



Start here.

## 5 reasons to do business in Sandusky, Erie County

### Affordability for you and your team

- 13% less expensive cost of doing businesses
- 6.75% effective sales tax rate
- .26% CAT-only state business tax
- \$132,400 median home value
- \$51,033 median income

### Central location for customer access

- 50% U.S. population within a day's drive
- 11 million visitors to our Shores & Islands region each year

### Leading location for a large labor pool

- 3,156,677 population in 45-mile radius
- 1,621,683 labor force in 45 mile radius
- 35% of workforce has an associates degree or higher

### High quality of life

- 6 amusement and water parks
- 90 miles of lake waterfront
- 6,299 acres of state parks, forests, nature preserves and wildlife areas
- 90 marinas

### Evidence of success

- 60% gross regional product growth over last 30 years
- Projected job growth for 2020 - 2026 is 7%
- Over \$600 million in business capital investment in the last 5 years

Let us be among the first to welcome you and your business to the City of Sandusky. As you continue to move through the process of getting your business up and running, please know that we are here to assist you in the challenges that come with opening a business. Entrepreneurship and small business development are essential to the success of our economy in the City of Sandusky. Starting and running a business can be challenging and requires a variety of skills.

Our partners at ECEDC can assist in connecting you with experts and advice that help you navigate these initial challenges. Our goal for a vibrant, inclusive, and thriving economy is only possible with individuals like you. We thank you for your commitment to the City of Sandusky and look forward to watching your business succeed!

# Start here.

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## Who we are.

This Business Expansion & Startup Guide is brought to you by the Erie County Economic Development Corporation (ECEDC), the Regional Incubator for Sustainability & Entrepreneurship (RISE), and the City of Sandusky. Our organizations support economic development providing critical connections to help your business grow and succeed like market research, regulatory assistance, financial incentives, and specialized small business and entrepreneurial support through RISE. This guide is a by-product of the challenges, common questions, and unexpected hurdles new and existing businesses face as they look to locate and expand their facilities, ultimately achieving their business goals.

### How this guide works

This guide is designed to provide a checklist for new and existing businesses who are looking to build or relocate into the City of Sandusky. By answering a few initial questions and then working through customized checklists, business owners can feel confident that they have met all the requirements to operate in good standing.

### Choose where to start

Are you a new business, start up, or entrepreneur that's trying to get your business incorporated and quickly up and running? Flip to **page 10** to start and learn how RISE can help get you going in the right direction.

Existing business? We can help you there too. Head to the next page to make sure you have crossed off everything on the list and then head to **page 12** to see how ECEDC and our partners can help you grow and expand your business.

# Start here.

These icons alert you to tasks with extended time requirements:



Are you finding broken links?

That means there's information newer than this document out there! See page 12 for the homepage link to all the agency and organization websites cited in this document.



## Ready to grow or establish a facility in the City of Sandusky?

One of the first steps a new or existing business owner should take once they've decided they want to open a business in the City of Sandusky is to schedule a meeting with the local and city economic development groups. This initial introduction can assist the process of becoming operational by foreseeing any challenges or hurdles businesses may face due to the specific context of their business.

### Will you be moving into an existing facility or constructing new/expanding a location?

If an existing facility, you'll want to work through the following checklist. (If building new continue to page 8.):

#### ZONING

Before signing your lease:

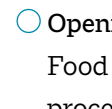
- Check the [Zoning Map](#) to ensure your business type and use is appropriate based on the zoning of your location.
- Owner should have an occupancy permit. Change of use will result in the need for a new occupancy permit.
- If you're making exterior changes to the building, check to see if you're in a [historic district](#). If so, you'll need to obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness for your proposed changes from the Sandusky Landmarks Commission.
- Notify the Fire Department of your new business and operation.

- Before design and purchase, review [signage regulation](#). After reviewing signage regulation, check out the [commercial sign permit](#).

#### LOCAL LICENSING & PERMITTING



- Is your business a food truck or food stand? You'll need a Public Vending License. Review and submit an [Application](#).



