



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
INSPECTIONAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT – BUILDING DIVISION
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE - MAYOR

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR SHORT TERM RENTAL (AIRBNB) LISTINGS IN SOMERVILLE

- Short term room rentals are permitted in Somerville in certain circumstances; short term rental of an entire unit is prohibited under the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO))
- Short term rentals within residential buildings are only permitted by Zoning under two programs in Somerville: 1) as a Tourist Home Accessory Use (SZO Sec. 2.2.165); or 2) as a Historic Bed & Breakfast (SZO Sec. 2.2.16.1)
- Tourist homes must be owner occupied principal residences; Historic Bed & Breakfasts (see additional info below) must have an on-site operator.
- Renters cannot sublet rooms or spaces in their units as short term rentals
- Building code requires additional safety measures when a space is converted to transient use, which a short term rental is. (An exception applies to 1 or 2 family homes where transient renters do not exceed 10 at any one time).

Tourist Home Accessory Use:

1. Unit must be an owner-occupied principal residence.
2. Up to three (3) rooms are generally permitted to be rented for zoning purposes, except that RA and RB zones require a special permit for 3 rooms. An entire dwelling unit cannot be rented.
3. Rentals must be for less than seven (7) days.
4. No food can be served except a continental breakfast (as defined by 105 CMR 590.001), unless both an Innholder License is obtained from the Somerville Licensing Commission and a Food Establishment License is obtained from the Somerville Board of Health.
5. Five (5) or more unrelated people occupying a dwelling unit is not permitted.¹
6. Only one dwelling unit per building may be used to rent rooms.
7. Additional parking spaces are required for every three (3) rooms rented.
8. The rental portion may not occupy more than 25% of gross floor area of the building.
9. You must apply for and obtain a certificate of occupancy from the building inspection department to meet additional safety requirements of a transient use, unless the building is a one or two family home and the number of occupants in the entire building will not exceed ten (10) transient individuals at any time. See the sections following Historic Bed and Breakfast Use for guidelines on applying for applicable permits from ISD.

¹Somerville Zoning Ordinance Section 2.2.53 defines family as, “[a]n individual, or two (2) or more persons related by blood, marriage or adoption, living together as a single housekeeping unit and occupying one (1) dwelling unit; or a group or pair of individuals, not so related, but living together as a single housekeeping unit. For purposes of controlling residential density, not more than four (4) unrelated individuals shall constitute a family.



Historic Bed and Breakfast Use:

1. If the building is: a) within a local historic district², and, b) the appropriate special permit with design review, where applicable, is obtained, the unit may permit occupancy for less than fourteen (14) days as a “Historic Bed and Breakfast” for zoning purposes.
2. The premises must be occupied as the principal residence of the operator of the Bed and Breakfast. The operator shall be on the premises when services are being provided, especially overnight and for breakfast if served.
3. Up to nine (9) rooms for rent may be permitted with a special permit and design review approval for zoning purposes.
4. If three (3) or less rooms are available for rent, no food can be served except a continental breakfast (as defined by 105 CMR 590.001), unless both an Innholder License is obtained from the Somerville Licensing Commission and a Food Establishment Permit is obtained from the Somerville Board of Health. If four (4) or more rooms are rented, the serving of any food will require both an Innholder License and a Food Establishment Permit. The unit is not subject to the 25% gross floor area of the building zoning requirement or related individuals zoning requirement set forth for tourist homes. See following sections for guidelines on applying for applicable permits from ISD.

Step by Step ISD Permit Guide in Varying Examples:

I) Tourist Home Use for 1 or 2 Family Home with No More Than 10 Transient Renters at any One Time. Need to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy as a 1 or 2 family house (R-3) with a tourist home accessory use.

