



ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

BACKGROUND

An Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) is a residential dwelling unit that provides complete independent living facilities for one or more persons established in conjunction with, and subordinate to, the primary dwelling units existing on the property. The City of Costa Mesa adopted Ordinance 2021-03 that became effective April 2, 2021. This handout provides answers to frequently asked questions and guidance to homeowners interested in creating an ADU.

DESIGN

1. What types of ADUs are allowed?

The ordinance allows accessory dwelling units in three forms: detached, attached, and conversion repurposed structures.

2. Are there any specific aesthetic requirements?

Yes, an ADU needs to be compatible with the main unit in terms of massing and design.

3. Where can the structure be located and how is it accessed?

ADUs can be located in the back, side or the front of the lot as long as it meets specific standards (See ADU Table Handout). All ADUs must contain an independent exterior access. Attached ADUs may include an interior access to the main unit.

PERMITTING

1. Can I get my ADU permit over-the-counter?

No, an application must be submitted for review and processed through the standard plan check procedure.

2. Would the neighbors be notified?

If the ADU is a part of a comprehensive two story residential addition, a second story notification to the adjacent neighbors is required. However, a two story or second floor ADU addition or conversion does not require a second story notification, provided it meets ADU development standards.

3. Are fees required?

Just as any other plan check, the standard fees apply such as plan check fees, engineering fees, school fees, park impact fees, etc. (See ADU Table Handout).

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Where are ADUs allowed in Costa Mesa?

An ADU that complies with all applicable standards and codes is permitted on all lots zoned for residential use or mixed-use.

2. Can I have a two story or second story ADU?

Yes. Single-family dwellings may have a second floor ADU addition integrated with the existing house provided it has an independent access. Multi-family dwellings may only convert non-habitable spaces; two-story or second floor ADU additions are not permitted in the multiple family zones.

3. Is there a specific requirement for a stairway to a second floor ADU?

Yes. An interior stairway to a second floor ADU is recommended. If an exterior stairway is the only option because of site constraints, the stairway shall be facing the interior of the lot, not readily visible from the public right-of-way, and meet setback requirements for second-floor or two-story ADUs.

GENERAL INFORMATION *(continued)*

4. Do I have to meet the minimum open space requirement?

ADUs that are less than 800 SF in area are exempt from open space requirements on both single family and multi-family lots. ADUs exceeding 800 square feet in gross floor area on single-family lots must meet open space requirements. ADUs cannot exceed 800 SF in multi-family lots.

5. Can I convert an existing accessory structure or garage to an ADU?

Single-family dwelling lots may convert a detached or attached accessory structure or a garage to an ADU. Multiple-family dwelling lots may only convert non-habitable spaces (e.g. electrical rooms, garages) within a multiple-family dwelling structure that consist of two or more units.

6. Is replacement parking required when the garage of the primary dwelling is used for an ADU? No.

When an existing parking structure (garage, carport, or covered parking) is converted or demolished “in conjunction” with construction of an ADU, parking replacement is optional. However, if open parking spaces were removed to accommodate an ADU, they shall be replaced. “In-conjunction” is met when the new ADU is constructed within any portion of the existing parking structure’s footprint.

7. Do I need to provide parking for the ADU?

No. If an owner wants to provide parking for the ADU, parking configuration may be tandem or within setback areas.

8. Do I have to remove the garage door if I convert the garage into an ADU?

Yes, if the garage door is visible to the public right-of-way (e.g. front-loaded garages), the facade must be refinished with substantial articulation or sufficient landscaping.

9. Do driveways leading to a garage have to be replaced if the garage is converted into an ADU? No.

A single-family residential lot may choose to keep the driveway for parking. If an owner wants to remove the driveway, the 20-foot front setback must be landscaped and the driveway apron removed.

10. Is owner-occupancy required for ADUs?

No. But if a JADU is constructed, the owner must reside in either the JADU or the primary dwelling.

11. Is a utility connection required for an ADU?

Yes. All ADUs and JADUs must be connected to public utilities (or their equivalent), including water, electric, and sewer services.

12. Must I have a separate address for the accessory dwelling unit?

Yes. A separate address may be requested with a letter designation (B, C, D, etc.)

13. Is a recorded deed restriction required?

Yes. A standard land use restriction is required to document the approval parameters of the ADU.

14. When is an alteration of an existing structure deemed as new construction?

For the purposes of the Planning department, demolishing more than 50% of an existing structure or adding more than 150 square feet to an existing structure is considered new construction. The Building and Engineering Department may designate your proposal differently.

GENERAL INFORMATION *(continued)*

16. Are pre-fabricated, manufactured, or modular ADUs allowed?

Yes, provided that the structure is placed on a fixed foundation and the design is compatible in exterior appearance with the primary unit or units.

17. When calculating the number of units allowed for conversions within existing multi-family dwelling structures, do I round-up or round-down?

Consistent with the City's General Plan policy, the number of units is rounded down to the nearest whole number.