



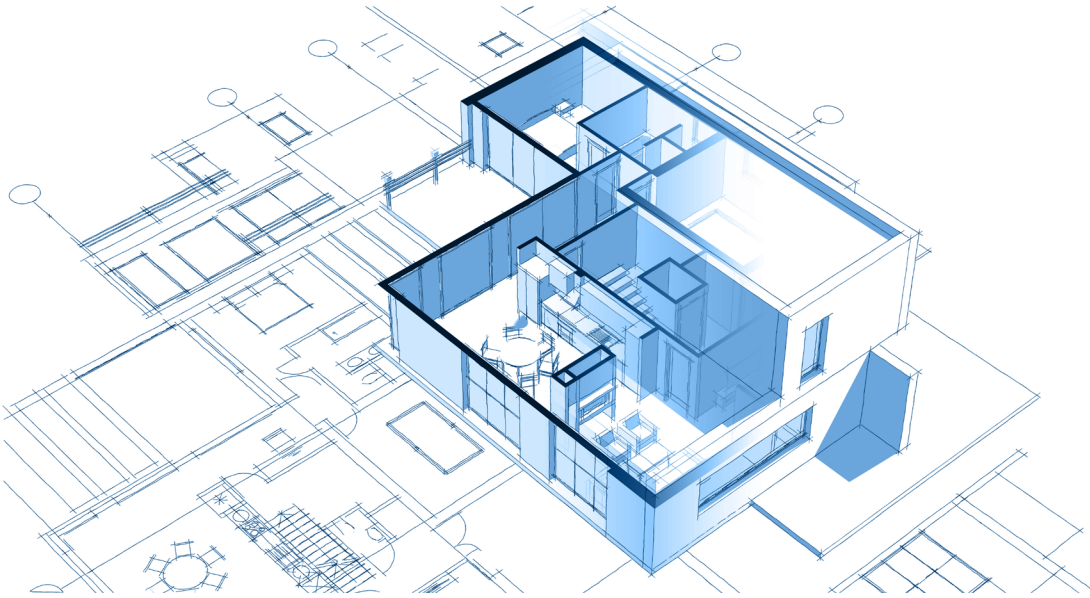
Accessory Dwelling Unit Handbook

April 2024



Table of Contents

Overview	3
Introduction.....	4
ADU Types	5
ADU Standards	10
Steps to Build an ADU.....	14
Potential Costs	18
Frequently Asked Questions	20
Resources	22
Contacts	23



Source: Adobe Stock

Overview

The purpose of this handbook is to assist property owners in the unincorporated areas of San Diego County with understanding what an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) is and whether one can be built on their property. This handbook also provides preliminary answers to key questions and shows the steps the County will require, and what the design and construction of an ADU will entail.

How to Use This ADU Handbook

Use this handbook as a guide to get started and to prepare the basic information you will need to give to the County, your lender, your designer, and your contractor. Take photographs of the existing residence, measure the backyard, and sketch ideas for an ADU, as this handbook illustrates, you will be well on your way. There are architects, engineers, designers, builders, and planners ready to help you at every stage. For additional information or if you have questions beyond this handbook, please refer to the Contacts section of this handbook for contact information for Planning & Development Services. The [County's ADU webpage](#), provides information on the process and applicable requirements for ADUs.

Introduction

What is an ADU?

An Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) is a residential unit that can be added to a lot with an existing single-family or multifamily dwelling. ADUs can be detached from or attached to the primary dwelling, or a garage conversion, or accessory structure conversion, such as a garage, barn, workshop or recreation room. ADUs are independent housing units that have their own kitchen, bathrooms, living areas, and entrances.

Why Build an ADU?

There are many reasons for building an ADU on a residential property. ADUs can provide additional space for renters, grown children, elderly parents, or caregivers. “Empty nesters” can stay in their neighborhood by moving into a smaller ADU and renting their larger existing home for additional income. An ADU can be built to house a relative or caregiver to be near one another while maintaining privacy.

What is the Law for ADUs in California?

California Government Code Section 65852.150 declares that California is facing a severe housing crisis and ADUs are a valuable form of housing and can play a key role in meeting the housing needs in many communities. The law recognizes that ADUs can provide housing to individuals at an affordable cost within existing neighborhoods without the need to subdivide land to create new parcels.