- Opening a restaurant? Check out the [Food and Beverage Guide](#) for the process to meet local requirements.



- Are you opening an Airbnb or short-term rental? You'll want to check out the transient rentals [Application](#) and [Zoning Regulations](#).

Be familiar with the types of building renovations that require permitting. Cosmetic improvements, like painting or flooring, typically do not require a building permit. However, items falling under categories require permitting and those permits can be found on the City of Sandusky's [online portal](#). Categories include: Building, Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing, Stormwater, Excavating, Flood Plain, Fire Alarm, and Sprinklers.

Have you selected a location that suits your business objectives?

Yes,

continue reading here to ensure you've met the regulatory requirements to operate there.

No,

economic development offices can assist you in your search.

Visit [Page 13](#) for contact information and services.

#### STATE LICENSING

Check state requirements at the official website of the State of Ohio: [Licenses & Permits | Ohio.gov | Official Website of the State of Ohio](#)

Liquor permits are handled at the state level. Specific attorneys are often hired to assist in the application process.

- New Liquor Permit [Process](#)
- Check [How to Apply](#) for more information
- [Forms Required](#)
- Sandusky DORA: The Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area allows patrons of establishments within a geographic boundary near Downtown to take beverages out of the business. View the rules and [FAQ](#) [here](#).

#### PARKING

Understand parking availability and regulations near your business in order to notify your customers.

- [Accessory Parking Facilities Required \(1149.02\)](#)
- [Location of Parking Facilities \(1149.07\)](#)

#### UTILITIES

Transfer utilities:

- City of Sandusky Water and Sewer: Call Customer Accounting Department at (419) 627-5893
- Columbia Gas: (419) 625-8875
- Ohio Edison: (419) 271-1313
- Telecommunication Providers: [Buckeye Broadband](#) [Spectrum](#)



**In Sandusky, the Planning Commission meets the 4th Wednesday of every month.**

Site plan applications are due the month before the meeting they will be presented (e.g. 4th Wednesday of May deadline for June meeting agenda item). We can help you work out any anticipated Planning Commission questions, staff comments, code requirements, other details so board approval is more likely in one meeting.

**If constructing a new building for your business or doing a large renovation of existing building:**

**ZONING**

Check the [Zoning map](#) to ensure your zoning is appropriate for your business function.

- **Change the Size of Your Lot.** The process of splitting or combining lots can be found [here](#). If you've found the perfect location but the size isn't right, depending on what you need you have two options. If you need a bigger size and there is available land, you can combine the spaces and keep it all under one name for convenience. If the space is bigger than what's needed, you can ask the owner to split the lot and have a chance to just purchase the space you need.

- **To best understand the traffic patterns** needed for your new building a meeting with the with the City Engineer, Josh Snyder is encouraged. This can be done after the preliminary drawings have been complete. Reach him at [\(419\) 627-5875](tel:(419)627-5875).

- **Accessways to parking areas** need to be planned ahead of time. Check out some of the requirements [here](#).
- **Check availability of needed utilities.**  
Columbia Gas: (419) 625-8875  
Ohio Edison: (419) 271-1313  
City of Sandusky Water & Sewer Department: (419) 627-5893

**SITE PLAN APPROVAL**

A registered design professional is the best resource to begin your site design.

The City Planning Division recommends scheduling a call or an informal meeting to discuss your site plan ideas before you prepare your formal submission.

- **Submit site plan** to the City of Sandusky Planning Division. Approval of site plan can take 6 - 8 weeks. This will include: setbacks, ingress/egress, parking, stormwater/grading, lighting, utilities location.

Changes may need to be made during this process to adhere to site requirements enacted by the City.



**BUILDING DEPARTMENT**

- **Working with registered contractors** is the smoothest way to begin constructing your building. Contractors will need to pull the necessary permits and follow the inspection instructions found within each permit. Items falling under these categories require permitting and those permits can be found on the City of Sanduskys' [online portal](#). Categories include: Building, Mechanical, electrical, Plumbing, Stormwater, Excavating, Flood Plain, Fire Alarm, and Sprinklers.



