

**King County Environmental Health Division Existing Policy and  
Procedures Technical Memorandum**

**Effective Date:** May 9, 2025  
**Version:** 2  
**Date Updated:** June, 26, 2025  
**Subject:** Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)  
**Developed by:** Marissa KingTalik, Health and Environmental Investigator, Public Health Seattle & King County  
**Discussed with TAC:** April 15, 2025

## **1. Summary**

PHSKC's memo for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) was developed to outline and clarify the construction of, and potential impacts of ADUs to on-site sewage systems (OSS) prior to requirements specific to ADUs being included in Board of Health Code (BOH) Title 13. The purpose of this update is to clarify requirements associated with ADUs in addition to the requirements specified in BOH Title 13.

The goal of these updates is to:

- a) Allow small accessory dwellings that reasonably do not house more than 2 individuals to be sized for 1-bedroom, or 150 gallons per day (GPD);
- b) Remove the requirement of a waiver for ADUs smaller than 3-bedrooms; and
- c) Restate and/or clarify our current operating procedures surrounding the permitting of ADUs.

Please note, the ability to construct an ADU on any given property should be discussed with the local building official before designing an on-site sewage system to verify zoning and square footage requirements. Consult with the local plumbing authority for any additional considerations when proposing a tiny home as an ADU.

## **2. Definitions**

- **BOH 13.08.460 Single-family dwelling.** "Single-family dwelling" means a detached building designed exclusively for occupancy of one (1) family.
- **BOH 13.08.057 Bedroom.** "Bedroom" means a room used for sleeping and that includes a window, a door, and a closet. "Bedroom" does not include a room smaller than seventy square feet in area with a closet, or an entry way with a closet. For the purposes of this title, "window" includes a means of egress, other than a door, under section R310.1 of the International Residential Code, 2018 edition.
- **BOH 13.08.218 Kitchen or kitchen facility.** "Kitchen" or "kitchen facility" means an area within a building intended for the preparation and storage of food and containing a sink.
- **K.C.C. 21A.06.350 Dwelling unit, accessory.** Dwelling unit, accessory: a separate, complete dwelling unit attached to or contained within the structure of the primary dwelling; or contained within a separate structure that is accessory to the primary dwelling unit on the premises.
- **DADU.** Acronym for a detached Accessory Dwelling Unit.
- **Accessory Living Quarters (ALQ) vs Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)**
  - ALQ has no kitchen facilities and is not used as a separate dwelling unit.
  - ADU has kitchen facilities and can be used as a separate dwelling unit.

## **3. Scenarios**

- The single-family dwelling and ADU use independent OSS, each designed for a single-family dwelling – Two application and fees, one for each type of OSS
- The single-family dwelling and ADU are served by one OSS designed using the multi-family criteria – One application and fee per the OSS type
- The permitted single-family dwelling OSS is expanded to meet the multi-family criteria to accommodate the ADU – One application and fee per the OSS type

#### 4. Requirements and Limitations

Sizing limitations are listed below (Reference: BOH 13.28.070 *Required absorption area*):

| Single Family Residence and ADU Shared OSS |                                                          |              |              |                            |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------------|
|                                            | Number of bedrooms <sup>1</sup> and/or floor area in ADU |              |              |                            |
|                                            | 1-bedroom <sup>2</sup> ,<br><600 sq ft.                  | 2-bedrooms   | 3-bedrooms   | Each additional<br>bedroom |
| ADU Minimum Design Flow                    | 150 GPD                                                  | 300 GPD      | 450 GPD      | + 150 GPD                  |
| ADU Minimum Tank Size <sup>3</sup>         | 1000 gallons                                             | 1000 gallons | 1500 gallons | + 250 gallons              |
| ADU Independent OSS                        |                                                          |              |              |                            |
|                                            | Number of bedrooms <sup>1</sup> in ADU                   |              |              |                            |
|                                            | 1-bedroom <sup>2</sup>                                   | 2-bedrooms   | 3-bedrooms   | Each additional<br>bedroom |
| ADU Minimum Design Flow                    | 300 GPD                                                  | 300 GPD      | 450 GPD      | + 120 GPD                  |
| ADU Minimum Tank Size                      | 1000 gallons                                             | 1000 gallons | 1500 gallons | + 250 gallons              |

##### Explanatory Notes:

1. Dens, offices, and/or accessory rooms that are not common living areas may be counted as a bedroom if the room has a window for ingress/egress and a closet.
2. An accessory dwelling unit with no bedroom (e.g. studio floor plan) shall be deemed equivalent to one bedroom.
3. Tanks serving ADU only must meet the minimum tanks sizes outlined in this table. Septic, pump and treatment tanks that are shared between the single family residence and ADU must be sized in accordance with Minimum Capacities for Single-Family Residence Septic Tanks **BOH 13.36.010**.