1. Please go to the Inspectional Services page on the Cities website at www.somervillema.gov/ISD and click the citizenserve logo link. There click “Apply for a Permit” in the left upper corner. If you do not have an account, please complete the free registration.
2. Select “Application for Certificate of Occupancy”, and fill out the required information in the application page. Please note in your application that you are applying for an accessory tourist home use, for short term rental and how many rooms you are renting and the max number of people you will be renting to at any one time. If you have any specific questions about the application process please contact the front desk at (617)625-6600 ext. 5600 and they can walk you through the process.
3. Pay the application fee
4. Load the following required documentation to your application:
 - A detailed and legible floor plan which lists the total square footage of the floor area of the building. The floor plan shall also designate which rooms you will be renting out and those room dimensions, so as to verify the Gross Floor Area Requirement.
 - Documentation which verifies you are the owner of the unit and it is your principal residence.
 - If renting 3 rooms, a certified plot plan with parking layout which shows the property has sufficient parking. (Renting 3 rooms in a RA or RB zone as a tourist home will also require you to obtain a Special Permit from the Zoning Board).
 - Contact the Planning Department about specifics and procedures at 617-625-6600 ext. 2500.

² A listing of Somerville Historic Districts can be found in the Somerville Code of Ordinances Section 7-18 at https://www.municode.com/library/ma/somerville/codes/code_of_ordinances .

- Special Permit Application Forms and Information can be found at http://www.somervillema.gov/residents/forms-library?field_document_department_nid=216
- If serving food which exceeds the definition of a continental breakfast as defined in 105 CMR 590.001, a copy of your Food Establishment License from the Somerville Board of Health and Innholder License from the Somerville Licensing Commission.
 - Innholder License Application and Guidelines can be found at http://www.somervillema.gov/residents/forms-library?field_document_department_nid=199
 - Follow up questions regarding the Innholder License should be directed to the City Clerk's Office 617-625-6600 ext. 4100
 - Food Establishment License Application can be found at <http://www.citizenserve.com/CAP/CitizenController?Action=ShowLicensePage>
 - Follow up questions regarding the Food Establishment License should be directed to the Inspectional Services Health Department at 617-625-6600 ext. 4331
- 5. Your application will be reviewed for compliance. If your application conforms to the requirements, an inspection of the unit will be scheduled to verify accuracy of your application and review any potential safety concerns. Any safety concerns found on the inspection will have to be resolved prior to issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy.
- 6. After passing the inspection a Certificate of Occupancy as a 1 or 2 Family Home with Tourist Home Accessory Use, occupancy classification R-3 will be issued.

II) Tourist Home Use for 3 or More Unit Property, or 1 or 2 Family Home with More than 10 Transient Renters at One Time.

Need to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy converting the unit designated for use as a tourist home to a transient (R-1) use and make alterations to comply with heightened safety regulations.

1. Follow the steps outlined in section I, concurrently with the steps below.
2. Obtain the services of a duly licensed Massachusetts Registered Design Professional (Engineer or Architect) to generate detailed plans to convert the unit to R-1 transient use. The plans may contain but not be limited to work for the following: installation of fire doors, fire walls, attic draft stopping, manual fire alarm, exit signage, emergency lights, fire escape, and automatic sprinkler system. The plans shall detail existing and proposed work. The plans shall bear the stamp and signature of the Registered Design Professional.
3. Those plans shall be submitted as part of a building permit application to Inspectional Services. Building permits for 3 or more unit buildings are required to be submitted by a duly licensed Massachusetts Construction Supervisor. Depending on the work being done, Electrical and Plumbing Permits may also be required. Electrical permits are required to be submitted by a duly licensed Massachusetts Electrician and Plumbing permits are required to be submitted by a duly licensed Massachusetts Plumber.
4. Work will be done pursuant to those plans after the permit is approved and issued, and will be inspected for compliance.
5. After all work has been done and passed inspection and any applicable licenses and permits are obtained, a Certificate of Occupancy with R-1 transient occupancy classification will be issued.

III) Historic Bed & Breakfast Use for 1 or 2 Family Home with No More Than 10 Transient Renters at any One Time.

Need to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy as a Historic Bed and Breakfast (R-3 use).