In 2017, the State Legislature passed a series of bills that allowed ADUs by-right¹ and created statewide development standards that regulated size, setbacks², height, and parking requirements (among other things) for ADUs in all California communities. In 2019, the State Legislature passed another series of bills that refined guidance on ADUs.

Generally, State law allows single-family properties to have one ADU and one Junior ADU (JADU) while multi-family properties are allowed a maximum of two detached ADUs.



Source: Home Builder Digest

ADU Types

ADUs come in many forms and configurations and may involve new construction, a remodel or addition, or conversion of existing space. The different types of ADU configurations are described and shown in the following section.

¹ Allowing something 'by-right' means that projects complying with zoning and regulations can be approved administratively without the need for special permits, hearings, or conditions.

² Minimum required distance from the property line to the structure.

ADU Types

See what type of ADU you want to build and refer to that page to learn more:

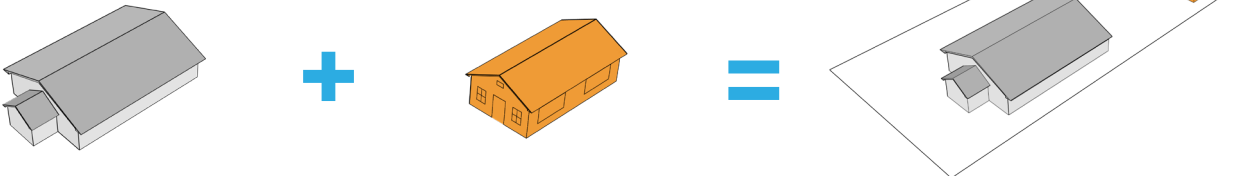
Detached ADU

[See Page 6](#)

I have a single-family house

I want to add an ADU in my backyard and it will not share a wall with the house

The lot with a detached ADU in the backyard:



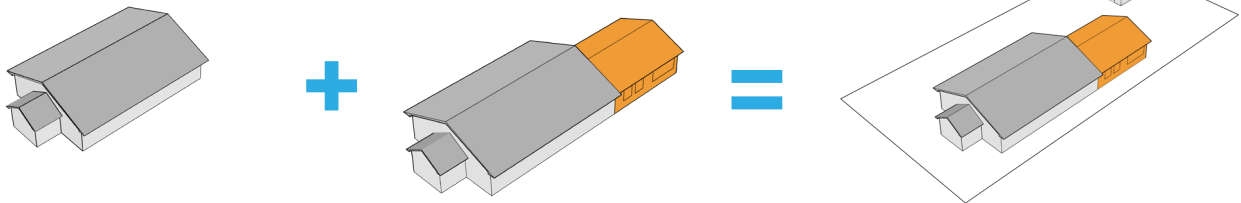
Attached ADU

[See Page 7](#)

I have a single-family house

I want to add an ADU and the unit will share at least one wall with the house

The lot with an ADU attached to the house:



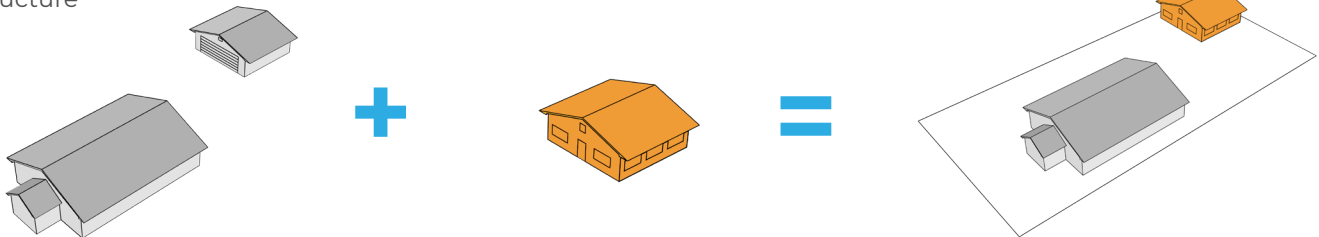
Conversion ADU

[See Page 8](#)

I have a single-family house with a garage (attached or detached), or other permitted accessory structure

