

Few bed-and-breakfasts in Edmonds, but city hopes streamlined regulations will encourage more to open

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David Schaefer and Pat Moriarty in the studio apartment they rent as a bed and breakfast.

Cozy studio apartment with private entrance. Outdoor garden seating with peek-a boo view of Puget Sound. This updated, modern apartment is located on the first floor of our home in a residential neighborhood in the historic, waterfront community of Edmonds, Washington. — Description of Moriarty/Schaefer rental from Airbnb.com

Pat Moriarty knows from personal experience how challenging it can be to find lodging for visitors in Edmonds. With just one hotel — the Harbor Inn — in the downtown core, rooms can be scarce for out-of-town guests arriving to attend weddings and family reunions. And that's especially true if you are a fan of the small, personalized living arrangement such as a bed-and-breakfast — the type of lodging that Moriarty and her husband David Schaefer prefer when they travel.

So Moriarty, a retired educator, and Schaefer, director of public affairs at the Woodland Park Zoo, decided to convert the first floor of the Maple Street home they own into a studio apartment. For the past year, they have made it [available for rent on airbnb.com](#) — a popular website for those seeking bed-and-breakfast lodging worldwide.

The couple refers to their home as a bed and breakfast, although Moriarty is quick to explain that they offer a continental breakfast rather than a full hot meal. The establishment is also licensed as a bed and breakfast with the City of Edmonds, which recently updated the city code to encourage the growth of B&Bs in a town that promotes tourism, but has minimal lodging to support it.

Or as Schaefer puts it: “There’s one hotel and a lot of reasons for people to come here.”

Rob Chave, the city’s Planning Manager and Acting Development Services Director, said the intent of the code update, approved by the Edmonds City Council in July 2012, “was to streamline the regulations so that people interested in opening a B&B wouldn’t feel daunted, but welcomed. Edmonds has relatively few hotels, so the city felt that encouraging B&Bs to locate in Edmonds was a good way to support tourism, and in a way that is in keeping with Edmonds’ ‘small town’ image,” Chave added.

Many would agree Edmonds seems like the perfect place to set up a bed and breakfast. With its quaint charm and well-appointed and historic homes, downtown Edmonds and its surrounding neighborhoods have many amenities to offer for tourists visiting here — from restaurants and shops to a movie theater and beach access, not to mention a thriving arts scene including a performing arts center.

Yet, there are few establishments listed as B&Bs, perhaps due to the intimidation factor of city regulations, the financial unknown of whether the cost of upgrading a room for visitors can be recouped through the room rate, and the fact that some people just aren’t comfortable opening up their home to complete strangers. (A quick Google search of local websites brings up the names of a few B&B websites that are now out of business, according to phone calls made to those establishments. In addition to Moriarty and Schaefer’s place, only one — the Dayton at 522 Dayton Street — is still operating and it offers two rooms, according to owner Mary Stovel.)

That doesn’t mean there aren’t short-term rooms for rent in Edmonds, as evidenced by listings in the 98020 and 98026 ZIP codes on the same Airbnb.com website where you can find Moriarty and Schaefer’s unit. And those rentals are legal in single-family residences under the city’s development code, Chave said, as long as the room is rented to a family of five or fewer persons. It would be difficult to meet the family requirement when renting more than one room in the same home, Chave said, noting that “B&Bs that typically have more than one bedroom would quickly run into trouble.”

“By going through the B&B approval they do avoid any future questions regarding how many people are staying/living there... so it’s a good strategy,” Chave said. “Clearly it may affect resale value, as well.”

When Moriarty first mentioned the idea of starting a bed-and-breakfast, Schaefer admitted that he was not supportive. “I fought it all the way,” he said. “I don’t think I realized the potential for doing it. I knew we were going to spend some money on the capital cost side and I wasn’t sure that we would make it back.”

On her end, Moriarty was worried about meeting city regulations. “I heard it was difficult,” she said. When the code changed, she took the plunge and went down to city hall, where she took a closer look at the new B&B ordinance and talked with city staff. She discovered that she didn’t have to comply with expensive requirements governing commercial lodging establishments, such as installing a heavy-duty fire door that automatically closes.

“The only thing I had to do was install a CO2 (carbon monoxide) monitor,” she said.

According to Chave, the cost of registering a bed and breakfast is the city’s normal \$100 business license for those establishments with two bedrooms or less, not counting the owner’s bedroom. Those B&Bs with three or more bedrooms (in addition to the owner’s bedroom) would also need a conditional use permit, which costs another \$590.



The Maple Street room has a garden sitting area and a view of Puget Sound.

Moriarty and Schaefer said the past year as bed and breakfast owners has been a positive one.

“We’ve not had a bad experience,” Schaefer said.

“I don’t think I’ve washed a dish,” Moriarty added. “Most people strip the bed, people often throw their towels in the washer.”

The couple has hosted guests from across the U.S. and around the world. One woman came from Australia to see a local naturopath. Another traveled from Norway, staying nearly a month so she could spend time with her Edmonds-based son and grandchildren. Two guests from Korea, avid golfers, came to visit friends and also play the nearby Lynnwood and Nile golf courses.

Rates are \$125/night in the summer, while winter rates run \$90, both with a two-night minimum. That includes a continental breakfast for the first day and coffee/tea service.

Why do people chose a bed and breakfast rather than a hotel? Moriarty said visitors enjoy waking up, fixing a cup of coffee or tea and “having a place to sit and be comfortable.” In addition, guests appreciate the ability to connect with their hosts and learn first-hand recommendations for local attractions and restaurants.

And Moriarty noted that she enjoys getting to know her guests as well. “I really want to make it a goal of mine to have people sit upstairs for a cup of coffee and a chat because there are such great people coming through from such wonderful places,” she said.

She offered this advice for those thinking of starting a bed and breakfast: First, study the [city’s bed and breakfast ordinance](#), then “go talk to somebody before you start so you feel comfortable that it’s not going to be the hassle that you think it might be.”

“And I would be happy to talk to people,” she added.

Schaefer said he has overcome his early skepticism about the venture. “I just wasn’t certain it was a good investment and it’s turned out to be quite a good investment,” he said. “We aren’t making a ton of money but we’ve certainly gotten

back what we've put into it.”

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