Home Occupations

Updated April 4, 2022

The purpose of this Tip is to help customers understand the rules for home-based businesses in the City of Seattle. This Tip includes the most recent available rules as of March 2022, including relaxed or removed requirements related to the COVID-19 civil emergency.

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.
- Home occupations must be conducted only within legal structures on the lot.
- Home occupation rules apply to legal detached accessory dwelling units.
- Child care* may be conducted only in the principal structure or in a legal accessory dwelling unit.
- The home occupation is not allowed to have outdoor storage on the property.
- The home occupation is allowed to operate a maximum of two passenger vehicles, vans, or similar vehicle (each less than 10,000 pounds gross vehicle weight) in conjunction with the occupation.
- The dwelling unit is limited to one commercial delivery daily Monday through Friday. No commercial deliveries are permitted on Saturday, Sunday or federal holidays.
- The home occupation may use up to one required parking space for the dwelling unit, provided that no changes are made that would prevent the space from being used for parking in the future.
- The home 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 allowed. A permit may be required depending on the scope of the changes, see below.
- 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

You are allowed to have one non-illuminated sign, no more than 720 square inches, that displays the name of your home occupation.

Alterations to Structures for Home Occupations

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

Bed and Breakfast Establishments

The City regulates bed and breakfast establishments by rules different from other home occupations and they have additional permit requirements (see Seattle Municipal Code section 23.44.051 (Single Family zones); section 23.45.545 (Multifamily zones)).
In single-family zones the following additional condition applies:

- 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 must be consistent with the development standards of the underlying zones.
- The bed and breakfast operator must secure a license from the Seattle Department of Finance and Administrative Services.
- All operators of bed and breakfasts who use a short-term rental platform for listing the bed and breakfast shall have a valid short-term rental operator's license issued by the Department of Finance and Administrative Services.
- There shall be no evidence of the bed and breakfast from the exterior of the structure, except that operators are allowed to have a modest sign, externally illuminated or non-illuminated of less than 64 square inches.
- A bed and breakfast use may be located in a principal dwelling unit or in an accessory dwelling unit.

Animals

The City has special rules that apply to businesses involving the keeping of animals as 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 our website at www.seattle.gov/sdci. 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.