I want to convert my garage or other permitted accessory structure into an ADU

The lot with a garage or other permitted accessory structure converted to an ADU:



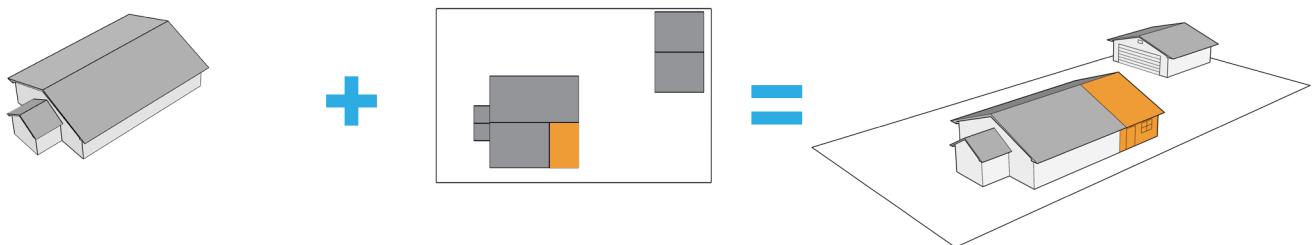
Junior ADU (JADU)

[See Page 9](#)

I have a single-family house

I want to convert a portion of the house into a JADU

The lot with a JADU:

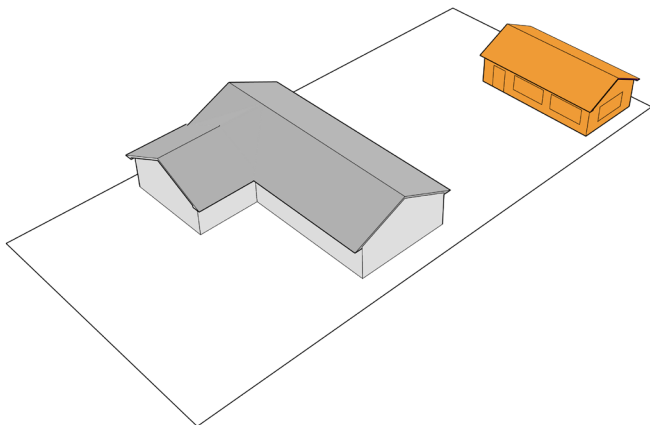


Detached ADU

A detached ADU is physically separated from a single-family home or multi-family home on the same contiguous lot. Detached ADUs are the classic ‘backyard home’ that most people are familiar with. Detached units do not share a common wall, ceiling, or floor with the primary home. They are a separate structure located on the same property as the primary home.

Detached ADUs can also include a converted garage or other stand-alone structure. This type of ADU is the most flexible and allows for the greatest range of design options, given that it is essentially a new freestanding home. However, it is the most expensive of the ADU types and typically has more complexity during permitting and construction and may require the installation of new water, sewer, and electrical connections to the street and/or overhead power lines.

What It May Look Like



Requirements

Height

Maximum height: 25 feet (except for multifamily complexes, which are limited to 18 feet).

Setbacks

Front Yard: Underlying zoning district measurement, unless lot constraints preclude the ability to build an ADU outside of the front yard setback.

Side Yard: 4 feet (minimum).

Rear Yard: 4 feet (minimum).

Parking

One parking space required. The parking space may be located within the setbacks and in an existing driveway as tandem parking.

A parking space is not required for the ADU in any of the following instances:

- (1) The ADU is located within one-half mile of public transit.
- (2) The ADU is located within an architecturally and historically significant historic district.



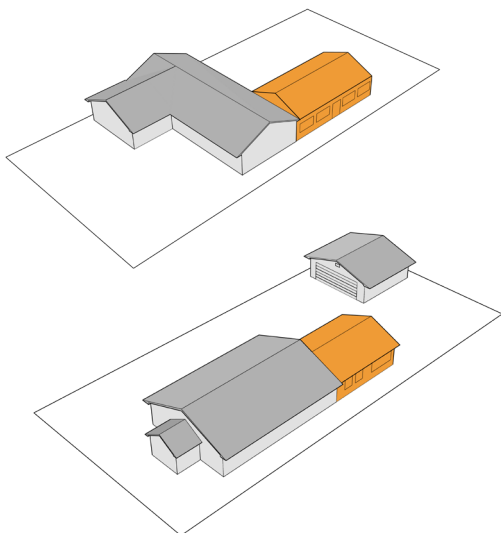
Source: Home Builder Digest

Attached ADU

An attached ADU is a contained space, typically sharing a common wall, ceiling, or floor with the main house. Attached ADUs also includes building conversions of an existing structure (such as a garage) and second story or above-garage additions.

