FAQs for Bellingham’s Temporary Shelter Regulations
Bellingham Municipal Code (BMC) Chapter 20.15

What is a temporary shelter?
Temporary shelters (i.e. temporary building encampments, temporary safe parking areas, temporary tent encampments, and temporary tiny house encampments) provide temporary housing accommodations for people experiencing homelessness.

Where can temporary shelters be located?
- Temporary safe parking areas, temporary tent encampments and temporary tiny house encampments: Any zoning district.
- Temporary building encampments: Industrial zones, public zones, commercial and industrial areas within urban villages, and commercial zones where hotels and motels are permitted.

What are the occupancy limits?
- Temporary safe parking areas, temporary tent encampments and temporary tiny house encampments: No more than 100 people. The total number of people in multiple shelters can’t exceed 300.
- Temporary building encampments: No more than 300 people citywide in no more than four temporary building encampments.

What are the operation time frame limits?
- Temporary safe parking areas and temporary tent encampments: No more than 90 days. One 90-day extension may be granted.
- Temporary tiny house encampments: Between 90 days and two years.
- Temporary building encampments: Up to five years.
- All types: May not occupy the same site more than once per year, or within 180 days after vacating the site.

What type of permit is required?
- All temporary shelters require a temporary shelter permit.
- Please consult planning staff early in the project planning process (210 Lottie Street, City Hall, or 360-778-8300).

Which temporary shelters are exempt from permitting?
- Short-term emergency temporary building encampments.
- Confidential shelters as defined in the BMC.
- Temporary shelters that are accessory to the primary religious use of a church building.
- Temporary building encampments on property owned or controlled by a religious organization are exempt from zoning restrictions.

What is the permit approval process timeline?
All temporary shelter applications include a modified Type II review process. After a 14-day public comment period, a final decision is made within 30 days of application submittal. See BMC 20.15.080.

Is a permit fee required?
Temporary shelter permits do not include a fee.

Conditions and waivers:
- The planning director has the ability to impose conditions on the permit to ensure that the proposal meets the standards in BMC 20.15.
- The applicant may request that the director waive one or more of the standards in BMC 20.15.

Other requirements (check applicability):
- License agreement and liability insurance
- City inspection
- Other permits may be required

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