SUNNYVALE HOMEOWNERS:
INTERESTED IN BUILDING AN ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT?

What is an ADU?

An Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU), also known as granny flat, in-law unit, or second unit is a secondary residential dwelling unit that provides complete independent living facilities for one or more persons and is located on a lot with an existing or proposed single-family or multifamily home. It must include permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking, and sanitation.

Can I build an ADU?

ADUs are allowed on lots containing an existing or proposed single-family home (SFH) or multifamily home (MFH).

Why build an ADU?

More affordable housing option for friends, colleagues, or anyone seeking rental housing.

Housing solution for aging relatives who need to be near family, want to maintain independence and privacy.

Housing option for young adults who want to live near where they grew up but can't afford local housing prices.

Supplement your income

Is my property Single-Family or Multifamily?

*These designations are only for the purposes of Sunnyvale Municipal Code Chapter 19.79 Accessory Dwelling Units and may differ from the definitions applied for Utility Billing.

Single-Family Home*

- One detached dwelling unit on a single lot.
- 2 or more detached single-unit dwellings on the same lot.
- Townhomes that are separate interest of real property (on individual lots) and include:
  - A group of 3 or more attached dwelling units;
  - Units that extend from foundation to roof.
  - Units that are open to air on at last two sides.

Multifamily Home*

- A building with 2 or more attached dwelling units on a single lot. E.g. apartments, duplexes, condominiums etc.

Use this document to learn about requirements and development standards for ADU projects.

SFH = Single Family Home

MFH = Multifamily Home

Main Building = A building in which the principal use of the lot is conducted. E.g. Single family home and multifamily dwelling structure

Multifamily Dwelling Structure = A building with 2 or more attached dwelling units on a single lot.

ADU TYPES

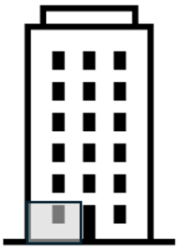
New Construction ADUs are new construction structures for ADU purposes and can be detached or attached.

Detached ADUs are freestanding structures detached from the single-family dwelling main building or multifamily structures. These may be attached to accessory structures or other detached ADUs.

Attached ADUs are new structures constructed as a physical expansion of a SFH main building. These are not allowed for MFHs.

Conversion ADUs

SFHs: Created by conversion of parts of an existing or proposed main building or accessory structure.



MFHs: Created by converting existing interior non-habitable area within an existing multifamily dwelling structure.

Junior ADUs (JADUs) are entirely contained within the walls of a main building of an existing or proposed SFH.[1]

	New Construction	Conversion	JADUs
Minimum Area	150 s.f.	150 s.f.	150 s.f.
Maximum Area	1,000 s.f. (for SFH)	No max.	500 s.f.
Eligibility	SFH (detached or attached) MFH (detached only)	SFH; Existing MFH only	SFH only

How many ADUs are permitted for my property?

ADU Types	SFHs	MFHs
New Construction	Max. 1	**Existing MFHs:** Max. 8 detached (not exceeding existing number of units)
Conversion	Max. 1	**Only for existing MFHs:** • Min. 1 • Max. 25% of the existing number of units
JADU	Max. 1[1]	None
Total	**Max. 3[2]**	**Existing MFHs:** Based on existing number of units **Proposed MFHs:** Max. 2 detached new construction ADUs

[1] JADU not permitted for lots with 2 or more detached single-units on the same lot.
[2] Of the 3 allowed ADU types, a SFH lot cannot have both Conversion ADU within the main building and Attached New Construction ADU.

What permits do I need for an ADU?

Required permits depend on whether the project qualifies for a streamlined or non-streamlined review.

Streamlined versus Non-Streamlined Review

	Streamlined	Non-Streamlined
Required Permits	Building Permit	Ministerial MPP (Miscellaneous Planning Permit) and Building Permit
SFHs	New construction ADUs up to 800 square feet; Conversion ADUs; JADUs; and ADUs completely within a basement	New construction ADUs (attached or detached) over 800 square feet
MFHs	Detached new construction and conversion ADUs	None

Applying for a Non-Streamlined ADU planning permit?

- ☐ Review Non-Streamlined ADU submittal requirements.
- ☐ Visit Online Permit Center, gather requirements & apply for MPP.
- ☐ A planner will contact you to confirm receipt & will generate invoice.
- ☐ Pay the permit fee

Typical Review Timeline: 2 to 4 weeks from the fee payment.