These units typically provide cost savings with utility connections which can be connected directly through the primary residence (versus creation of new water, sewer, and electrical connections to the street and/or overhead power lines). Attached ADUs are also typically limited in size to 50% of the total floor area of the primary residence. The 50% square foot limitation is not applicable for attached ADUs up to 850 square feet for studio and one-bedroom, 1,000 sq ft for 2 bedrooms or more, or up to 1,200 square feet if it has more than one bedroom. Attached ADUs must be separated from the main dwelling with a continuous fire rating similar to one that would occur between a residence and a garage and will have a separate entrance.

What It May Look Like



Requirements

Height

Cannot exceed the height of the primary structure or 16 feet, whichever is higher. If ADU is constructed above any portion of an existing dwelling, it cannot exceed the height limits of the underlying zone.

Setbacks

Front Yard: Underlying zoning district measurement.

Side Yard: 4 feet (minimum).

Rear Yard: 4 feet (minimum).

Parking

An ADU shall provide one parking space. The parking space may be located within the setbacks and in an existing driveway as tandem parking.

A parking space is not required for the ADU in any of the following instances:
 (1) The ADU is located within one-half mile of public transit.
 (2) The ADU is located within an architecturally and historically significant historic district.



Conversion ADU

A conversion is when an existing structure, such as a garage or accessory structure, is converted into an ADU. This type of ADU may also utilize existing space within an existing home and may be fully contained within the home's footprint, or may expand beyond the existing walls, particularly to accommodate a separate exterior entrance. Other examples of conversions include basement or attic conversions.

Conversions are the most cost-effective approach to designing, permitting, and building an ADU, because homeowners are typically able to use existing foundations, framing, roof systems, and plumbing/electrical systems. However, the ADU is limited to the size/configuration of the existing structure and therefore design options can be more limited compared to new construction.

There may be Building Code requirements and/or Fire Department requirements to bring an existing structure to code. The applicant should contact the Building Division and their respective Fire District to ensure compliance.

Requirements

No additional development standards such as maximum square footage, height, lot coverage, and setbacks are required if an existing and permitted detached or attached accessory structure is being converted into an ADU.

An existing and permitted accessory structure, or a portion of the existing

and permitted main residence could potentially be converted into an ADU. Such a conversion would not be subject to any size requirements.

Height

If detached conversion, see page 6

If attached conversion, see page 7

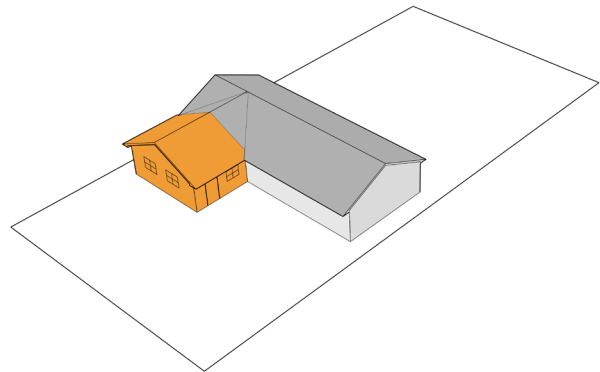
Setbacks

No change to existing setbacks

Parking

Not required.

