Is my business information confidential?

Most of the information collected by the City on the [Business Registry](#) web site is considered a public record. As a matter of course, the City releases certain information to the public, especially as relates to **aggregated data** regarding the business districts and basic business listings. Certain information is considered confidential and not released by the City. This includes: Federal Employment Identification Number (EIN), Seller’s Permit Number, Credit Card Number, and other payment information. The City will take steps to protect the privacy of certain information which could be deemed sensitive or proprietary. In some cases, the City will release this type of data in a range.

I want to renew my Business Registry Certificate, but I forgot (or don’t know) the account information – the User Name (email address) and/or password. What do I do?

Click **Start An Application** from the Home page and create new account, i.e., new user name (an email address not used previously) and a new password.

I forgot my password. How do I reset it?

To reset your password, click **Forgot your password?** found on the Sign-In page (scroll to bottom) and enter the user name/email address originally used to create the account. You will receive an email with instructions for resetting your password. If you don't receive an email in your Inbox, check your Spam/Junk email folder to make sure it didn't end up there.

Can I stop in the middle of entering information and return to the questionnaire/form at a later time?

At any time, you can save your answers, log out, and resume the questionnaire/form at a later time. When you wish to resume, sign in by entering the **same** user name (email address) and **same** password.

To access and resume an existing questionnaire/form (i.e., previously created/started):

1. Sign in and view a list of existing questionnaires/forms.
2. Click **Resume** next to the questionnaire/form you want to retrieve.
3. When the questionnaire/form has been retrieved, it will begin at the last page you completed. You can navigate to and edit other pages.

Alternatively, after signing in you can click **Start An Application** to start a *new* questionnaire/form.