Building an ADU? Know the Requirements

NEW CONSTRUCTION ADUs	
Setbacks (Side & Rear)	Min. 4’
Heights (as measured from the average finish grade within 5’ of the structure)	• **Attached New Construction ADU:** Max. 25’ • **SFH and one-story MFH:** Max. 16’ • 2 or more story MFHs & all lots that are within one-half mile walking distance of a major transit stop or a high-quality transit corridor, as those terms are defined in Section 21155 of the Public Resources Code: Max. 18’ • Additional 2’ allowed to accommodate a roof pitch on the accessory dwelling unit that is aligned with the roof pitch of the main dwelling unit.
Additional requirements for Non-Streamlined ADUs (refer to SMC Chapter 19.79)	• Min. Front & Reducible front yard setbacks per zoning district • Entrance on a different wall plane than the main dwelling unit • Min. 5’ distance (wall to wall) from the main building & accessory structures • Design relationship to the main building • Tree Replacement requirement for removal of protected trees • **Two story or Second Floor ADUs:** Solar access requirements and window privacy requirement.

ADU BASICS

Floor Area & Lot Coverage: Up to 800 square feet of each ADU is excluded from floor area & lot coverage calculations. Attached covered patios (with more than 50% solid roof) are not exempt and shall be included in lot coverage & floor area. Entry porches are included in lot coverage calculation but exempt from floor area calculations.

Heights: Measured from the average finished grade within 5 feet of the ADU.

Easements: ADUs are not permitted in any portion of existing easements that prohibit the construction of permanent structures as noted in the easement.

Additional Requirements

Separate ADU Entrance: Required for all ADUs

JADUs: Internal connection with main house may be provided. Internal connection is required if the JADU is sharing a sanitation facility with the main residence.

Transportation Impact Fee (TIF): Required for all ADUs over 750 square feet.

School Impact Fee: Required for new construction ADUs with 500 sq. ft. or more living area and shall be paid to the applicable school district.

Owner Occupancy Deed Restriction: Required if the JADU has shared sanitation facilities with the main dwelling.

Separate sale of ADUs/JADUs: Prohibited

Short term rental: Prohibited for ADUs approved after January 1, 2020.

Utility Billing Rates: For utility rate purposes, single-family with ADU properties are classified as multi-family properties with two units, and those rates will go into effect the day the ADU project is completed/signed off on.

Fire, Public Works & Building Requirements for SFH ADUs[1]

	ADUs (New Construction & Conversion)	JADUs
Fire Sprinklers	**Attached ADUs:** Required if primary dwelling has fire sprinklers. **Detached ADUs:** Required if primary dwelling has fire sprinklers or if detached ADU does not meet hose reach of 150 feet on all portion of building per CFC 503.1.1.	Maintain existing condition
Utility Hookups	Incremental sewer and water connection fees are exempt. If total water closets for the site exceeds 5, building sewer system to be upgraded to 4" line with building and property line cleanouts.	
Independent space and water heating systems	Required	Not required
Electrical panel (Check with PG&E for upgrade availability)	100 AMP subpanel at ADU, 200 amp at primary dwelling	N/A
Separation from Primary Dwelling	**Detached ADUs:** Exterior walls, openings, and projections to comply with CRC R302.1 based on real and/or imaginary property line between the ADU and primary dwelling. **Attached ADUs:** 1-hour fire rated wall with no door openings	N/A
Sewer Line Connection	**Detached ADUs:** • May pass through primary dwelling • New line to connect down line of the primary dwelling kitchen island sink • No ejector pump allowed **Attached ADUs:** Connect to the existing system	Connect to the existing system

[1] *Contact the Building Division for questions about the requirements for MFH ADUs.*

Can I legalize my unpermitted ADU/JADU?

Yes, existing unpermitted ADUs/JADU may be legalized (subject to permitting requirements). Contact Building Division for further information. Refer to the substandard dwelling definition brochure for qualifications for denial of permits for unpermitted substandard ADUs and JADUs.

For additional questions contact:

Planning Division: planning@sunnyvale.ca.gov | (408) 730-7440

Building Division: building@sunnyvale.ca.gov | (408) 730-7444

Or visit the One-Stop Permit Center at 456 W. Olive Ave, Sunnyvale, CA 94086

Quick Links

ADU PLAN GALLERY allows you to browse and filter pre-approved ADU plans. You can connect with designers and companies to use or purchase their plans.

Scan the QR code Or visit https://sunnyvale.aduaccelerator.org/gallery

ADU CALCULATOR is a great place to start creating a budget for your ADU project. The Calculator provides rough estimates of costs, fees, and rents for ADU projects. It allows you to customize multiple factors to create a budget that works for you.

Scan the QR code Or visit https://sunnyvale.aduaccelerator.org/calculator

ADU GUIDEBOOK is a free step-by-step guide to building an ADU in Santa Clara County. It includes helpful tips about design, financing, and construction. The guide also features worksheets to help plan your ADU project.

Scan the QR code Or visit http://www.aduscc.org/resources/guidebook

City's ADU Ordinance