What It May Look Like



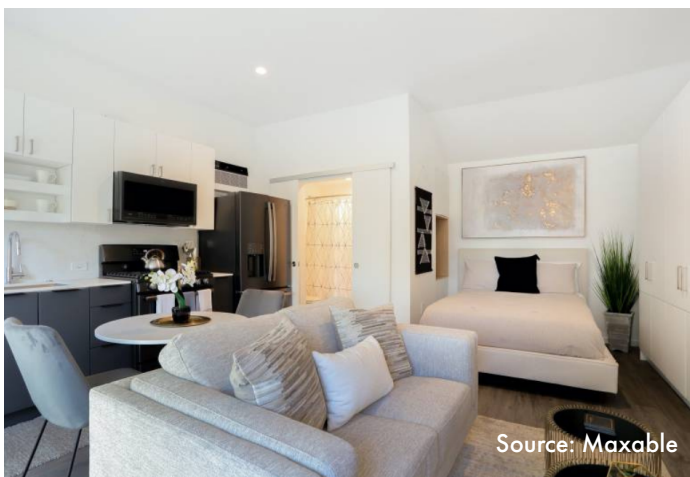
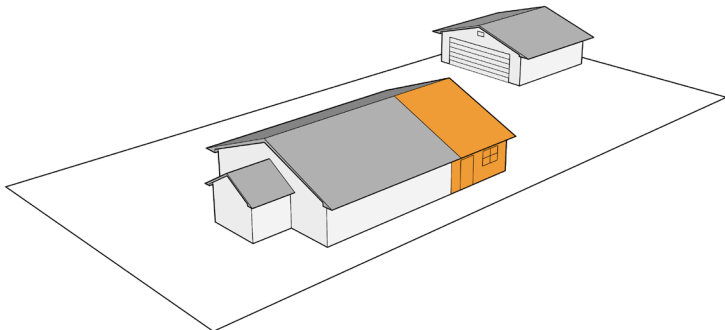
Before and After Conversion



Junior ADU

A Junior ADU (JADU), although similar to an ADU, is limited to 500 square feet and may be contained within existing space that is entirely within an existing or proposed single family residence (SFR) with a separate entry. Additions to an existing structure may be permitted that is partially or entirely within the JADU. Garages and other non-living spaces may be converted to a JADU, if they are attached to the primary residence. JADUs are allowed in addition to ADUs, therefore it is possible to build a total of two additional units on one single-family property. JADUs, have different standards than ADUs, including a requirement that either the primary home or JADU be owner-occupied and a JADU may be allowed in addition to an ADU on the same property.

What It May Look Like



Requirements

Unit Size

One JADU, which shall not exceed 500 square feet, may be permitted on lots with an existing or proposed SFR within a residential or mixed-use zone.

The JADU must be completely contained within an existing or proposed SFR and may include separate restroom facilities or may share restroom facilities with the existing structure.

Efficiency Kitchen

A full kitchen is not required in a JADU. However, the JADU must include an efficiency kitchen, as defined by state law. An efficiency kitchen should be sized appropriately to the size of the JADU and may include whatever appliances that fit the space and meet Building Code. Efficiency kitchens must include:

- a. A cooking facility with appliances.
- b. A food preparation counter and storage cabinets that are of reasonable size in relation to the size of the junior accessory dwelling unit.

Parking

Not required.

ADU Standards

The information presented below summarizes requirements for consideration when building an ADU. For the full updated list of requirements for ADUs, refer to [County's ADU and JADU Regulations Handout](#)

Proposed ADU development are subject to standards set forth in [San Diego County Zoning Ordinance - Part Six: General Regulations, Section 6156x. Residential and Agricultural Use Types](#). The County's ADU and JADU Regulations Handout is consistent with State Law and may be updated from time to time to maintain consistency with the State. ADU and JADU laws supersede local zoning ordinances.

Septic Systems

Septic systems are required in parts of San Diego County which are not serviced by a public sewer system. If an existing single-family residence is connected to a public sewer system, then the ADU could also be connected to the system.

If a property is not serviced by a public sewer system and there is an existing septic tank, new kitchens and bathrooms in a proposed ADU may need to install an additional septic tank to reduce the load on the existing disposal field. If the existing disposal field is not large enough to accommodate the additional flow or load from the ADU, a new, separate septic system will need to be installed. Septic requirements will vary by project, for more information on septic requirements

please contact Environmental Health and Quality (DEHQ). Feasibility is determined by obtaining DEHQ approval of an On-site Wastewater Treatment System (OWTS) Layout Application. Septic requirements will vary by project, for more information on septic requirements please contact Environmental Health.

