

Accessory Dwellings: An Affordable Answer

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Planners often refer to ADUs as “hidden” or “gentle” density.

An ADU is a small living quarter secondary to and on the same lot as an existing single-family home. ADUs meet both affordable and compatible urban objectives by providing lower-cost housing and blending seamlessly into the surrounding neighborhood.

They are also one of the best and often only forms of affordable housing that can be encouraged and/or provided through zoning.

ADUs and Neighborhoods: An Affordable Compatible Partner

Imagine Austin:

"Maintaining unique and diverse character of Austin's neighborhoods, while meeting market demands for close-in housing."

"Balancing new development and redevelopment in lower-income neighborhood's while maintaining essential neighborhood character."

"Encouraging preservation of affordable housing in neighborhoods across the city and in activity centers and corridors."

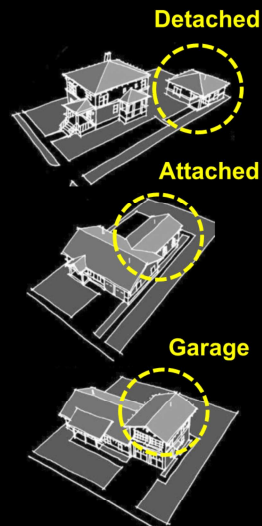
Code Diagnosis:

"Secondary apartments can provide increased density in existing neighborhoods without sacrificing neighborhood character."

When it comes to the provision and regulation of accessory dwellings, affordability and compatibility must go together.

Imagine Austin and the Opticos Code Diagnosis both stress the importance of "preserving neighborhood character" while absorbing new growth and providing new housing.

“A Rose by Any Other Name”



Also Known As:

<i>Ancillary unit</i>	<i>Multi-generational</i>
<i>Carriage house</i>	<i>Secondary suite</i>
<i>Companion unit</i>	<i>Lockout suite</i>
<i>Mother-in-law unit</i>	<i>Sidekick suite</i>
<i>In-law apartment</i>	<i>Fonzi suite</i>
<i>Garage apartment</i>	<i>Granny flat</i>
<i>Basement apartment</i>	<i>Alley flat</i>
<i>Guest house</i>	<i>Servant quarter</i>
<i>Coach house</i>	<i>Backyard cottage</i>
<i>Laneway house</i>	<i>Elder cottage</i>
<i>ECHO home</i>	<i>Casita</i>

ADUs are known by many names. Here are their three basic structural types and 22 of their most common aliases.

Because of their smaller size and lower cost, done right, ADUs can contribute greatly to Austin's need for affordable housing.

In particular, ADUs can well serve the growing inner-city housing needs for singles, seniors and smaller families that are looking for affordable living quarters near transit and urban amenities.

Peer City ADU Survey:

Peer City:

Honolulu: 400sf<5,000sf lot, 800sf>5,000sf lot

Miami: 450sf, 1 space

Santa Cruz: 500sf<7500sf, 640sf, 800sf>10,000sf lot

***Austin (Mueller):* 600sf, 2 stories**

Denver: 650sf<6,000sf lot, 864sf, 1,000sf>7,000sf lot

Seattle: 650-800sf, 4,000sf lot, 1 space

San Diego: 700sf, 1 space, 21' (companion unit)

