



ZONING FAQs

Common Questions from Residents

I want to add on to my home – What is the process?

Depending on the size of the addition, you will either need to apply for a Design Review Permit with the Planning Division, or a building permit with the Building Division. Additions that include an increase of 50 percent or more in existing floor area and/or break the existing roof line of the structure require a Design Review Permit. The Design Review Guidelines, process and application can be found by visiting the [Design Review Board](#) page. Projects that do not involve the type of construction noted above will require a building permit from the Building Division. The building permit process and application can be found by visiting the [Plan Submittal & Permit Requirements](#) page.

I want to replace my windows – What is the process?

Most window replacements will require a building permit from the Building Division and review by the Planning Division. Planning staff will review the plans to ensure the same window types are being replaced for a uniform design. For more information on the building permit process and application, please refer to the [Plan Submittal & Permit Requirements](#) page.

What are setbacks?

A setback, also referred to as a “yard”, is the area between a property line and a building or structure which must be kept clear or open. Property lines and yards are broken into four types: front, street side, interior side, and rear. Required setbacks for each type of yard are based on the property’s zoning district. Please visit our [Interactive Zoning Map Tool](#) and search by address or APN to determine a property’s zoning district. Click on the Zoning link to further view required setbacks. For help in locating your property line, please visit the [San Mateo County GIS Property Maps Portal](#).

What are the requirements for fencing?

Fences are regulated by height and location. The maximum allowed height of a fence is based on its location on the property and whether it is located in a required setback, or yard. Within a required front and/or street side yard, fences may be a maximum of three (3) feet; within a required interior side and/or rear yard, fences may be a maximum of six (6) feet. Outside of required yards, fences may be a maximum of six (6) feet. Increased fence height may be allowed subject to the approval of a Minor Use Permit. For further information, please refer to SSFMC [Section 20.300.005](#).

Do I have an easement on my property?

An easement is a portion of land created by grant or agreement for specific purpose; an easement is the right, privilege or interest which one party has in the land of another. Easements can be used for streets, lanes, or other public ways or places, sanitary sewers, drainage, utilities or other public purposes. For help in determining whether there is an easement on your property, please visit the [San Mateo County GIS Property Maps Portal](#).



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You can also refer to a copy of your Title Report or reach out to the Engineering Division at 650-829-6656 or EngDevelopment@ssf.net.

What are the requirements for adding a shed to my property?

A shed, otherwise known as an accessory building, may only be constructed on a lot on which there is a permitted main building or on an adjacent lot under the same ownership. Accessory buildings are subject to the following requirements:

- Limited to two (2) per lot;
- Located in the rear half of the lot;
- Limited to 20 percent of the footprint of the main building or 220 square feet, whichever is greater; and
- Located at least six (6) feet from any other structures, inclusive of roof eaves.

Additionally, setbacks from property lines are required and are based on the size of the accessory building. Additional development standards of the property's zoning district will also be considered, including but not limited to, total lot coverage and floor area ratio (FAR) requirements. For more information, please refer to SSFMC [Section 20.300.002 Accessory Buildings and Structures](#).

Any accessory buildings over 120 square feet require a building permit from the Building Division and review by the Planning Division. The building permit process and application can be found by visiting the [Plan Submittal & Permit Requirements](#) page.

Is a short-term vacation rental permitted at my residence, and what is the City approval process?

A short-term vacation rental is a residential structure that is rented to a transient occupant for a period of less than 30 days. A short-term vacation rental is permitted at your residence if:

- You are the permanent resident of the proposed short-term vacation rental;
- Your proposed short-term vacation rental use is for an existing single-family dwelling unit (multi-family units and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) are not eligible);
- You are applying for only one short-term vacation rental permit;
- You can provide at least one-off street parking space for use by your short-term vacation renters;
- You have a local contact person who will be available to respond within one (1) hour to any issues that arise whenever the unit is rented or occupied;
- You have a valid business license; and,
- The terms of any applicable lease agreements, HOA bylaw, or CC+Rs permit short-term vacation rentals.

To operate a short-term vacation rental, approval from the Planning Division is required, in addition to a business license from the Finance Department. The overall process will take approximately 5-6 weeks. For more



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information, please refer to SSFMC [Section 20.350.040 Short-Term Vacation Rentals](#) and the [Short-Term Vacation Rental Permit Application](#). The business license application, fees, and process can be found by visiting the [Business License](#) page.

