FAQs for Bellingham’s Short-term Rental Regulations
Bellingham Municipal Code (BMC) Section 20.10.037

What is a Short-term Rental (STR)?
A lodging use, other than a hotel or motel, in which a dwelling unit or portion thereof is provided to guests by a short-term rental operator for a fee for fewer than 30 consecutive nights.

How many days/year can an STR be operated?
• Residential zones: With primary residency at least 270 days/year, individual bedrooms can be rented year round. The whole unit can be rented for no more than 95 days/year.
• Commercial and Urban Village zones: There is no maximum number of days/year individual bedrooms or the entire unit can be rented.

Where can an STR be located?
• STRs are allowed in legally-established dwelling units, including accessory dwelling units (ADUs) (when permitted), in residential, commercial and urban village zoning districts.
• Residential zones: STRs are only allowed in dwelling units (including ADUs when permitted) that serve as the primary residence of the applicant (an owner or long-term tenant) for at least 270 days/year.
• Single-family zones: STRs are not allowed in detached ADUs.

Note: See BMC 20.10.037 for other exceptions

What type of STR land use permit is required?
• Single-family zones: Up to 2 bedrooms—Type I; up to 5 bedrooms—Type II
• Multi-family zones: Up to 2 bedrooms—Type I; up to 5-bedrooms—Type II
• Condominiums in residential zones: Where STRs exceed the maximum of 1 unit or 25% of the units (whichever is greater)—Type III-A and condominium approval
• Commercial and Urban Village zones: Up to 5-bedrooms—Type I

How many STRs can I operate?
• Residential zones: Only 1 STR per operator is allowed. If an owner agrees to let a long-term tenant have an STR, this counts as the 1 permitted STR for both the owner and tenant.
• Commercial and Urban Village zones: There is no cap on STRs per operator.
• All zones: On sites where an STR is permitted in an ADU, an STR permit may be obtained for either the primary dwelling unit or ADU—not both.

Do I need to live there?
• Residential zones: The dwelling unit (including an ADU when permitted) housing the STR must serve as the operator’s (owner or long-term tenant) primary residence for at least 270 days/year.
• Commercial and Urban Village zones: Primary residency is not required.

How long is a permit valid?
The permit must be renewed on or before January 1 of every even-numbered year. Failure to comply with the BMC may result in permit revocation and/or a fine as per BMC 20.52.

What are the fees?
See the Land Use Fee Schedule

Other Requirements:
• City of Bellingham Business License
• Federal, state, and local license & tax compliance
• Liability insurance
• City Inspection per BMC 20.10.037.D.11
• All other requirements outlined in BMC 20.10.037
• Other permits as required

This handout is intended as a guide only. Operators are responsible for compliance with all applicable regulations.