

Bed & Breakfast and Short-term Rental FAQ's...

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What is a conditional use?

A use allowed in a zoning district that can be approved by the Assembly with conditions. The conditions must be able to mitigate the impacts of the use.

What are some examples of conditional use permits?

An example might be a Bed & Breakfast conditional use permit or a short-term rental conditional use permit.

What is the difference between a bed & breakfast and a short-term rental conditional use permit request?

A bed & breakfast means a lodging use, where individual rooms within your home are provided to guests on a daily basis or for a short period of time for a fee. Breakfast and/or light snacks may be served to guests renting rooms. Cooking facilities are not allowed in the guest rooms. The owner must reside at the home.

A short-term rental is considered to be a stay of fourteen days or less. The rental is a separate dwelling unit such as an apartment that is rented to one party or individual.

Are bed & breakfasts and short-term rentals controversial in Sitka?

Occasionally. While most of them are approved with little fan fare, some have involved considerable debate. Approval, therefore, is not automatic. If issues do surface, the review process may slow considerably. Conversations with neighbors in advance will increase the likelihood of a straightforward review.

How many parking spaces am I required to have for a short-term rental?

There needs to be two parking spaces per unit.

How many parking spaces are required for a bed & breakfast?

There needs to be a minimum of one off-street parking space for every three guest rooms or two spaces per four or five guestrooms. In addition, there has to be two off-street parking spaces for the house. So...a one guestroom bed & breakfast would require a total of three parking spaces.

Do I need a life safety inspection?

Yes. All bed & breakfasts and short-term rentals require a life safety inspection that is completed by the building officials. You can contact them at 747-1837. Among the items that will be checked are properly located and functional smoke detectors, a way directly to the outside from every sleeping room (a door or a window of a certain minimum size), guardrails and handrails for stairs and decks, and a mounted fire extinguisher.

How many guests may stay in a bed & breakfast or short-term rental?

A restriction of two guests per guestroom is generally placed on the permit.

When do I need to have my application submitted?

Complete applications and all supporting materials must be submitted by noon on Tuesday, two weeks prior to a scheduled Planning Commission meeting. These meetings are normally held on the first and third Mondays of the month. If a meeting is to be held Monday August 18th the application and materials need to be submitted by noon on Tuesday August 5th. Adhering to this time frame allows the municipality to review the applications, send out notifications, and run the required advertisements in a timely fashion.

What kind of supporting materials do I need to submit with my application?

Remember *you* are most familiar with your project. The Planning Department and Planning Commission don't know what the topography or layout of the project look like. Therefore, it is important to be as detailed and thorough as possible. Imagine you are telling a story.

For a bed & breakfast or short-term rental in addition to the routine requirements, you must provide a detailed interior and exterior drawing, parking spaces, and a narrative of how the operation will work.

Is there a conditional use application fee?

Yes. For a standard conditional use permit the fee is \$100.00 + 5% sales tax, totaling \$105.00.

For a bed & breakfast permit the fee is \$35.00 for each room plus the current sales tax.

Does a short-term rental or bed & breakfast permit expire?

Not necessarily. Permits lapse and become void if the short-term rental or bed & breakfast ceases operation for twelve consecutive months.

Permits may be approved with the condition that they are reviewed in one year.

If my conditional use request is not approved, is the fee refundable?

No, the fee is non-refundable.

How long does the conditional use permit process take?

Generally it will be on the Planning Commission's agenda twice and then recommended to the Assembly for final approval. Overall, the process takes six to eight weeks.

If my conditional use request is granted when does it take effect?

Once approved by the Assembly it goes into effect immediately.

Will my neighbors be notified of my project? Do I need to speak with them beforehand?

Both you and your adjacent property owners will receive a copy of the Planning Commission agenda, a vicinity map, and a copy of your project plans the week before the meeting. A notice will also appear in the newspaper the Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday before the meeting as well as the day of the meeting.

As a general courtesy to your neighbors, the Planning Office recommends you inform surrounding neighbors of your project plans. They will appreciate the effort and, as a result, the process may go more smoothly.

Do I need to be present at the Planning Commission meeting and Assembly meetings?

Yes. Often the Planning Commissioners have specific questions pertaining to the projects and you being present, allows for these questions to be answered. Although there may not be questions at the Assembly meeting, it is still advisable to attend.

Who has the burden of proof in B&B's and short-term rentals?

The applicant is responsible for proving to the Planning Commission that the short-term rental or B&B will not have any adverse impacts on adjacent property. Regardless of approval, if there are impacts, conditions may be set forth by the Planning Commission. Ultimately, it is the applicant's responsibility to prove to the Planning Commission that their project is workable and will have no adverse impacts on the surrounding area.

Why are your rates so low?

Glad you asked. Our rates haven't been updated for 15-30 years and are roughly a third of those charged other similar Alaska communities. The fees may increase in 2004.

How do your review times compare with other communities?

We take pride in the fact we are able to process requests quickly. In most cities the processing time is much longer than the four weeks for a variance request or the six to eight weeks for a conditional use permit request.

I've been thinking about this project for two years and I have a contractor ready to go.**Why do I have to go through the Planning Commission process now?**

All projects that fall outside of the normal zoning code standards must go through the Planning Commission for approval. Contractors for the most part will be understanding since they are familiar with the procedures.

Do I have to speak at the Planning Commission and Assembly? I'm uncomfortable with public speaking.

The week before the Planning Commission each board member receives a packet of information, which describes each request on the agenda in detail. Board members may or may not have questions for you. If they do, the questions are generally very simple.

How long does it take to get a building permit if everything is approved at the Planning Commission or Assembly?

Approximately four to five days for residential structures.

Does the Planning Office inspect my property before the meeting and, if so, should I make an appointment so I can be there?

The Planning Office does not formally "inspect" your property so there is no reason to make an appointment. Before the board member packets are prepared, the Planning Office staff visits each site to visually see the request as this aids in the full understanding of the proposed request.

Can someone else represent me at a meeting if I'm going to be out of town?

Certainly. Family members or friends that are familiar with the project often represent owners who are out of town.

Will I get a reminder before the meeting?

No. The only "reminder" per se will be a copy of the informational letter that goes out to your surrounding neighbors a week before to notify them of your project. On the notice is the meeting date and time. The Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday before the meeting, there is a notice in the newspaper as well as the day of the meeting.

What gets mailed to my neighbors?

Your neighbor receives a copy of the meeting's agenda, a vicinity map showing the location of your project as well as any maps, drawings, and narratives.

If this process still seems a little confusing, don't worry. The Planning Office will make every effort to help where needed and make it go as smoothly as possible.