Can I operate a business from my home?

A resident of a dwelling unit may operate certain businesses out of their home. These types of business are referred to as a home occupation. A home occupation must be supplemental to the residential use of the structure and located within the habitable area of the dwelling in compliance with specific standards. Home occupations tend to be small in nature and are limited to certain business types. All home occupations require a business license from the Finance Department. For more information, including the business types not permitted as a home occupation, please refer to SSFMC [Section 20.350.023 Home Occupations](#). The business license application, fees, and process can be found by visiting the [Business License](#) page.

Can I operate a family day care from my home?

Most residential districts in the City allow the operation of a family day care facility within a single-unit residence or other dwelling unit. There are two types of family day care facilities: small and large. The type depends on the number of children the facility provides care for. Both small and large family day care facilities require approval from the Planning Division, as well as must be licensed by the State of California. Additional requirements, including hours of operation, dedicated play area, and passenger loading and drop-off areas, are also required. For more information, please refer to SSFMC [Section 20.350.019 Family Day Care, Large](#).

Common Questions for Residential Construction

What is the Zoning for my property?

Please visit our [Interactive Zoning Map Tool](#) and search by address or APN. Click on the Zoning link to further view permitted uses, development standards, and parking requirements.

What are development standards?

A development standard is a criterion that governs an aspect of the design of a building, subdivision or the use of land. Examples of a development standard are the maximum height of a building, total floor area ratio, yard setbacks and landscaping requirements. Each zoning district is governed by its own set of development standards.

Can my development standards be reduced?

Most new development must comply with the current development standards for the project site's zoning district. In certain circumstances, slight deviations from the development standards may be allowed, subject to the approval of a [Waiver and Modification](#) or a [Minor Use Permit for Non-Conforming Structures](#).



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How many units can I have on my property?

The number of units allowed on a property are based on the maximum density for a zoning district and the size of the property. Maximum density, taken as units per net acre, can be found by using the [Interactive Zoning Map Tool](#) to search by address or APN, and linking to the zoning district.

What is a Planning entitlement? What is the process? How much does it cost, and how long does it take?

A Planning entitlement is a discretionary Planning approval granted to an applicant to allow for a specific type of land use and/or to allow for the construction, modification, or use of a building. Planning entitlements can be administrative or require a public meeting/hearing with the Design Review Board (DRB), Zoning Administrator (ZA), Planning Commission (PC), and/or City Council (CC), depending on the type of entitlement and proposed project.

A preliminary review is required for all entitlement applications, and must be scheduled at least ten business days prior to submitting an application. Please call 650-877-8535 or email planning@ssf.net to set up a meeting.

Once an application is submitted, the process can take on average three to nine months, depending on the project. All Planning Applications and related fees can be found by visiting the [Planning Applications and Guidelines](#) page.

What is the Design Review Board (DRB)? When is DRB review required, and what is the application process and cost?

The DRB is a discretionary review board consisting of five design/construction professionals who review Design Review Permits for the following residential projects: construction of a new residential unit/s; and additions that include an increase of 50 percent or more in existing floor area and/or break the existing roof line of the structure. The Design Review Guidelines, process and application can be found by visiting the [Design Review Board](#) page; the required fees are listed in the [Planning Division Fee Schedule](#).

Can I have an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) on my property?

An ADU is allowed on any lot with an existing or proposed single-unit or multiple-unit residential dwelling. The number and type of ADU/s allowed depends on the lot type. All new ADUs require a building permit from the Building Division and review by the Planning Division. Further information can be found by visiting the [Accessory Dwelling Units/Junior Accessory Dwellings](#) page.

Can I split my lot?

Depending on the size of your property, you may be able to split, or subdivide, your property into two or more lots. Lot size requirements, including minimum depth, width, and overall square footage, depend on the zoning district of the property. Additional requirements for each lot, such as street access and utility access, will also apply. Please reach out to the Planning Division at 650-877-8535 or planning@ssf.net for further information.



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How big can my new house or addition be? What is the difference between maximum lot coverage and maximum FAR?

