

Seattle Permits

— part of a multi-departmental City of Seattle series on getting a permit

Home Occupations

Updated February 20, 2015

Home occupations are allowed as accessory uses in residences in Seattle, subject to these conditions:

- The home occupation must be conducted by someone living in the residence.
- The home occupation must be clearly incidental to the use of the property as a dwelling.
- Customer visits are by appointment only.
- Except for child care programs, only two people living offsite may work in the home for the home occupation.
- Home occupations must be conducted only within legal structures on the lot.
- In legal backyard cottages, the same rules for home occupations apply.
- Child care* may be conducted only in the principal structure or in a legal accessory dwelling unit. Bed and breakfast occupations may be conducted only in the principal structure (see page 2).
- No outdoor storage is permitted in conjunction with the occupation, and the only allowable exterior evidence of the occupation may be child care play areas or other outdoor features normally associated with residential use, such as normally allowed parking.
- A maximum of two passenger vehicles, vans or similar vehicles (less than 10,000 pounds gross vehicle weight) are permitted to operate in conjunction with the occupation.
- The dwelling unit is limited to one commercial delivery daily Monday through Friday, and no commercial delivery is permitted on Saturday, Sunday or federal holidays.
- A home occupation may not cause substantial increases in on-street parking or traffic in the immediate vicinity.

- The occupation must not produce noise impacts, odor, smoke, dust, light and glare, electrical interference or other similar impacts extending beyond the property line of the lot where the occupation is located.
- Interior and exterior alterations consistent with the development standards of the underlying zones are permitted.
- For single family and duplex structures, home occupations within a dwelling unit may not take up more than 500 square feet of the dwelling unit, under the provisions of the *Seattle Residential Code* (section R202).

* *NOTE: For a child care other than a Family Home Child Care as defined by the Washington State Department of Early Learning, see Tip 108, Regulations Governing Child Care Centers.*

Signs

Externally illuminated or non-illuminated signs that do not exceed 64 square inches in area are allowed in most zones.

Alterations to Structures for Home Occupations

If a home occupation requires physical alterations to the home, a building permit may be required depending upon how extensive the changes will be. See *Seattle Residential Code* section R105; *Seattle Building Code* section 106. The residential character and use of the dwelling unit should be preserved. In non-residential zones, interior or exterior alterations may require a permit to change the use from residential to a use more appropriate to the nature of your business, such as live-work unit or light manufacturing.



Bed and Breakfast Establishments

Bed and breakfast establishments are governed by rules different from other home occupations and there are additional permit requirements (see *Seattle Municipal Code* section 23.44.051 (Single Family zones); section 23.45.545 (Multifamily zones)).

In a **single-family zone**, any lot line of property containing any proposed new bed and breakfast use must be located 600 feet or more from any lot line of any other bed and breakfast use.

In **single-family zones**, neighborhood mitigation provisions are required:

1. The owner will make public transit information available to patrons, and the owner's operating plan must describe how the transit information will be made available to patrons.
2. The design of the structure in which the use is located and the orientation of the access will minimize impacts, such as noise, light and parking, to neighboring structures.
3. The owner's operating plan includes quiet hours, limits on programmed on-site outdoor activities, and parking policies to minimize impacts on residential neighbors.
4. The delivery of goods and services associated with the bed and breakfast use are accommodated at a time and in a manner that will limit, to the extent feasible, impacts on surrounding properties.
5. The operator of the bed and breakfast shall distribute the operating plan to all residents and property owners within 300 feet of the proposed bed and breakfast use. The distributed plan shall reference the Land Use Code provisions that require notice to neighbors; and provide contact information for SDCI's Review and Inspection Center and contact information for the operator of the bed and breakfast. Applicants are required to provide proof of their good faith effort to distribute the operating plan before a permit establishing the bed and breakfast use will be issued.

In **single-family zones** the following additional conditions apply:

- The bed and breakfast must be operated by the owner of a fifty percent or greater interest in the dwelling in which the bed and breakfast is located and that fifty percent or more owner must reside in the structure.

- The bed and breakfast may have no more than five guest rooms. (This limitation does not apply to bed and breakfasts which were established on or before April 1, 1987, and have been in continuous operation since that date.)

The following conditions apply in both **single-family and multifamily zones**:

- Interior and exterior alterations consistent with the development standards of the underlying zones are permitted.
- New bed and breakfast establishments are permitted in single family homes and multifamily units that are at least five years old.
- A license for the bed and breakfast must be secured from the Seattle Department of Finance and Administrative Services.
- There shall be no evidence of the bed and breakfast from the exterior of the structure, except that a modest sign, externally illuminated or non-illuminated of less than 64 square inches in area, is allowed.
- Bed and breakfast establishments must provide parking—one space for the dwelling unit and one space for each two guest rooms.
- The bed and breakfast may operate only within a single dwelling unit.
- The bed and breakfast may only be operated within the principal structure, not in an accessory structure.
- No more than two persons not residing in the dwelling unit may be employed in the bed and breakfast establishment.

Animals

Businesses involving the keeping of animals have special rules outlined in the Seattle Land Use Code (*Seattle Municipal Code*, Section 23.44.048).

Getting More Information

If you anticipate operating a business out of your home and are unsure whether the Land Use Code allows it, you may either: (1) Check the language in the Land Use Code, Section 23.42.050; or (2) Visit the SDCI Applicant Services Center, located on the 20th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower at 700 Fifth Ave., to discuss your plans with a permit specialist.

NOTE: Due to the complexity of Seattle's Land Use Code, and the importance of providing you with the most accurate information that specifically addresses your situation, SDCI staff does not answer questions on this topic by phone.

Access to Information

Links to electronic versions of SDCI **Tips, Director's Rules**, and the **Seattle Municipal Code** are available on the "Tools & Resources" page of our website at www.seattle.gov/sdcj. Paper copies of these documents, as well as additional regulations mentioned in this Tip, are available from our Public Resource Center, located on the 20th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower at 700 Fifth Ave. in downtown Seattle, (206) 684-8467.