Septic requirements will vary by project, for more information on septic requirements visit the [Dept. of Environmental Health and Quality website](#). The first step is to contact an OWTS Professional who will prepare and submit the application after selecting the best OWTS design to match your ADU proposal and specific site conditions. DEHQ will perform a field inspection of the submitted application, and if all requirements are met will provide terms of approval.

Visit the [DEHQ website](#) and find the lists of: OWTS Professionals, Septic Contractors, and Septic Pumpers. Find the As-Built drawing of your existing OWTS using the [DEHQ document library](#), and email lwq duty.deh@sdcountry.ca.gov for all correspondence and document submittals.



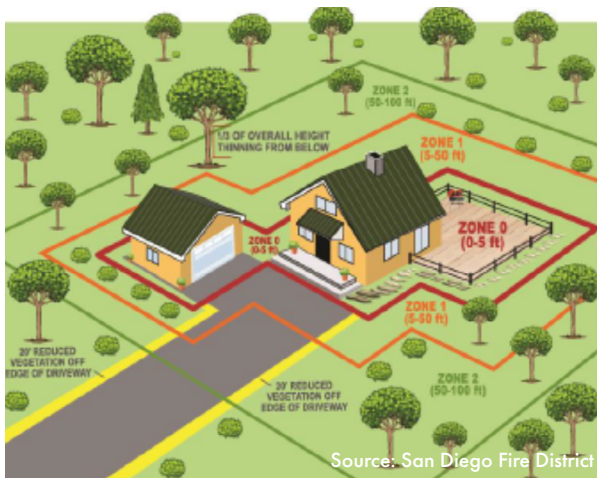
Source: Adobe Stock

Development Requirements

Fire Safety Requirements

Fire Safety Requirements must also be considered when building an ADU. First step would be to determine which [fire protection district](#) the property in question is located. Reach out to the appropriate fire protection district to determine [fire-related requirements](#). Consider the following requirements:

[Defensible space](#) is one of the most important steps you can take to improve your home's chance of surviving a wildfire; it is a buffer between a structure on your property and the grass, trees, shrubs, and any wildland area that



surrounds it. Consistent with state codes, the [required fuel modification area](#) is 100 feet around structures (or to the property line, whichever is nearer to the structure). The area located within 50 feet of the structure must be cleared and planted with fire-resistant plants, and the landscaping must be irrigated.

Fire sprinklers are not required when they were not required by building codes for the existing primary residence. For example, a detached single-family home designed and constructed decades ago would not have been required to have fire sprinklers installed under the applicable building code at the time. Fire sprinklers are required in ADUs when the same primary residence underwent significant alteration and is now required to have fire sprinklers, any ADU created after that alteration must be provided with fire sprinklers.

Plans for residential building projects must be submitted to the County Building Division for approval. You will need to coordinate the review of your plans with the outside fire authority having jurisdiction.

California Residential Code Section R313.2 (Part 3 of Title 24) requires that newly constructed one- and two-family dwellings install automatic residential sprinkler systems with the exemption as described in the previous paragraph. See [Cal Fire Information Bulletin 21-005](#).

Wildland Urban Interface Area

Properties located within the [Wildland Urban Interface Area](#) have additional building and fire requirements that must be incorporated into the design of a new ADU project.

In accordance with State law, fuel modification requirements must be implemented including fuel modification areas, defensible space, and ignition-resistant construction requirements. If your project is located in a Wildland Urban Interface Area make sure to ask your local fire authority how this may effect your plans. To see if your home is within this zone, you can enter your address at the [Fire Hazard Severity Zone GIS map](#).

Solar Panel Requirements

According to California's Title 24, Part 6 of the Building Energy Efficiency Standards, you may be required to install solar panels and install solar panels to meet the requirements of your energy efficiency analysis. This applies to newly constructed, non-manufactured, detached ADUs. If you have an existing solar system on your primary structure, solar panels could be added to the existing system to meet this requirement. ADUs and JADUs exempt from this requirement are attached and conversion ADUs, as well as prefab ADUs. JADUs are not required to provide solar photovoltaic system. To get the most updated information on the [Title 24 solar panels requirement, refer to the California Energy Commission](#).