○ **Before construction begins**, you or your contractor must complete and submit the [Commercial Plan Approval Application](#) along with 3 copies of construction drawings developed by a registered design professional to the Building Department at 240 Columbus Avenue, Sandusky, Ohio 44870. The Building Department will have 30 days to respond to your application.

- **Receive Certificate of Plan Approval** from City of Sandusky Building Department.

- **Determine what type of signage** your business will need to make the desired impact. Once determined, fill out the [commercial sign permit application](#) with the City of Sandusky. There will be a fee associated with the application.

**UTILITIES & OPERATIONS**

The City of Sandusky makes getting started easy with the [Utilities Tap In and Set Up Form](#).

- **Excavation or Sewer Building Permit Application** required for the installation, repair or replacement or abandonment of any storm or sanitary lateral. 
- **Sewer and water connections** have a variety of fees (Sanitary Connection Fee, Water Tap-In Fee, Water Connection Fee). Review them [here](#). 
- **Set up the remaining utilities** for the business including:  
[Ohio Edison/First Energy](#)  
[Columbia Gas](#)  
[Telecommunication Providers: Buckeye Broadband, Spectrum](#)
- **Trash Collection:** Choose a local operator to set up your refuse and recycling collection. If you are located on Shoreline Drive or Downtown, check with the Sandusky Public Works Department to see if you are in a shared services area.

**Congratulations on your new business location.**

Final reminders: don't forget to update your insurance, mailing address, and all online listings which are very important to your search engine optimization. Celebrate and announce your growth with your customers. Partners at the City of Sandusky and Erie County Economic Development Corporation would be glad to welcome you and share the news.

## Special considerations for starting a new business.

### Are you a new business, start up, or entrepreneur that's trying to get your business incorporated and quickly up and running?

Take advantage of the local Regional Incubator for Sustainability & Entrepreneurship (RISE). RISE works with entrepreneurs in every phase of the business development process. Whether you are starting with just an idea in need of a plan, fresh start-ups in need of a boost, or a business looking to develop and execute a new growth strategy. RISE can give you access to expert advice and resources to help you start, develop, or accelerate your business. Our advisors are seasoned professionals in business and know what questions to ask to help you explore the many aspects of starting and running a business, including the list below! Work your way through this RISE recommended checklist for a solid legal and strategic foundation for a new business:

#### Checklist

- **Create a business plan.** A business plan should be feasible and cover a description of your products and services, potential competitors, marketing and sales ideas, and key partners, staff, or resources.
- **Work on financial planning** and projections that detail a worst, medium, and best-case scenario for the profitability of your business. You should have 1-3 years' worth of projections showing revenue and expenses quarterly or monthly.
- **Form your LLC.** Register with the state. Most small businesses will fall into this category when launching: [LLC \(Limited Liability Company\)](#). Other business entities can be researched [here](#).
- **Research and obtain necessary licenses** in accordance with the state [here](#).
- **Visit the IRS website** ([Internal Revenue Service website](#)) to establish your Employer Identification Number (EIN). You will need an EIN to create a separate checking account for your business.
- **Contact your bank to establish a checking account** for your business. Separating personal and business finances is key for tax purposes. Some banks in the area include [VacationLand Federal Credit Union](#), [Civista Bank](#), [First National Bank of Bellevue](#), [Firelands Federal Credit Union](#), PNC, and US Bank.
- **Obtain a Vendor's License**, which authorizes you to collect sales tax. You can either apply online at the [Ohio Business Gateway website](#) or in-person at your local county auditor's office: [Erie County Auditor's Office](#).