#### 5. Additional Considerations

- Any room within an accessory structure meeting the definition of a bedroom must be accounted for in the design flow.
- Design flow is based on a maximum of 2 people per bedroom.
- A conforming reserve area must be established for the single family dwelling if not already present.
- A current satisfactory (less than one year) O&M inspection must be performed on the existing system serving the single family residence by a certified maintainer. Inspection report must be provided for review.
- Provide public health reviewed record drawing for single family dwelling.
- Floor plans for the ADU must be included in application package.
- A bathroom in a garage or shop with no living space will not require additional sewage treatment capacity but must still receive PHSKC approval.
- Multiple kitchens within one residence that have internal ingress will be considered to contribute multi-family flows. Therefore, each bedroom within such a structure must be sized at 150 gallons per day per bedroom.
  - A septic system serving three kitchens or more may require enhanced treatment.

- Tiny homes with holding tanks may not discharge waste from the holding tank into the septic system.

## 6. Water System Requirements

- Consult with your local building official regarding water connection requirements.
- Group A Water System
  - Provide a current certificate of water availability from the purveyor that specifies the addition is for an ADU (ALQs do not need a certificate of water availability).
    - Certificate must include “Accessory Dwelling Unit” or “ADU” in the project description.
- Group B Water System
  - If the property is currently served by a Group B well, but is within a Group A water service area, the ADU may be required to connect to the Group A water system. Consult with King County Department of Local Services or corresponding municipality to confirm water connection requirements.
  - An ADU is considered an additional water system connection to the property. Refer to approval letter, water use agreement, and/or water system design to see if there is an additional connection available, not yet allotted, to serve the ADU.
    - Provide written confirmation from the purveyor that the ADU may be served by the Group B water system.
    - Provide an updated water use agreement with an updated service connection map if an unused connection is to be reallocated to serve the ADU.
  - If the Group B system needs to be expanded to serve the ADU, the property owner will need to contract with a professional engineer to verify if the system qualifies for expansion. Group B design applications are permitted through Washington State Department of Health.
  - Water system must be current on satisfactory bacteria (less than one year old) and nitrate (less than three years old) analyses.
  - Water system must have one arsenic analysis on record that demonstrates arsenic levels <10 ppb or have an existing approved connection available.
  - We strongly suggest that you contact this office with the name of the water system and its purveyor to discuss potential issues at the outset of the process.
- Individual Private Well
  - An ADU may be served by an individual private well on the same property as the well and single-family residence.
    - Exception: When the ADU is within a water service area, it must connect to public water if available.
  - Individual well must meet minimum horizontal setbacks to potential sources of contamination and must have satisfactory:
    - Current recorded covenants
    - Water quality analyses
      - Two satisfactory bacteria results less than 1 year old
      - Nitrate results less than 10 mg/L and less than 3 years old
      - Arsenic results less than 10 ppb
    - Minimum 2-hour pump test required (air tests and bailer tests not accepted).
      - If the pump test results in a flow rate of 10 gallons per minute or less, a subsequent 4-hour pump test is required.
      - Well must demonstrate ability to produce 800 gallons per day (400 gallons per day per residence or 10 gallons per minute).

- Pump test must be less than 5 years old.
  - Well must be a drilled well meeting current construction standards (verified with DOE well log).
- Rainwater Catchment is not a permissible water source for ADUs.

## 7. Sewer Availability

- When the ADU is proposed within an Urban Growth Area, applicants should consult with the corresponding city or local sewer utility to determine sewer availability and connection requirements.
  - **13.04.050 Connection to public sewer.**
    - A. The owner or occupant of lands or premises located within the Urban Growth Area, as defined in the King County Comprehensive Plan, undertaking new residential or nonresidential construction, short subdivision or subdivision from which sewage will originate shall connect the construction to a public sewer if the sewer utility permits such connection. Within unincorporated King County such connection shall be in accordance with K.C.C. 13.24.136. Within incorporated cities such connection shall be in accordance with the policies of that city or the local sewer utility. The connection shall be made by connecting the building drain with an approved side sewer, and the side sewer to the public sewer.
- If the public sewer cannot serve the ADU within an Urban Growth Area, a sewer availability letter stating a connection is not required/available must be included in the site design application package.

## 8. Incorporating Unused Design Flow to Accommodate an ADU

Example: An existing on-site sewage system was designed for 4 bedrooms, but only a 3 bedroom single family dwelling was constructed. In order to consider reallocating the additional bedroom(s) to an ADU the following is required:

- Site design application required for review.
- System must meet current code.
  - Conforming, permitted upgrades or expansions may be considered.
  - The single family dwelling must retain a minimum of 3 bedrooms after reallocating any bedroom(s) to an ADU.
- Floor plans must be provided for the single family dwelling and ADU.
- System must be shown to be functioning with a current (less than one year) O&M inspection performed by a certified maintainer.
- System must have a public health approved record drawing on file.