

Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)

WHAT IS AN ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT (ADU)?

An ADU is a second, smaller dwelling unit located on the same lot as a single-family dwelling. ADUs are intended as a housing option that can contribute to housing affordability and choice, respond to changing household needs and lifestyles, contribute to housing supply, and contribute to neighborhood stability consistent with residential neighborhood patterns. ADUs can be located either within or attached to the primary residence, or in a detached structure in the rear yard.

Where ADUs are allowed. One ADU per lot is allowed as an accessory use to a single-family detached dwelling, on legally established lots (irrespective of lot size or width) in zoning districts that permit single-family development.



An attached ADU (Dalton home, www.accessorydwellings.org)



A Detached ADU (Photo by Lauren Flemister, City of Tacoma)

DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

Size. The living area of the ADU, excluding any non-living areas, is limited to the most restrictive of the following:

1. No more than 15% of the lot area.
2. No more than 85% of the living area of the primary structure or dwelling.
3. No more than 1,000 square feet.

Height. Attached ADUs are subject to the primary structure height limits. Detached ADUs shall be no taller than the main house **and** the most restrictive of the following:

- Up to 18 feet measured to the midpoint of a peaked roof.
- Up to 20 feet with incorporation of parking, or with Built Green 4 stars (or equivalent) environmental certification.
- Conversion of an existing accessory structure taller than 18 feet may be considered as a Conditional Use.
- In View Sensitive Districts, maximum height is 15 feet (measured per TMC 13.01.060, additional height is subject to TMC 1305.010.B variance criteria).

Setbacks & location. Attached ADUs are subject to the primary structure setbacks. Detached ADUs must:

- Be on the same lot as the primary structure.
- Be in the rear yard of the primary structure.
- Provide a minimum of 5 feet from side and rear property lines, except no setback is required from alleys.
- Meet Building Code fire separation from other structures.
- Meet accessory building standards (TMC 13.06.020).

Parking. Parking is not required for ADUs. If parking is proposed, it must be located in and accessed from the rear portion of the lot. The addition of an ADU may not remove parking required for the primary dwelling.

Open Space. The overall site must maintain or provide at least 10% of the lot size as usable and functional yard space (per TMC 13.06.020).

Walkways. For ADUs with a separate entrance, a walkway must connect to the nearest public sidewalk or right-of-way.

- A minimum 3-foot walkway width is required.
- Walkway materials must be distinct from any adjacent vehicular areas (may function as a shared drive/walk space along an exterior edge of a driving surface).

Design Standards for all ADUs.

- Generally match the exterior architectural style, appearance and character of the main house with similar materials, window, façade and roof design; or complement the main house through use of materials and design of equal or better quality.
- Meet applicable Historic District design standards.

Design Standards for Detached ADUs.

- Main entrances at least 8 feet from side property lines shared with a neighbor, if the entrance faces the neighboring property.
- Second story windows within 10 feet of shared property lines shall be constructed to reduce direct views into the neighboring property.



Note: This Tip Sheet does not substitute for codes and regulations.

The applicant is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.

More information: City of Tacoma, Planning and Development Services | www.tacomapermits.org (253) 591-5030

To request this information in an alternative format or a reasonable accommodation, please call 253-591-5030 (voice).

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- The structure shall not intercept a 45-degree daylight plane inclined into the site from a height of 15 feet above existing grade from the 5-foot setback line.

Other Requirements.

- Both dwellings must be in common ownership.
- ADUs shall include facilities for cooking, living, sanitation, and sleeping.
- A separate address visible from the street is required.
- Occupancy and minimum room dimensions shall meet Tacoma Municipal Code 2.01.060 sections S and T.
- Building Code standards include ceiling heights, insulation, additional energy credits, firewalls, egress windows, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, heating, exhaust fans, plumbing fixtures, etc.
- Attached ADU's shall be constructed to duplex design with fire separation and rated supporting structure.
- Utility services are required per City standards.
- Standards for home occupations, short-term and long-term rentals apply.

See Tacoma's [ADU Design Guide](#) for further information, illustrations, departmental contacts and permit submittal guidance.

PERMIT REQUIREMENTS

Construction permits are required for creating, converting, or legalizing an ADU. The type of permits are dependent on the scope of the project, and could include: Building, Plumbing, Mechanical, Site Development, Side Sewer, Stormwater, Water and/or Electrical.

Legalize existing unpermitted ADUs. Through December 2020, additional flexibility is available for existing, unpermitted ADUs to obtain permits.

APPLICABLE REGULATIONS

Tacoma Municipal Code Section: [13.06.010 - General Restrictions](#), [13.06.020.G – Accessory building standards](#), [13.06.080.A - Accessory Dwelling Units](#), [2.02 Building Code](#)

SUBMITTAL AND REVIEW PROCESS

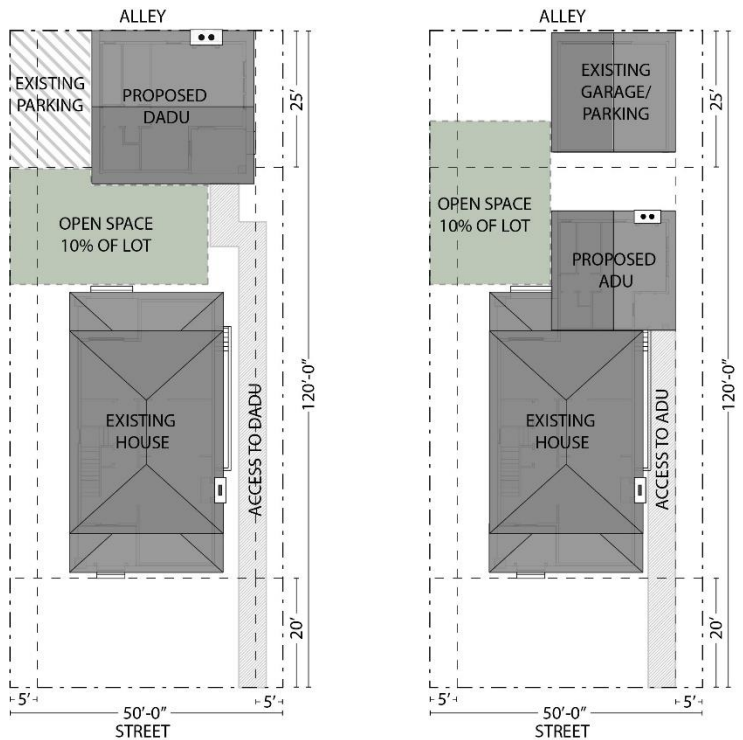
Application materials must be submitted in electronic PDF format on compact disc (CD) or online at [TacomaPermits.org](#). See tip sheet on [Electronic File Standards G-230](#).

Submittal requirements (drawn to scale):

- A site plan showing structures, access and utilities.
- Section views showing proper ceiling height.
- Building elevations.
- Floor plans with layout of the primary and accessory dwelling units drawn to scale.
- Framing drawings for new, altered, or change of use.
- Plumbing and mechanical fixture locations.

Permit application and review.

- Apply online at [TacomaPermits.org](#) or in person at Planning and Development Services (PDS), Tacoma Municipal Building, 747 Market Street, 3rd Floor.
- The plans may need a 1-3 week review time.
- After work is completed, contact PDS to request a new address and schedule necessary inspections.



Example Attached and Detached ADU site plans



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