- **Investigate business insurance.** Contact and get a quote from multiple providers to find the best fit for your business. Some agencies in the area: [Bodey Insurance Agency](#), [Lindsley Insurance Agency](#), [Steinemann Hafner Insurance](#), [Willis Insurance Agency](#).
- **Get online!** Make sure people can find your business by growing an online presence. You want to be visible when people google you. Ways to gain an online presence include claiming a [My Business Google Listing](#); connecting to others on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter; and creating a website. [Squarespace](#), [GoDaddy](#) or [Wix](#) are popular places to purchase a URL and set up a website.
- **Some other helpful tools** for your business include bookkeeping programs like [QuickBooks](#), customer relationship management software like [Salesforce](#), or email marketing platforms like [Constant Contact](#) or [Mailchimp](#).

#### Get more assistance

Our RISE team can provide templates and one-on-one assistance working your way through this checklist. RISE events and workshops are another great way to sharpen your skills and build a local small business network. Check out current events on [Facebook](#) or contact [rise@eriecountyedc.org](mailto:rise@eriecountyedc.org) today.

## Business assistance programs & support organizations.





### Economic Development Programs




Companies making a significant investment in the City of Sandusky may be eligible for assistance through the following programs:

- Economic Development Fund Guidelines and Application**  
 The Sandusky Economic Development Fund program is intended to spur and support economic development activities within the City of Sandusky (“the City”). Financial assistance is available for new or expanding businesses and/or property owners that will positively affect the economic and employment climates in the City of Sandusky.  
 Financial assistance for new or expanding businesses and/or property owners that will positively affect the economic and employment climates in the City of Sandusky.
- Enterprise Zone Tax Abatement Guidelines and Application**  
 Certain new construction or renovation projects may be eligible for multi-year real estate tax abatement on the increased real estate tax liability of their project. This abatement provides real estate tax relief for a period of years and provide operations savings during the term of the abatement. All projects awarded real estate tax abatement under this program are required to meet or exceed a negotiated level of capital investment, new job creation and new payroll.



### Business Support Organizations

Organization	Description	Contact
	<p>A private non-profit organization serving our community through comprehensive economic development programs. We're here to help individuals and businesses start, stay, and grow in Erie County.</p> <p>Businesses that are experiencing challenges or opportunities can utilize ECEDC to gain access to several types of resources.</p>	<p><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:director@eriecountyedc.org">director@eriecountyedc.org</a></p> <p><b>Facebook:</b> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/OhioECEDC">@OhioECEDC</a></p> <p><b>Twitter:</b> <a href="https://twitter.com/OhioECEDC">@OhioECEDC</a> / <a href="#">Twitter</a></p> <p><b>LinkedIn:</b> <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/company/erie-county-economic-development-corporation">@OhioECEDC</a></p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="http://eriecountyedc.org">eriecountyedc.org</a></p>
	<p>RISE provides one-on-one advising, networking, and technical assistance for small businesses.</p> <p>Businesses can utilize RISE for early operational support and to provide critical connections to answer those early questions in the business development process.</p>	<p><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:rise@eriecountyedc.org">rise@eriecountyedc.org</a></p> <p><b>Instagram:</b> <a href="https://www.instagram.com/rise_entrepreneurs">@rise_entrepreneurs</a></p> <p><b>Facebook:</b> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/RISEingEntrepreneurs">@RISEingEntrepreneurs</a></p>
	<p>The official destination marketing organization for Erie and Ottawa Counties in Ohio, together known as Shores &amp; Islands Ohio.</p> <p>Businesses can utilize Shores and Islands for assistance in marketing and networking</p>	<p><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:Info@shoresandislands.com">Info@shoresandislands.com</a></p> <p><b>Facebook:</b> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/shoresandislands">@shoresandislands</a></p> <p><b>Twitter:</b> <a href="https://twitter.com/ShoresIslandsOH">@ShoresIslandsOH</a> / <a href="#">Twitter</a></p> <p><b>LinkedIn:</b> <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/company/shoresandislands">@shoresandislands</a></p>
	<p>Our goal is to represent the entire business community as effectively as possible so that not only businesses thrive, but the region as a whole thrives, and we may continue to experience improvements in our overall quality of life.</p> <p>Businesses can utilize ECCOC for business-to-business networking and advocacy.</p>	<p><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:info@eriecountycommerce.com">info@eriecountycommerce.com</a></p> <p><b>Facebook:</b> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/eriecountycommerce">@eriecountycommerce</a></p> <p><b>LinkedIn:</b> <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/company/erie-county-chamber-of-commerce">@erie-county-chamber-of-commerce</a></p>