Nashville: 750sf <10,000sf lot, 1,000sf>10,000sf lot

Atlanta: 750sf, R5 district only, .5 FAR

San Antonio: 800sf (40% main), 300sf min

Portland: 800sf (75% main), 15% cover

Charlotte: 800sf (35% main), 1 space

Phoenix: 900sf (50% main), 1 space, no STR

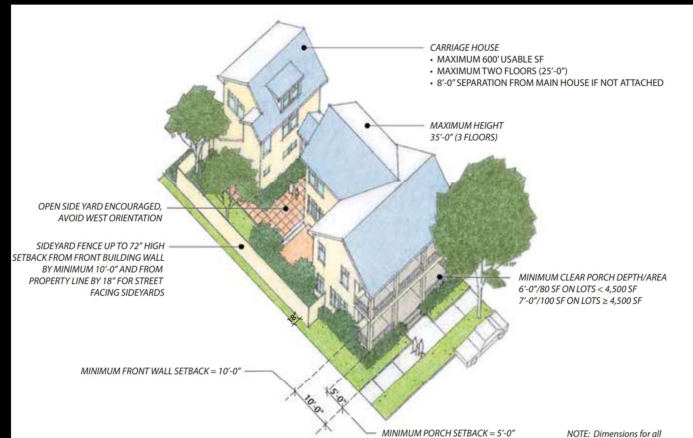
***Austin (CodeNEXT):* 1,100sf, no space**

A survey of major US cities shows that the average size of a maximum permitted ADU is about 700sf with the smallest being Honolulu at 400sf and the largest being Austin at 1,100sf.

Many more recent codes, such as those for Honolulu, Santa Cruz, Seattle, Denver and Nashville, have shifted to context-sensitive, variable rate formula based on lot size. Other factors in regulating ADUs include parking, building separation, utilities and occupancy.

The Santa Cruz approach is a national “best practice.” ADU floor area varies by lot size (500sf to 800sf) and one parking space is required. Santa Cruz also requires compatible design and waives fees for ADUs restricted to low and very low-income residents. In 2004, it won an EPA “Smart Growth Achievement Award.”

Carriage Houses Mueller Austin



Maximum 600 Usable SF
Maximum Two Floors (25')

While allowing the largest ADUs in the nation everywhere else in the city, Austin displays a rather inconsistent land use policy by limiting them to 600sf in its highly regarded planned mixed-use new urbanist Mueller neighborhood.

“Alley Flat Initiative”

The Alley Flat Initiative was created in 2005 and is a collaboration between:

- UT Center for Sustainable Development,
- Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corp, and
- Austin Community Design and Development Center.

The objective of the AFI is to create an adaptive delivery system for sustainable and affordable housing that includes:

- efficient housing designs,
- sustainable construction technologies,
- innovative financing and
- home ownership.



In Austin, the use, benefit and design of ADUs are promoted by the Alley Flat Initiative, a collaboration between;

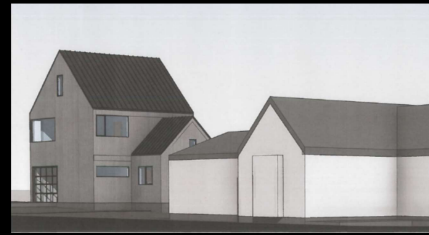
- UT Center for Sustainable Development,
- Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation, and
- Austin Community Design and Development Center.

The AFI offers several two-bedroom floor plans that can be City pre-approved to save design and permitting costs.

“La Casita” “Le Castle”



850 sf ADU



1,168 sf ADU

Two “good” and “bad” examples of ADUs in Austin.

The good: La Casita, an 850 sf east Austin ADU, was designed and built by an Austin planning commissioner. It features solar energy, rainwater collection and sleeping porch. In addition, the 1940s primary home was renovated rather than demolished. La Casita achieved a 5-star Austin Energy Green Building rating.

The bad: Le Castle, an 1100 sf central Austin ADU, is larger and taller than the primary home and has an illegal finish-out third floor.

ADUs and CodeNEXT

ZAP Recommendations

- Allow all ADU types 'by right' in all house zones,
- Fast-track “even more affordable” ADUs (<500sf) *(pre-approved plans, no parking and waived fees)*,
- Vary ADU floor area by lot size (600/800/1000),
- Simplify FAR, impervious, building cover limits,
- Eliminate prohibition of subleases, and
- Eliminate permit fees for income-restricted units.

In order to promote greater affordability, flexibility and compatibility, now is the time to revisit those rules and consider the following:

- Allow all ADU types 'by right' in all zones,
- Fast-track “even more affordable” ADUs (<500sf)
- Vary permitted floor area by lot size (600sf, 800sf, 1000sf),
- Simplify FAR, impervious and building cover limits,
- Eliminate prohibition of subleases, and
- Eliminate fees for small and income-restricted units.