



Residential Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

An Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) is a separate complete dwelling unit that is either attached to the existing single-family residence, wholly contained within the basement or attic, or in a separate stand-alone structure that is accessory

to the primary use on the premises. Nationwide, ADU's are also commonly referred to as mother-in-law units, backyard cottage homes, granny pads and secondary suites to name a few.

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Select: King County | Building | Single Family Residential | New Construction | Accessory Dwelling Unit



King County recognizes the need for a wide range of housing options in the community, and in many cases properties in King County jurisdiction will be able to meet the development criteria for a separate dwelling space. An ADU will typically contain a kitchen, bedroom, living area, and separate entrance. ADU's function as an independent dwelling space that may be utilized for a long-term rental or to be used for family members.

Important Considerations & Overview of ADU Zoning Requirements:

- ADUs located within the Urban Growth area are allowed to have up to two ADUs per property. These can be attached to the primary dwelling unit, detached from the primary dwelling unit, or any combination.
- ADUs located outside of the Urban Growth area (rural area zones) are limited to one ADU per property.
- ADUs located in the Rural Area zones (RA-2.5, RA-5, RA-10, and RA-20) are only allowed a detached ADU if the property complies with the minimum lot size for the zone.
- Only attached ADUs may be permitted in the Agriculture (A) zone and must be accessory to a primary use of commercial agriculture on the site.
- An ADU is not allowed within the Forest (F) zones.
- ADUs are typically limited to 1000 sq ft of heated habitable floor area and 1000 sq ft of unheated floor area. There are certain exceptions to the total size of heated and unheated floor area when in the urban area or if a basement is included. Refer to full ADU code standards below for these exceptions.
- No additional off-street parking spaces are required for accessory dwelling units.
- Accessory dwelling units should be designed to be compatible with the primary dwelling unit and the surrounding properties, including material, colors, and building forms.

To verify if your property meets the requirements to construct an ADU, please review all associated zoning standards for ADUs, governed by [KCC Title 21A](#), as follows:

Zoning Standards, per KCC 21A.08.030 B.7.a.:

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1. The accessory dwelling unit shall not exceed one thousand square feet of heated floor area and one thousand square feet of unheated floor area except:
 - (a) when the accessory dwelling unit is wholly contained within a basement or attic of the primary dwelling unit, this limitation does not apply.
 - (b) for detached accessory dwelling units, the floor area contained in a basement does not count toward the floor area maximum.
 - (c) in the urban area, accessory dwelling units that do not provide the maximum amount of unheated floor area allowed in subsection B.7.a.(1) of this section may increase their heated floor area by one square foot for each square foot of allowed unheated floor area not provided, up to a maximum of one thousand five hundred square feet of heated floor area. For example, an accessory dwelling unit could include one thousand two hundred fifty square feet of heated floor space if only seven hundred fifty square feet of unheated floor space was included.
2. Accessory dwelling units that are not wholly contained within an existing dwelling unit shall not exceed the base height for the applicable zone.
3. Attached accessory dwelling units shall have at least one common wall with the primary dwelling unit and appear to be contained within one structure. Connection through a breezeway or covered pathway shall not constitute an attached accessory dwelling unit unless the breezeway or covered pathway meets all of the following requirements:
 - (a) is less than ten feet in length,
 - (b) shares a common wall with both the accessory dwelling unit and primary residence,
 - (c) is completely enclosed, and
 - (d) is heated space.
4. No additional off-street parking spaces are required for accessory dwelling units.
5. An applicant seeking to build an accessory dwelling unit shall file a notice approved by the department of executive services, records and licensing services division, that identifies the dwelling unit as accessory. The notice shall run with the land. The applicant shall submit proof that the notice was filed before the department approves any permit for the construction of the accessory dwelling unit. The required contents and form of the notice shall be established in administrative rules.
6. Accessory dwelling units are prohibited in the Forest (F) zone.
7. For lots in the urban area, the following requirements apply:
 - (a) Two accessory dwelling units are allowed per lot in the following configurations:
 - i. one attached accessory dwelling unit and one detached accessory dwelling unit,

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- ii. two attached accessory dwelling units, or
 - iii. two detached accessory dwelling units, which may be either one or two detached structures.
- (b) Accessory dwelling units may be converted from existing structures, including but not limited to garages, even if the existing structure is legally nonconforming with respect to setbacks or maximum impervious surface percentage.
- (c) No public street improvements are required for accessory dwelling units.
8. For lots in the rural area or on natural resource lands, the following requirements apply:
- (a) One accessory dwelling unit is allowed per lot,
 - (b) Only allowed in the same building as the primary dwelling unit, except that detached accessory dwelling units are allowed when both of the following requirements are met:
 - i. there is no more than one primary dwelling unit on the lot, and
 - ii. the lot is three thousand two hundred square feet or greater if located in a rural town or meets the minimum lot area for the applicable zone if located in the rural area but not in a rural town or on natural resource lands.
 - (c) When the primary and accessory dwelling unit are located in the same building, or in multiple buildings connected by a breezeway or covered pathway, only one entrance may front a street.
 - (d) Accessory dwelling units should be designed to be compatible with the primary dwelling unit and the surrounding properties, including material, colors, and building forms.
 - (e) The applicant should consider a siting alternatives study that analyzes placement options of the accessory dwelling unit on the property to minimize impacts to privacy and views for surrounding property owners.
 - (f) Accessory dwelling units in structures detached from the primary dwelling unit shall be counted as a separate dwelling unit for the purpose of lot calculations in place at the time of a proposed subdivision. If an accessory dwelling unit in a detached building in the RA zone is subsequently converted to a primary unit on a separate lot, neither the original lot nor the new lot may have an additional detached accessory dwelling unit constructed unless the lot is at least twice the minimum lot area required by the applicable zone as established by KCC Title 21A.

Additional Permit Requirements

The construction of an ADU may require public health approval and/or a sewer certificate, which will be reviewed in the same manner as any residential dwelling structure. Please review the link pertaining to [On-Site Sewage System \(OSS\)](#).

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Additional Information or Questions

- Find available customer service options on our website: King County [Department of Local Services, Permitting Division](#)

Additional Resources

- [Property Research Guide](#) and [Property Research and Maps](#)
- [Residential, New Single Family Construction Packet](#)
- [Permit Fees](#)
- [Accessory Dwelling Units: Notice on Title Requirements and Affidavit](#)
- [King County Code \(KCC\)](#)