

Home Occupation Legislation FAQs



Bringing Business Home

Supporting Small, Home-Based Businesses during the Pandemic



 **Councilmembers Dan Strauss & M. Lorena González**

What does this legislation do?

This proposal would create temporary flexibility for small and micro-businesses operating out of homes. Home-based businesses are already allowed, as long as they meet [conditions set by the City](#). The proposal would modify some of the most restrictive conditions for the next year to allow more businesses to operate out of homes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What conditions would be suspended?

The conditions that would be suspended are:

- Customer visits are by appointment only
- There is no evidence of the home-based business visible from the exterior of the structure
- No more than two persons who are not residents of the building may work in a home-based business
- The home-based business shall not cause a substantial increase in on-street parking congestion or a substantial increase in traffic within the immediate vicinity

Home-based businesses would also be allowed to operate in a house's off-street parking stall or garage and have one non-illuminated sign with the business name if it is not larger than 720 square inches.

What problem is this trying to solve?

The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating to the small businesses that are the fabric of our communities. Small businesses have been nimble and creative in adapting to changing circumstances,

but our land use code is too rigid and has not kept up. As some business owners have moved to home-based business models to stay open and avoid commercial rents they can no longer afford or if they're starting a new venture as a means of income, complex City rules have held them back. With so many issues facing Seattle today, there are more important things for the City to do than shutting down small businesses.

A recent example is the [closure of Yonder Bar in Greenwood](#). Yonder Bar opened in August and has been selling cider cans out of their garage. Despite widespread neighborhood support, Yonder was forced to close after complaints to the City uncovered code violations; our current code for home-based businesses would require keeping their garage door shut, cutting off open air circulation during a respiratory pandemic. The current requirements were last updated more than six years ago and don't provide the flexibility needed in the current economic and public health environment.

Will this change the type of buildings allowed in my neighborhood?

No, this proposal does not make any changes to the types of buildings that are allowed in your neighborhood. It only makes modifications to the requirements of businesses that are operating out of those existing buildings.

Do you have to own your home to have a home-based business?

Home-based businesses must be conducted by someone who lives in the residence, but they do not have to own the residence themselves. Lease agreements tend to stipulate what types of activity can take place in a rental unit, so you should check with the property owner before pursuing a home-based business.

What about noise?

We're spending more time than ever in our homes, so noise impacts matter more than ever. This proposal does not make any changes to the City's existing [noise ordinance](#). Additionally, home-based businesses are not allowed to have more than one commercial delivery per day, and none on weekends.

What about public drinking/public health/safety?

This proposal does not make any changes to public health guidelines, food safety rules, or liquor license requirements. It also does not change the type of behavior allowed in public – that means open container [laws](#) still apply.

I'm a small business owner. How do I take advantage of these changes?

Depending on how you plan to operate your business, you may already be able to take advantage of home-based business rules. The current rules can be found [here](#). If your business would rely on one of the changes in this proposal, you could open as soon as the legislation takes effect (which is expected later this year), no permit required!

When will these changes take effect? How long do they last?

The City Council expects to vote on this proposal on Monday, March 15th. If the proposal passes, it will take effect 30-days after the Mayor signs it into law. That means it's likely to take effect on or soon after April 14th.

How can I provide input or follow along?

The Council's Land Use and Neighborhoods Committee will be considering the proposal at meetings on Wednesday, February 24th and Wednesday, March 10th. Both meetings start at 9:30am and begin with public comment. Committee agendas, including how to sign-up for public comment, can be found [here](#). To receive agendas via email, sign-up [here](#).

You can also provide written comments by emailing the City Council at council@seattle.gov. Or find your Councilmembers [here](#).