



City of Seattle

Department of Planning and Development

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Micro-housing and Congregate Residences October 7, 2013

This FAQ answers common questions about the proposed new rules DPD recommends for micro-housing and congregate residences. For more background please browse the materials on our website: <http://seattle.gov/DPD/codesrules/changestocode/micros/whatwhy/>

Q. Will the new regulations still permit micro-housing?

Yes. In parts of the city zoned for multi-family housing micro-housing will still be allowed, but there will be additional standards and requirements. DPD has found that micro-housing provides an important lower-cost housing option that is appealing to many renters, and we recommend that it continue to be allowed to meet this demand.

Q. What's the difference between micro-housing and a congregate residence?

In micro-housing there are groupings of up to 8 residents within a household who share a common kitchen. Each resident has a bedroom with a private bathroom. Micro-housing can be in different types of buildings including townhouses, rowhouses, or even apartment like structures.

Congregate residences are group housing arrangements with more than 8 sleeping rooms such as dormitories and some types of senior housing. They have some similarities to micro-housing and are addressed in the new rules. Congregate residences are in one building and are apartment-like structures. In a congregate residence there are usually a few larger lounges, lobbies or common areas that serve the whole building.

Q. Will design review be required?

Yes. New regulations will require design review for all new micro-housing and congregate residence projects that exceed a certain size. Projects with 6,000-11,999 square feet will undergo Streamlined Design Review (SDR), projects with 12,000 – 19,999 square feet will undergo Administrative Design Review (ADR), and projects with 20,000 square feet or more will undergo full design review. We think the majority of all new micro-housing and congregate residence projects will go through design review with these new requirements. See our Director's Report for the differences between the types of design review.

Q. Will I be able to comment on proposed micro-housing or congregate residence projects in my neighborhood?

If a project is required to go through design review public notice is required, which includes a mailing to addresses within 300 feet of a proposed project. We post the design review plans on our website. Design review includes a chance to provide comments on the design, which are considered by our planners when reviewing the project. For projects undergoing Administrative Design Review (ADR) and full design review, there is an opportunity to appeal the land use permit decision to the city's Hearing Examiner, if you believe the decision we make is incorrect.

Q. Will micro-housing or congregate residences be allowed in single family neighborhoods?

No. The new rules strengthen restrictions on micro-housing in single family zones. Homes in single family areas could still be rented by a group of up to 8 roommates, but the new rules prohibit new construction or remodeling to create structures specifically configured as micro-housing. Congregate residences are not allowed in single family zones.

Q. Will micro-housing and congregate residences be required to provide car parking?

In parts of the city where there is a parking requirement for other forms of housing - yes. The new rules will require micro-housing and congregate residences to provide 1 car parking space for every 4 sleeping rooms. Places where this would apply are generally areas outside of urban villages and urban centers, and places where transit service is infrequent.

In parts of the city where there is no parking requirement for other types of housing, there would not be a parking requirement for micro-housing or congregate residences. These places generally include urban villages and urban centers where the Comprehensive Plan focuses growth, and places with frequent transit service.

Q. Will micro-housing and congregate residences be required to provide bicycle parking?

Yes. All micro-housing and congregate residence projects will be required to provide bicycle parking. The new regulations increase the required amount to 1 bicycle parking space for every 4 residents.

Q. How will you make sure basic livability standards are met for all the residents?

The new regulations will require minimum sizes for common spaces in all new micro-housing and congregate residence projects. In micro-housing the shared kitchen for each grouping of up to 8 residents would have to be at least 120 square feet. In congregate residences, a total amount of common space such as shared kitchens or lounges would have to be at least 10% of the area in all of the building's sleeping rooms. By making sure the housing has adequate common area for functions such as cooking, dining, doing laundry, and gathering, we believe the livability of the housing option will be improved.

Q. How do you make sure micro-housing and congregate residences are constructed for fire and life safety?

A. DPD carefully applies building code standards to all new housing including micro-housing and congregate residences; proposed new rules do not change this. The City Building Official and Fire Marshal have each reviewed micro-housing types and determined safety requirements can be met. Key safety features that are applied to all new projects include:

- Early warning systems – let people know there's a problem with hard wired alarm systems
- Fire Suppression – put out the fire before it grows too large (sprinklers)
- Fire Containment – keeps the fire from spreading too far
- Structural protection – keeps the structure standing long enough to get people out
- Egress – makes sure people have a clear path to get out

Depending on building configuration and size, most new micro-housing and congregate residences will be required to satisfy safety requirements with items such as: interconnected smoke alarms, fire suppression sprinklers, fire rated walls, fire rated egress pathways and other features.