Grading Requirements

Site topography refers to the elevation of the surface on various points on a property including a site's natural features, grades, and overall terrain.

Knowing the topography on a property provides opportunities and constraints

related to siting buildings, access routes, drainage, view sheds, and more. Areas that are on flatter portions of a lot (less than 10% slope) are more ideal for development. A combination of grading and retaining walls can be used to level a portion of a property for new building construction. Grading on slopes exceeding 25% is not advised.

The San Diego County Grading Ordinance contains criteria on what types of activities require a grading permit. A summary of the most common of these scenarios is listed on the following [San Diego County Grading Plan User Guide](#) including a summary of activities that are exempt from requiring a grading permit. To determine if your project requires a grading permit or qualifies for exemptions, or if you would like an Initial Consultation, please contact the County Land Development Counter at (858) 694-2055 or email ldpermitcounter@sdcounty.ca.gov.



Source: Diane Waingrow, AIA

Stormwater Management Requirements

The project scope will determine the permitting requirements of a project including applicable stormwater management requirements. Stormwater management and erosion control is typically not a factor given their small building footprint or 1,200 square feet or less. However, impervious surfaces, including driveways, walkways, and other flatwork, can add up.

Stormwater Best Management Practices focuses on reducing runoff and improving water quality. Examples include rain gardens, grassy swales, permeable pavements, rain barrels, green roofs and other design practices, which may be integrated into new and redevelopment projects where appropriate. When an ADU is nearing completion, gutters will be installed to concentrate rainwater.

Stormwater basins are the reservoirs built near developments to temporarily hold stormwater during rain and snowmelt. They prevent high volumes of water from rushing into nearby streams during storms. If a site is graded, it can be designed to promote water flow towards a storm water basin. It is important to maintain the site and basin each year to ensure that the basin remains in operable condition to allow the water to seep into the soil.

In the County of San Diego, ADUs may be subject to [storm water management requirements](#), require site drainage and storm water mitigation for ADUs.

The [Building Forms and Handouts page](#) provides handouts for applications for

stormwater management filed with the Building Division. Specific questions should be directed to the Building Division hotline at (858) 565-5920, PDSBuildingPermitCounter@sdcounty.ca.gov.



Source: Adobe Stock

Steps to Build an ADU

The following outline is one approach to building an ADU. County staff have found applicants who follow this process when building an ADU are the more likely to succeed and move projects efficiently through the permitting and building process.

Decide and Prepare

1



Take photos

Once you've decided the type of ADU you would like to build, capture all angles of available space on your lot.

2



Make a sketch

Prepare preliminary plans of your lot, location and dimensions of structures. Verify requirements that may take up space (e.g. septic system, easements). Review the entire process before investing additional money and time. Consider adopting one of the [Pre-Approved County Standard ADU Building Plans](#) that are available for free.

3



Collect information

Bring information to the County PDS to discuss ADU plans. Retrieve Property Summary Report. Discuss design options, site specific factors, and constraints, such as septic, with County PDS. Consult with a few different contractors and people to understand costs and speed up the [permitting and building process](#).

Design and Apply for a Building Permit

4



Draft plans & determine costs

Consider your options for drafting plans such as hiring a designer or architect, drawing your own plans, purchasing plans, or purchasing a prefabricated unit. In addition, you can adopt one of the free [Pre-Approved County Standard ADU Building Plans](#).

5



Finalize construction drawings

Make sure that all of the required calculations and support documents are ready for submittal.

6



Submit for plan review and pay fees

Travel to the County office to go through the pre-intake process and set up an appointment for a record creation that starts the plan review.

Obtain Permit

There are many approvals a project needs to acquire in order to receive a permit. A well designed building is one part of this process, but some projects will also need approval for grading, septic expansion, and meet standards for fire hazard mitigation.

7



Revise drawings and resubmit

If there are comments or corrections needed based on the plans provided, revise the drawings and resubmit them until they are approved.

8



Obtain bids from contractors

It is advisable to receive bids from contractors before receiving a permit. A contractor will be able to give a full cost of development before you pay for an unrefundable permit.

9



Building permit issued

A building permit is what allows you to start building. This permit expires after 2 years but can be extended. Make sure to talk to planners and understand the permitting and renewal process.

