



Granny Flat Academy

What is an Accessory Dwelling Unit, anyway?

An accessory unit is a second dwelling unit located within or attached to a principal single-family dwelling. These separate living spaces can be located within the primary residence, such as a basement apartment, attached to the primary residence, such as a garage apartment, or detached from the primary residence, such as a cottage. In each case, the ADU is a self-contained residential unit equipped with a kitchen, bathroom, and sleeping area. They are typically discreetly located and designed to coordinate with the principal dwelling to preserve the character of the neighborhood. Primary dwellings and ADUs usually share an owner.



How can ADUs benefit older adults?

Accessory dwelling units are a housing option that helps to ensure that people of all ages have a roof over their head. They are convenient and affordable to older adults, empty nesters, and young adults who may want to stay in their homes and in a familiar neighborhood, or live close to family members.

Many older adults want to stay in their homes and familiar neighborhood, but lack the ability to continue to maintain a larger property by themselves. Others would prefer the social connection of living with a child or relative to an independent unit of senior housing. Still others would benefit from the ability to house a caregiver to assist with activities of daily living. In some families, grown children or other family members remain at home well into adulthood. In past generations, it was not uncommon for grandparents or younger relatives to live in smaller units that were part of the primary residence.

As the overall population ages, it is increasingly important to expand housing choice for older adults with health and mobility issues, allowing them to age in place. Allowing ADUs facilitates efficient use of existing housing stock, helps meet the growing demand for housing, and offers an alternative to major zoning changes that can significantly alter the character of neighborhoods.



As homeowners grow older, Accessory Dwelling Units may help them age in place.

Examples of ADUs in the Chicago Region

Bull Valley

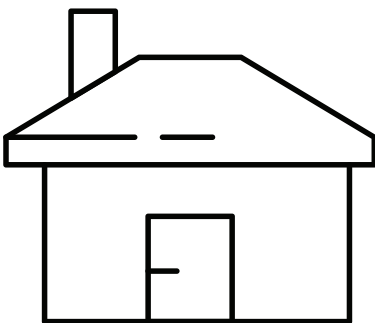
In 2010, the state of Illinois required the Village to develop an affordable housing plan, because it fell short of the state's affordable housing requirements. The Village did not want to seek a larger rental housing development, which would be out of character with the community. Instead, one aspect its plan encouraged the use of individual accessory apartments as rental units. The Village passed its ADU ordinance in 2015. After the ordinance passed, it soon became apparent that accessory units could help the Village's large percentage of older adults remain in their homes and age in place.



What's in a Name

Names for the ADU

ADUs have been around a long time. They take many forms and are thus known by many names:



- granny flat*
- in-law suite*
- coach house*
- granny pod*
- backyard cottage*
- mother-in-law flat*
- junior unit*

Meet Sue

Sue is the first homeowner in Bull Valley to take advantage of the new ADU ordinance. Sue moved to Bull Valley in the 1990s to build her dream home, and now lives on a beautiful property surrounded by pasture and a pond. As Sue gets older and has slightly more house than she needs, she decided to convert her basement into an accessory unit. The ADU, supported by the AARP Livable Communities program and completed in January 2019, will allow another person to enjoy the property and provide Sue the additional income to maintain her landscaping.

Glenview

In 1995, the U.S. Department of Defense closed the Naval Air Station Glenview and deeded the property back to the Village. The Village acted as master developer for a large mixed-use redevelopment ("The Glen"), which includes single-family homes, apartments, senior housing, and retail within a short walk of a Metra station. One neighborhood in the Glen includes ADUs. There are no occupancy restrictions on the accessory units, so long as the homeowner continues to live in the primary residence. Several ADUs may currently function as rental units, as evidenced by periodic "For Rent" signs in the neighborhood. The Village has not experienced any negative issues related to the accessory units.



Park Forest

In the mid-2000s, the Village of Park Forest agreed to permit ADUs in the redevelopment of the long-vacant Goldblatt's department store site, located in the Village's downtown. Five new homes included ADUs, which were constructed with back entrances to ensure compatibility with the neighboring single-family residences. The accessory and main units share a two-car garage, which met the parking requirements of the Village at that time. The properties also have deed restrictions that require homeowners to live in either the primary residence or the ADU. In the Village's recent development regulations update (completed in 2017), the Village decided to allow ADUs village-wide.





Zoning Considerations for ADUs

It's important to understand that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to allowing ADUs. Communities typically customize their zoning standards to reflect community concerns related to ADUs, while still providing owners the flexibility to modify their properties over time. The zoning code may address the following ADU standards:

Occupancy: Neighbors are frequently concerned that an accessory unit will not be cared for, or that an absentee landlord will rent out both units. Research in other states suggests that this is usually not the case, as around 80% of properties with an ADU are owner-occupied.¹ Nonetheless, some municipalities require that the owner reside in the primary residence or that occupancy of the accessory unit be restricted to families.

Design: Communities may specify the form of accessory units, often in an effort to fit with the character of existing homes. For example, communities with large homes may allow attached units with a separate entrance, while communities with deep lots or alleys may allow homeowners to add a new freestanding unit or convert their detached garage. Still others permit both attached and detached ADUs.

Size: Most ADUs are 800 square feet or less.² When communities allow ADUs, they can limit the total square footage of a detached unit or its coverage of lot area. For an attached unit, communities can limit the total square footage or percentage of interior space. Communities can also set the maximum number of bedrooms within the ADU. In municipalities with many housing types, these square footage and bedroom limits can vary by lot size.

Parking: The potential impact on parking is a frequent question, especially in communities where parking is scarce. Research from Oregon has suggested that ADU tenants tend to own fewer cars than other households and may walk, bike, or use transit if those options exist.³

1 Martin Brown, "Accessory Dwelling Units in Portland, OR: Evaluation and interpretation of a survey of ADU owners" (Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, June 2014).

2 "Character-Compatible, Space-Efficient Housing Options for Single-Dwelling Neighborhoods" (Oregon Departments of Transportation and Land Conservation and Development, May 2016).

3 Martin Brown, "Do ADUs cause neighborhood parking problems?", <https://accessorydwellings.org/2014/07/16/do-adus-cause-neighborhood-parking-problems/>.



How can my community take the next step?

It's critical to have a community conversation to ensure that ADUs are right for your community. As noted above, there is no "one-size-fits-all" policy. Every municipality is different.

Next, the municipality can update its zoning code to allow ADUs. The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, through its Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program, has assisted municipalities in drafting zoning codes that permit ADUs, most recently for Park Forest and South Elgin, and Bensenville. The Metropolitan Mayors Caucus can provide ordinances developed in the Chicago area or and Midwest.

For More Information:

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