



Legislative Summary

O-19-25

Regulation of Tours in Historic Annapolis

The City of Annapolis Office of Law created this summary for the use of Annapolis City Council members during their consideration of the legislation.

Bill Summary

O-19-25 regulates walking tours conducted by tour companies in the Annapolis Historic District. The companies must obtain a City business license and insurance coverage. The Planning and Zoning Department is also authorized to establish further regulations to address emerging issues.

Background

The Annapolis Historic District represents one of America's most well-preserved colonial urban landscapes. Over the past decade, Annapolis has seen an increase in the number and types of tours available. These now include historical walking tours, ghost tours, historic pub crawls, food tours, and scavenger hunts.

Market Changes

Annapolis tours have traditionally been led by local guides with strong connections to the community, alongside locally-owned tour companies and specialized tours organized by historical groups.

The introduction of national tour operators has transformed this landscape. These larger companies often follow a volume-based business model, resulting in bigger tour groups and guides who may not be as deeply connected to the Annapolis community.

This shift can stress the preservation of historic structures and congestion in the Historic District and surrounding neighborhoods. There has been an increase in tours exploring residential areas just outside the main downtown Annapolis area, with some tours now running later into the night.



Other Historic Cities

Many historic cities have faced similar issues and adopted stricter regulations regarding walking tours, carriage rides, permitted bus types, and tour guide training.

In Charleston, stricter certification requirements for guides were implemented in response to the presence of national companies. Savannah established a permit system.

Williamsburg and Boston have both introduced more formal oversight of their historic centers, which aim to enhance the quality of tourism while safeguarding historic resources and preserving the quality of life for residents.

Tours Offered in Annapolis as of September 2025

There appear to be at least 10 established tour operators currently offering various types of tours in Annapolis. The exact number is unknown and may vary as some smaller operators or seasonal companies might not appear in online search results, and the tourism industry can change frequently with new operators entering or leaving the market.

1. Watermark Journey/Annapolis Tours by Watermark - Offers yacht charters, walking tours, ghost tours, and various specialty tours including Colonial Annapolis Walking Tours and African American Heritage Tours, Annapolis and Baltimore Cruises and Tours
2. Annapolis Eventours - Provides small group cart tours that can navigate all historic streets Annapoliseventours
3. Our Legacy Tours (OLT-Annapolis) - Family-run business specializing in African American history tours, operated by seventh-generation descendants Our Legacy Tours
4. Tour Boats Annapolis - Provides boat tours and cruises in Annapolis Tour Boats Annapolis
5. Annapolis Food Tours - Specializes in culinary walking tours
6. Discover Annapolis Tours - Listed among the top tour operators
7. Naval Academy Tour Guide Service - Offers specialized Naval Academy tours
8. American Sailing Tours - Provides sailing-based tours
9. Annapolis Ghost Tours
10. U.S. Ghost Adventures





Details

O-19-25 creates a new City Code chapter for Tour Operators under the Title of Business License, Taxes and Regulations (7). Chapter 7.50 creates general requirements for tour operators in the City, with specific restrictions on walking tours. It also lays out the process for violation notices, penalties and appeals.

Section Details

Section 7.50.010

Provides definitions used in this chapter.

Section 7.50.020

This section contains the general requirements for all tour companies operating in Annapolis.

Subsection A

- All tour companies must get a business license per Chapter 7.04;
- The Department of Planning and Zoning handles the licensing.
- Tour companies must provide name, address, type of tours, and other information that the Planning and Zoning Director determines is necessary;
- Tour companies must be in "good standing" with the state;
- Tour companies must use legal names and service marks as registered with the State.

Subsection B

- Proof of insurance is required to cover liability related to injuries, damages, or losses to persons or property.

Subsection C



- Tour companies must pay a fee to get the City license.

Subsection D

- Licenses will be issued once the Planning and Zoning Director determines that: the company complies with City laws, that the tour will not overly impact public safety and traffic flow, and that planned tour routes will not harm the Historic District's buildings and infrastructure.

Section 7.50.040

This section deals specifically with Walking Tours.

Subsection A

- Guides must avoid congestion and damage to historic property

Subsection B

- Tour companies must take steps to ensure the safety of tour participants

Subsection C

- Guides must ensure tours do not cause congestion on sidewalks and streets.
- Tours cannot go onto private property, block the street or hinder access to driveways.
- Tour companies must ensure that trash from tour participants is picked up

Section 7.50.060

This section explains the violations, penalties, and appeals related to this chapter.

Subsection A

- The Planning and Zoning Department oversees enforcement of this chapter.

Subsection B



- Failure to comply with the chapter can result in the loss of the tour business license, fines, and other penalties.

Subsection C

- Explains the appeals process for any tour company that is penalized.

The Planning and Zoning Director has 90 days after the ordinance is adopted to create additional rules and regulations to implement the chapter.

Tour operators have 120 days after adopting O-19-25 to get their licenses.