1. Please go to the Inspectional Services page on the Cities website at www.somervillema.gov/ISD and click the citizenserve logo link. There click "Apply for a Permit" in the left upper corner. If you do not have an account, please complete the free registration.
2. Select "Application for Certificate of Occupancy", and fill out the required information in the application page. Please note in your application that you are applying for Historic Bed & Breakfast use, and how many rooms you are renting and the max number of people you will be renting to at any one time. If you have any specific questions about the application process please contact the front desk at (617)625-6600 ext. 5600 and they can walk you through the process.
3. Pay the application fee
4. Load the following required documentation to your application:
 - Documentation which verifies you are the owner of the property and it is your principal residence.
 - A detailed floor plan which shows which rooms you will be renting.
 - If you are in a RA, RB, RC, NB, or UN Zone, you will need to load a copy of your Special Permit with Design Review approval from the Somerville Zoning Board.
 - Contact the Planning Department about specifics and procedures at 617-625-6600 ext. 2500.
 - Special Permit application forms and information can be found at http://www.somervillema.gov/residents/forms-library?field_document_department_nid=216
 - Your Zone Historic Bed & Breakfast Special Permit requirements can also be found in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance Table of Permitted Uses, Section 7.11.3.g., which can be found at https://www.municode.com/library/ma/somerville/codes/zoning_ordinances
 - Additional zoning requirements for a Historic Bed & Breakfast can be found in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance Section 7.12.3.
 - If serving food which exceeds the definition of a continental breakfast as defined in 105 CMR 590.001, a copy of your Food Establishment License from the Somerville Board of Health and Innholder License from the Somerville Licensing Commission.
 - Innholder License Application and Guidelines can be found at http://www.somervillema.gov/residents/forms-library?field_document_department_nid=199
 - Follow up questions regarding the Innholder License should be directed to the City Clerk's Office 617-625-6600 ext. 4100
 - Food Establishment License Application can be found at <http://www.citizenserve.com/CAP/CitizenController?Action=ShowLicensePage>
 - Follow up questions regarding the Food Establishment License should be directed to the Inspectional Services Health Department at 617-625-6600 ext. 4331
 - If making any external alterations to your Historic Home, a copy of the approval from the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission
 - Follow up questions regarding alterations to a Historic Home should be directed to Preservation Planner Kristi Chase 617-625-6600 ext. 2525.

- Historic Preservation Application for Proposed Changes can be found at <http://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2016%20HPC%20Application.pdf>
5. Your application will be reviewed for compliance. If your application conforms to the requirements, an inspection of the property will be scheduled to verify accuracy of your application and review any potential safety concerns. Any safety concerns found on the inspection will have to be resolved prior to issuance of a certificate of occupancy.
 6. After passing the inspection and obtaining all other applicable licensing and/or permitting requirements, a Certificate of Occupancy as a Historic Bed & Breakfast, occupancy classification R-3 will be issued.

IV) Historic Bed and Breakfast Use of a Three or More Unit Home.

Need to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy as a Historic Bed and Breakfast with R-1 transient use occupancy classification and make alterations to comply with heightened safety regulations.

1. Follow the steps outlined in the Historic 1 or 2 Family Home concurrently with the steps below.
2. Obtain the services of a duly licensed Massachusetts Registered Design Professional (Engineer or Architect) to generate detailed plans to convert the *entire building* to R-1 transient use. The plans may contain but not be limited to work for the following: installation of fire doors, fire walls, attic draft stopping, manual fire alarm, exit signage, emergency lights, fire escape, and automatic sprinkler system. The plans shall detail existing and proposed work. The plans shall bear the stamp and signature of the Registered Design Professional.
3. Those plans shall be submitted as part of a building permit application to Inspectional Services. Building permits for 3 or more unit buildings are required to be submitted by a duly licensed Massachusetts Construction Supervisor. Depending on the work being done, Electrical and Plumbing Permits may also be required. Electrical permits are required to be submitted by a duly licensed Massachusetts Electrician and Plumbing permits are required to be submitted by a duly licensed Massachusetts Plumber.
4. Work will be done pursuant to those plans after the permit is approved and issued, and will be inspected for compliance.
5. Any work which affects the external appearance of your historic home will require approval from the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission
 - Follow up questions regarding alterations to a Historic Home should be directed to Preservation Planner Kristi Chase 617-625-6600 ext. 2525.
 - Historic Preservation Application for Proposed Changes can be found at <http://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2016%20HPC%20Application.pdf>
6. Work will be done pursuant to those plans after the permit is approved and issued, and will be inspected for compliance.
7. After all work has been done and passed inspection and any applicable licenses and permits are obtained, a Certificate of Occupancy as a Historic Bed & Breakfast with R-1 transient occupancy classification will be issued.