Guest House

PJR-012

Purpose: This handout summarizes the regulations of the Sonoma County Zoning Ordinance for guest houses.

What is a guest house?

A guest house, as defined in Sonoma County Code, Section 26-02-140, is a detached accessory building of a permanent type of construction which includes living area with no provisions for appliances or fixtures for the storage and/or preparation of food, including, but not limited to, refrigeration, dishwashers or cooking facilities. Living area may include a full or half bath. A guest house cannot be leased, subleased, rented or sub-rented separately from the main dwelling.

The maximum floor area of a guest house is six hundred forty (640) square feet. Floor area is calculated by measuring the exterior perimeter of the guest house and the length of any common walls. In the case of straw bale or similar construction, floor area may be calculated using interior dimensions. For the purpose of calculating the maximum size of a guest house, any storage area attached to the guest house, excluding garage, shall be included.

A guest house must be located closer to the primary dwelling on the subject lot than to a primary dwelling on any adjacent lot. The guest house shall not be located more than one hundred feet (100') from the primary dwelling on the subject lot, except where the planning director determines that a greater setback is appropriate in light of topography, vegetation or unique physical characteristics.

Where are guest houses allowed?

Guest houses are allowed in residential zoning districts (R1, R2, R3, RR and AR) and in agricultural and resource zoning districts (LIA, LEA, DA, RRD, and RRDWA). Properties must be developed with a primary dwelling before a guest house may be constructed.

What permits are required for guest houses?

A guest house requires zoning approval on the associated development permit. In addition to zoning approval, other permits that may be required include: building permit, zoning permit, grading permit, septic permit, well permit, sewer permit and an encroachment permit.

What are the required Permit Fees?

Permit fees vary depending upon type of construction and the availability of sewer and water. See the current PRMD fee schedule or contact a permit technician.