Organization	Description	Contact
 <p>U.S. Small Business Administration</p>	<p>U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) continues to help small business owners and entrepreneurs pursue the American dream. SBA is the only cabinet-level federal agency fully dedicated to small business and provides counseling, capital, and contracting expertise as the nation's only go-to resource and voice for small businesses.</p>	<p><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:Mhoffma05@terra.edu">Mhoffma05@terra.edu</a>  <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:answerdesk@sba.gov">answerdesk@sba.gov</a>  <b>Facebook:</b> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/SBAgov">@SBAgov</a>  <b>Twitter:</b> <a href="https://twitter.com/SBAgov">@SBAgov</a>  <b>LinkedIn:</b> <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/company/us-small-business-administration">@us-small-business-administration</a></p>
 <p>CITY OF SANDUSKY, OHIO FOUNDED 1818</p>	<p>The Sandusky City Economic Development programs intend to spur and support economic development activities within the City of Sandusky. Financial assistance is available for new or expanding businesses and/or property owners that will positively affect the economic and employment climates in the City and broader Firelands Region.</p>	<p><b>Kristen Barone:</b> <a href="mailto:kbarone@ci.sandusky.oh.us">kbarone@ci.sandusky.oh.us</a>  <b>Quinn Rambo:</b> <a href="mailto:qrambo@cityofsandusky.com">qrambo@cityofsandusky.com</a>  <b>Facebook:</b> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/cityofsandusky">@cityofsandusky</a>  <b>Twitter:</b> <a href="https://twitter.com/cityofsandusky">@cityofsandusky</a>  <b>LinkedIn:</b> <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/company/city-of-sandusky-ohio">@city-of-sandusky-ohio</a></p>
 <p>MBET</p>	<p>Women and minority owned businesses can utilize MBET for peer networking, learning, and marketing.</p>	<p><b>Facebook:</b> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/MBETSandusky">@MBETSandusky</a></p>

### More About the Erie County Economic Development Corporation (ECEDC):

ECEDC is a private nonprofit that assists companies to Start, Stay & Grow in Erie County. As you work your way through this guide, our team can assist you with the following:

#### SITE SELECTION

ECEDC keeps a database of available sites for businesses to utilize. This includes both vacant land and buildings businesses can move into. Steps to determine what is best for you include:

- Specific Zoning Needs (i.e. Commercial, Industrial, Office, Warehouse, ect.)
- Pricing
- Site Tour
- Infrastructure (Utilities, Parking, Traffic Patterns)
- Renovation Costs

#### CONTRACTOR SELECTION

Through our work within the community, we have put together a detailed list of various contractors specializing in the different aspects of building new or renovating existing space. Contractors' areas of specialty include:

- Architecture & Advisors
- Finance and Title
- General & Design-Build
- Concrete & Materials
- HVAC & Plumbing
- Finishing Touches

#### CRITICAL CONNECTIONS

Joining a network of experienced business leaders and members of our community can be the difference in success or failure. Tap into a network that offers insight and advice that will help your business succeed. We can connect you with a number of critical connections including:

- Accounting
- Legal
- Networking Organizations & Events

#### BRE ACTIVITIES

Our Business Retention and Expansion program connects new and expanding businesses to common needs, such as:

- Financing
- Ohio Tax Credits, Exemptions, Abatements, and Grants
- Infrastructure
- Brownfield Redevelopment
- Economic Research
- Regulatory Issues
- Industry and Function-Specific Needs
- Workforce Hiring and Retaining





247 Columbus Avenue  
Suite 126  
Sandusky Ohio 44870

In coordination with



Thank you to the Erie  
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