Home-Based Businesses

Frequently Asked Questions

The responses below are intended to clarify the regulations for home-based businesses as required in subsection 4102.7.H of the Zoning Ordinance.

1) What types of businesses am I allowed to operate from my home?
   - General retail sales (such as the sale of clothing or kitchenware) when sale and delivery occur online or off-site;
   - Small health and exercise facility (such as yoga instruction);
   - Repair of small household items (such as repair of musical instruments or watches);
   - Office (such as an interior designer, accountant, or doctor's office);
   - Barbershop and hair salon (no nail, facial, massage, or other services allowed) – only with special permit approval;
   - Sewing and tailoring;
   - Music, photography, and art studios;
   - Specialized instruction center (such as tutoring, music lessons, or art classes); and
   - Small-scale production (such as jewelry making or baked goods, or coffee roasting), limited to items created on-site and home-based food production, when sale and delivery occurs online or off-site (i.e., no on-site customers, except to view samples only). Small-scale production does not include heavy industrial activities.

2) Do I need a permit for teleworking?
   No, teleworking allowed by your employer does not require a permit. Any business that is conducted from or has a business license registered to the home requires a permit.

3) How many customers can I have?
   Except for instructional uses, special permit approval by the BZA is required to have any customers come to your home. Teaching activities associated with health and exercise or specialized instruction (see above) may have up to four students at a time and eight in a day with administrative permit approval. A special permit may not approve customers for retail sales and small-scale production. Customers are limited to the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

4) How many employees can I have?
   With administrative permit approval, one nonresident employee is allowed in a single-family detached dwelling between 7:00 AM and 6:00 PM, but no nonresident employees are allowed in all other dwelling types (e.g., townhouses, apartments). Additional employees or different hours could be approved with a special permit.

5) How many home-based businesses can I have?
   There is no limit to the number of home businesses. However, certain standards, such as the total area (maximum of 400 square feet), number of employees, and the limit of one commercial vehicle, apply cumulatively to the entire site.

6) My HOA covenants do not allow home-based businesses. Will the County enforce the covenants on behalf of the HOA?
   HOA covenants are a private matter to be enforced by the HOA, and the State Code does not allow the County to withhold issuing a permit based on HOA or other private agreements. They may be more restrictive than the Zoning Ordinance provisions, but they may not be more permissive. Prior to submitting an application, an applicant is advised to check if any HOA or other private agreements apply to their property.

7) What kind of signage is permitted?
   The Zoning Ordinance allows yard signs on all residentially zoned lots, including lots having a home-based business, regardless of the message. A single sign is limited to four feet in height and four square feet in area. Total signage on the lot is limited to 12 square feet (i.e., a maximum of three signs that are four square feet or four signs that are three square feet, etc.).

8) What are the parking requirements?
   There is no specific parking rate for an accessory home-based business use, but if the home-based business is allowed to have customers, an off-street parking space that can be reserved or made available by the person operating the home-based business must be made available for those customers to park. This may include a driveway space or an assigned parking space, but public street parking cannot be used to meet this requirement.

9) Can I use my entire home for my home-based business?
   No, the total area used for the home-based business, including storage, is limited to 400 square feet with an administrative permit. A larger size may be approved with a special permit.

10) What if I want to do more than these limitations allow?
    A special permit may be approved by the Board of Zoning Appeals to allow for outdoor activities associated with a home-based business (such as swimming or soccer lessons), a larger area used by the business, additional employees or different work hours, and customers or clients.

11) How much will the permit cost?
    The administrative permit fee is $135, and the special permit application fee is $585. As of July 1, 2026, the application fees will be $140 for the administrative permit and $615 for the special permit.

12) Other than the home-based business administrative or special permit, do I need any other approvals?
The home-based business administrative or special permit grants zoning approval, but other approvals or licensing may be required, depending on the nature of the business. Home-based businesses are also subject to the Business, Professional, and Occupational License (BPOL) Tax.

13) How can I find out about home-based businesses in my neighborhood?
Administrative permits and special permits can be found in PLUS, which can be searched by address or by "home-based business." Home occupation permits approved before July 1, 2021, are also available through the PLUS link for historical data.

14) Are there any additional requirements if the property is on a private well or septic system?
Yes, if the property is served by a well or septic system, Health Department approval will be required prior to an administrative permit or special permit being approved. Also, certain items are not allowed to be disposed of in a sewer, in accordance with Ch. 67.1 of the County Code.

15) Are there limits on the materials or products that I may use as part of my business?
A home-based business may not use, store, or generate flammable or combustible liquids, explosives, or hazardous materials in an amount that requires a permit under Chapter 62 of the County Code (Fairfax County Fire Prevention Code).

16) Am I allowed to have a commercial vehicle?
Yes, one commercial vehicle is allowed on a residential lot. The vehicle must be owned or operated by an occupant of the dwelling, not exceed 21 feet in length, and comply with other standards of the Zoning Ordinance in subsection 4102.1.B(2).

17) Are sales of firearms as regulated by the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives considered a home-based business?
No, transfers of firearms require a zoning interpretation: Interpretations of the Zoning Ordinance | Planning Development.

If you have additional questions, please email OrdAdmin@fairfaxcounty.gov or call 703-324-1314.