

Q&A Steps for Operating a Recovery Residence

Q: How does the property need to be zoned?

A: The property needs to be zoned appropriately for a “Rooming House” through the office of License and Inspections in your county. A rooming house is defined as a building arranged or occupied for living and NOT occupied as a single family or a two-family dwelling. “BASEMENTS are NOT habitable space.”

- (A) Obtain a Commercial Activity License via L&I which is free of charge (charging “resident fees” to live in a recovery residence constitutes a business, therefore, you need a CAL unless you’re a 501c3 (nonprofit entity). Most properties are initially zoned for “Single Family Dwelling” this will only allow you, legally, to have three (3) unrelated individuals living in the house.
- (B) Through the zoning process, L&I will determine how many individuals can reside in the “Rooming House.”
- (C) L&I will also inform the owner of the residence of the needed repairs and modifications for the new zoning, i.e. hard wire fire alarm system, fire extinguishers clearly displayed on each floor, exit signs, square footage for each resident, # of bathrooms needed for number of residents, etc.
- (D) Need to clearly display Certificate of Occupancy, Rooming Home License, and Community Activity License.

Q: How do you gain community support?

A: The owner should inform the community about the intended use of the property as a “Recovery Residence” and attempt to build community support.

- (A) If most of the community is not in favor of the recovery residence opening in their neighborhood, they could possibly block the zoning process via Councilman / Councilwoman, or the Recovery Community Organization meeting process.
- (B) Conduct an “Open House” and/ or invite members of the community in to view the residence and see / hear what your residence will do for the community.
- (C) Plan for the residents to have certain days when they sweep/ clean and/or shovel snow on block, keep front of Recovery House clean always, and do not “hang out” or smoke cigarettes in front of house – use backyard for smoking area.
- (D) Schedule an appointment at the local Income Maintenance office (DPW) to make them aware of the new recovery residence and create working relationship- all residents will be going to this office to apply for benefits (cash, food stamps, medical).
- (E) Have your organization reach out to local drug and alcohol treatment programs, inpatient and outpatient, to make them aware of your Recovery Residence and or Services.
- (F) Allow for representatives of the treatment programs in to view the physical plant, daily operations to achieve a sense of what your program offers. This will support their decision in determining to make referrals there.
- (G) Identify all local outpatient programs that your residents may be attending (resident choice) and create working relationships.

Q: What documents are to be included and needed for the recovery residence?

A: All Recovery Residences should have the following: mission statement, code of ethics, written house rules, admission criteria, resident agreement, supervision requirements, health and safety policy, operating standards, grievance policy and drug and alcohol screening policy at the minimum.

The main theme in all successful recovery residences is the process of one person in recovery helping another: sharing household responsibilities and meals, caring compassionately about one another, feeling passionately about recovery, learning to get along with others, helping each other in daily lives.

Q: Is your recovery residence required to have a hard-wired fire alarm system?

A: Yes.

Q: Does any change made to a property from its approved use require an occupant to file for a change of use?

A: Yes any change must be approved per the Zoning Code by obtaining a new Zoning Code Permit, Certificate of Occupancy and most likely change the fire protection requirements for the building.