

Accessory Dwelling Units

The City of Seattle is proposing to remove regulatory barriers and make it easier for property owners to create accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and increase the number and variety of housing choices in Seattle's single-family zones. ADUs include backyard cottages, known as detached accessory dwelling units (DADUs), and in-law apartments, known as attached accessory dwelling units (AADUs).



What are the benefits of ADUs?

- Encouraging ADUs can increase the supply and variety of housing options in single-family neighborhoods. They can promote economic diversity in neighborhoods that might be out of range for average-income renters.
- DADUs share many characteristics with small single-family houses: a single unit with no shared walls in quiet residential neighborhoods. Due to their smaller size and lack of additional land cost, backyard cottages can offer a more affordable housing option in neighborhoods where homes are unaffordable for many people.
- Accessory dwelling units also offer a good housing option for various household types, including families with children and multi-generational households.
- Families can respond to changing needs for living space by adding an ADU.
- Property owners can also rent their ADU to earn additional income that makes it easier for them to remain in their neighborhood, help pay the mortgage, or pay for home improvements.
- DADUs are an example of infill development, which slowly increases density and takes advantage of existing infrastructure. Both ADUs and DADUs can help reduce sprawl and preserve the character of neighborhoods.

Current Seattle ADU Regulations

Attached ADUs have been allowed in all single-family homes in Seattle since 1994. DADUs were introduced by a city pilot program in 2006 that was expanded to include all of Seattle in 2009. See the attached chart to review the current regulations for ADUs.

Proposed Changes to Seattle's ADU Regulations

In May of 2016, Seattle City Councilmember Mike O'Brien proposed new regulations that would make it easier to build backyard cottages and in-law units in Seattle. The Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development issued a State Environmental Policy Act Determination of Non-Significance in May of 2016, but this determination was successfully appealed to the Seattle Hearing Examiner. In response, the city completed a full environmental impact statement, the adequacy of which was again appealed. On May 13, 2019, the Hearing Examiner ruled that the environmental review adequately addressed the

potential environmental impacts of O'Brien's proposal, clearing the way for the legislation to move forward.

The proposed changes can be reviewed on the attached chart from the Seattle City Council. Key changes include:

More Units: Each property may have two ADUs (either an AADU and a DADU or two AADUs). A second ADU can be added if a lot has been in the same ownership for at least one year.

Parking: No off-street parking will be required for ADUs.

Owner occupancy: No requirement for an owner to occupy the principal dwelling unit, AADU, or DADU.

Floor area: The maximum square footage for DADUs increases to 1,000 square feet and no longer includes garage or storage areas.

Larger household size: Any number of related people, or up to eight unrelated people, can live on lots in single-family zones with an AADU or a DADU. If the lot has two ADUs, the limit is 12 unrelated people.

New maximum floor area ratio (FAR) limit: New houses in single family zones are subject to a FAR limit of 0.5 or 2,500 square feet, whichever is greater.

Next Steps

A public hearing was held on Councilmember O'Brien's legislation on June 11. The Sustainability & Transportation Committee is expected to consider the legislation and any amendments on June 18. If you would like to offer comments in support of the proposed changes, please contact your councilmembers. Contact information may be accessed at: <https://www.seattle.gov/council/meet-the-council>.

Building a new ADU/DADU

If you're thinking about investing in an ADU or DADU, check with a knowledgeable architect or builder about your eligibility and how the new rules will apply to your property.

Sources

Seattle City Council Accessory Dwelling Units EIS page:

<https://www.seattle.gov/council/adu-eis>

Seattle City Council Backyard Cottages and Basement Units page:

<http://www.seattle.gov/council/meet-the-council/mike-obrien/backyard-cottages-and-basement-units>

Office of Planning & Community Development, Encouraging Backyard Cottages: <http://www.seattle.gov/opcd/ongoing-initiatives/encouraging-backyard-cottages>

CAST Architecture Backyard Cottage Quick Start Guide:

<https://www.castarchitecture.com/cast-architecture-blog>

