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Beaufort vacation rental checklist

Beaufort County, South Carolina | Rules checked November 6, 2026

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The City of Beaufort caps short-term rentals at 4% of eligible parcels in its designated neighborhoods and 3% in the National Historic Landmark District, with a waitlist once a cap is reached. New rentals must be 300 feet from any other, keep a 2-night minimum, and have a monitored fire alarm. Tax is 10%.

Three strikes in 12 months: a written warning, then a $500 fine, then suspension or revocation of the business license. Operating without a license bars a new rental license for two years.

Narrow exceptions to the cap cover rehabilitated properties from the city's abandoned or dilapidated list (bought January 1, 2025 to April 28, 2026), one inheritance, and multiple rentals on one parcel that were lawful before April 28, 2026.

The ordinance adds an annual short-term rental fee set by city council, but we didn't find the amount. Ask the Business License Division.

Licensing steps

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

- [ ] **Get a retail license for direct bookings**
  If you take bookings yourself, you need a SCDOR retail license for each rental property and must file and pay electronically through MyDORWAY. If you rent only through a property manager or an online travel company that takes the payment, they remit the state tax and you don't need a license. Rent no more than one week a quarter and you can file once a year instead.
  MyDORWAY: https://mydorway.dor.sc.gov/
- [ ] **Know what the platform collects**
  Airbnb collects the 5% sales tax, 2% accommodations tax, and the local sales taxes the state collects, on its bookings. It also collects some county and city accommodations taxes, but only in the places it lists. Everything else is yours to file.
- [ ] **Register for local taxes**
  Many counties and cities charge their own accommodations tax (up to 3%), a hospitality tax, or a beach preservation fee. They collect these directly, so you register with the county or city even if a platform pays your state tax.
- [ ] **Check your property tax rate**
  A home that is your legal residence keeps the 4% assessment ratio only if it is rented out 72 days or less a year. Rent it more and it is taxed as a 6% rental property. Ask your county assessor.
- [ ] **Then your county and city**
  Business licenses, rental permits, and zoning are where South Carolina towns differ most. Pick your area.

BEAUFORT COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA

- [ ] **Find out who governs your address**
  A Hilton Head, Bluffton, Beaufort, or Port Royal address may be outside town limits. If it is, the county's permit, business license, and 3% accommodations tax apply instead. Check your parcel before you apply.
- [ ] **Then your town or area**
  Permits, caps, and fees differ in every town. Pick your area.

CITY OF BEAUFORT

- [ ] **Check the cap and spacing first**
  Use the city's interactive neighborhood map, then email the Business License Office to confirm a spot is open; the map doesn't show pending applications. Only one rental is allowed per parcel, and it must be 300 feet from the nearest rental.
  City of Beaufort short-term rentals: https://cityofbeaufort.org/344/Short-Term-Rentals
- [ ] **Apply for the conditional use permit**
  Submit the application with the $100 fee, a site plan showing parking at the side or rear (not the front yard), a property management plan, your rental agreement, and an HOA president's letter if the home has covenants. Rentals found operating before approval pay a $1,000 post facto fee.
- [ ] **Install a monitored fire alarm and pass inspection**
  After approval, install a monitored fire alarm and send proof of the monitoring contract. Then pay the $50 safety inspection fee and call 843-525-7041 to schedule.
- [ ] **Get the business license last**
  The owner, and a property manager who isn't the owner, need City of Beaufort business licenses. Don't rent until the license is issued. The city then mails notice to all neighboring owners.
- [ ] **Register for state and local taxes**
  The state-collected tax on stays here is 7% (state sales and accommodations tax plus local sales taxes). Airbnb collects it on its bookings; for direct bookings, get a SCDOR retail license and file through MyDORWAY. Collect the city's 3% local accommodations fee and send it to the city monthly by the 20th. Airbnb's South Carolina tax article doesn't list the City of Beaufort's local accommodations tax, so plan to file it yourself, including on Airbnb bookings.

Fees

$150 to apply and inspect, plus an annual fee and the business license tax

Application	**$100**
Safety inspection	**$50**
Post facto application For rentals operating before approval.	**$1,000**
Annual short-term rental fee We didn't find the amount.	**Set by city council**

House rules for guests

Maximum guests: 2 adults per bedroom

Events: No more than 25 people
Weddings and reunions need city approval; no outdoor amplified music.

Local contact: On site within 1 hour
A backup manager is required unless you don't rent while away.

Quiet hours: 9 p.m. to 8 a.m.

Who to contact

Business License Inspector: 843-525-6526
Business License Division: 843-525-7025

Beaufort asks for drawings with your application.
Make the site sketch, floor plans, and evacuation maps to scale from your measurements at FireEscapePlan.com.

Official sources

South Carolina Department of Revenue: Accommodations tax. https://dor.sc.gov/tax/accommodations

Airbnb: Collection and remittance by Airbnb in South Carolina. https://www.airbnb.com/help/article/2328

South Carolina Department of Revenue: Revenue Ruling #15-4: vacation rentals of a residence-
. https://dor.sc.gov/resources-site/lawandpolicy/Advisory%20Opinions/RR15-4.pdf

City of Beaufort: Short Term Rentals. https://cityofbeaufort.org/344/Short-Term-Rentals

City of Beaufort Business License Division: Short-term rental conditional use permit application and summary sheet-
. https://cityofbeaufort.org/DocumentCenter/View/10341

City of Beaufort (Municode): Code section.
https://library.municode.com/sc/beaufort/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=CO_PT7LIRE_CH18SHTERE