The size of a new residence or residential addition is regulated by the size of your property and the development standards required for the property's zoning district. Lot coverage refers to the portion of a lot that is covered by structures, including principal and accessory buildings, garages, carports, and roofed porches. Floor area ratio (FAR) refers to the ratio of the total floor area of all buildings on a lot to the lot area. For more information on what is included in total lot coverage and FAR, please refer to SSFMC [Chapter 20.040 Rules of Measurement](#).

How many parking spaces are required for a single-family home?

Most single-family residences require a total of two parking spaces. Additional parking may be required based on the square footage of a residence and/or the number of bedrooms. For more information, please refer to SSFMC [Chapter 20.330 On-Site Parking and Loading](#).

Do you have copies of plans for my house?

The Building Division may have copies of plans in their historic files. Please reach out to the Building Division at 650-829-6670 or building@ssf.net to request information on old plans. The San Mateo County Assessor's Office may be another resource to obtain copies of plans.

Common Questions from New Businesses

I want to start a business. What is the process?

The first step would be to determine whether your business is a permitted use at the desired location. Please visit our [Interactive Zoning Map Tool](#) and search by address or APN to determine a property's zoning district. Click on the Zoning link to further view permitted uses, development standards, and parking requirements.

The second step would be to obtain a business license from the Finance Department. All persons operating or doing business within the city limits of South San Francisco are required to obtain a business license, including businesses that operate from home. The business license application, fees, and process can be found by visiting the [Business License](#) page.

How do I obtain a business license?

Business licenses are issued by the Finance Department. All persons operating or doing business within the city limits of South San Francisco are required to obtain a business license, including businesses that operate from home. The business license application, fees, and process can be found by visiting the [Business License](#) page.



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How can I be sure that the building's zoning allows for my proposed business?

Please visit our [Interactive Zoning Map Tool](#) and search by address or APN to determine a property's zoning district. Click on the Zoning link to further view permitted uses, development standards, and parking requirements.

I want to make tenant improvements – What is the process?

Most tenant improvements require a building permit from the Building Division. You can apply through the Building Division's online permitting center at <https://permits.ssf.net/>. With your online permit, please attach a completed plan check application (see [Plan Submittal Requirements and Application](#)).

What are the requirements to start a cannabis business?

The operation of a cannabis business requires an operator's permit and business license from the Finance Department and a Conditional Use Permit from the Planning Division.

The following cannabis uses are allowed in the City subject to approvals from the City and State:

- Indoor Personal Cultivation in residential zoning districts (No formal City approval is required for indoor personal cultivation);
- Manufacturing;
- Testing;
- Distribution;
- Indoor Commercial Cultivation; and
- Delivery-only businesses.

The permitted uses, excluding Indoor Personal Cultivation, shall only be located in the following districts, east of US-101:

- Business Commercial Zoning District (BC);
- Business Technology Park Zoning District (BTP);
- Bay West Cove Specific Plan District (BWCSPD);
- Gateway Specific Plan District (GSPD);
- Mixed Industrial Zoning District (MI); and
- Oyster Point Specific Plan District (OPSD).

Further information can be found by visiting the [Cannabis Information](#) page.

What are the sign regulations for my business?

Sign regulations are based on the property's zoning district and sign type. Regulations include sign design, location, number allowed, and size. For more information, please refer to SSFMC [Chapter 20.360 Signs](#).



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Do I need a permit to add or change a sign?

Most signs require a Sign Permit from the Planning Division, as well as a building permit from the Building Division. Sign regulations are based on the property's zoning district and sign type and include sign design, location, number allowed, and size. For more information, please refer to SSFMC [Chapter 20.360 Signs](#).

How many parking spaces do I need to provide for my business?

The number of parking spaces required for a business depends on the business use classification. To determine the number of required parking spaces, please refer to SSFMC [Chapter 20.330 On-Site Parking and Loading](#).

I want to hold a special event at my business – What is the process?

Businesses are allowed to hold a certain number of special events in a 12 month period, subject to approval from the Police Department. A Special Events Permit is required for most special events, and an application must be submitted to the Police Department at least 30 days in advance of the event. For more information, please refer to SSFMC [Chapter 6.48 Special Event Permits](#) and the [Special Event Permit Application & Information Packet](#).