Construct your ADU

10



Select contractor

When selecting a contractor make sure to pick wisely and ensure your contractor is in good standing with the [California State Licensing Board \(CSLB\)](#).

11



Begin construction

12



Construction inspection

13



Certificate of occupancy

A Certificate of Occupancy is issued upon final approval of all inspections for work authorized under a building permit and associated permits.

14



Done! Enjoy your ADU!

Process Overview

There are many steps involved when building an ADU. The following section details steps to take in four phases:

Decide and Prepare Phase

Confirm Eligibility and Allowed Size of ADU

Take time to do your due diligence. The more time you invest upfront, the easier the process is likely to go in the future. Determine the eligibility of your property and the maximum size ADU you can build.

Square Footage of Existing Single Family Residence	Maximum Allowed Square Footage for Detached ADU	Maximum Allowed Square Footage for Attached ADU (up to 50% of SFR)	
		Studio or 1 Bedroom	2 Bedrooms or more
500	1,200	850	1,000
1,000	1,200	850	1,000
1,800	1,200	900	1,000
2,000	1,200	1,000	1,000
2,200	1,200	1,100	1,100
3,000	1,200	1,200	1,200
4,500	1,200	1,200	1,200

Refer to the [ADU Regulations handout](#) and [ADU webpage](#) for more information.

Retrieve your [Property Summary Report \(how-to guide here\)](#) which you will take to the County Permit Center to assist with the pre-application and pre-review phase of the permit application process.

Determine any septic system requirements and if your ADU will be feasible. You can read the [Frequently Asked Questions from the Department of Environmental Health and Quality](#).

Utilize ADU finance tools via California Housing Finance Agency to estimate your costs including useful and free cost estimator tools.

Call or e-mail the County Planning & Development Services (see Contacts section) to discuss options as well as any constraints or site-specific factors (steep slopes, agricultural buffer setbacks, existing accessory structures, septic systems, etc.). This step will help to avoid surprises after investing time and money into a building design.

Design Phase

Design and Preparation



Decide if you will build a new ADU or convert an existing structure to an ADU. Consider your options for drafting plans such as hiring a designer or architect, drawing your own plans, purchasing plans, or purchasing a prefabricated unit. In addition, you can adopt one of the free [Pre-Approved County Standard ADU Building Plans](#). By using Pre-Approved County Standard ADU Building plans, much of the

design and permitting work is already completed, so there is less chance for delay or unexpected costs down the road.

Consider your options for construction. You can hire a General Contractor to manage and complete the construction or obtain an owner/builder permit to allow you to manage and complete the project yourself or through sub-contractors. Even if you process a project as the owner/builder, you will still need to use licensed contractors per the State of California. You can visit the [CSLB](#) website for more information on when you need a licensed contractor.

Once you select an ADU design option, you can get an [estimate of County fees](#) by looking up the Development fees. You can also see the [ADU Application Checklist](#) for a list of submittal requirements.

Obtain Permit Phase

Submit Plans for Building Permit

Depending on the type, size, height of your desired ADU, your building permit application may need a few rounds of comments and/or re-submittals. Plans are typically reviewed by various agencies, such as planning, engineering, and fire districts. Expect this process to take several weeks.

For a detailed guidance on how to submit your building permit application, please refer to [County's How to Obtain a Building Permit Summary document](#).

Obtain [Permits and Pay Fees](#)

Complete applicable forms and obtain your [building permit and any other necessary permits](#).

[Pay all required fees](#). Fees vary both by size and by method of construction.

Construct & Occupy Phase

Construct Your ADU

Complete all required Building and Environmental inspections at appropriate stages of the construction process. Throughout the construction process your contractor will need to call for periodic inspections that once approved allow them to move on with the next phases of construction. Failed inspections do occur and you will be provided with a list of items to correct for subsequent inspections. Once you pass your final inspection you have what is referred to as Occupancy and you can start to use the property

Occupy Your ADU

If you want to rent your new ADU, see the Frequently Asked Questions, Renting an ADU, and Resources sections for more information.



Source: Adobe Stock

Potential Costs

To determine the costs for constructing your ADU you will need to estimate the costs to obtain a Building Permit (and other necessary permits), costs to design your ADU, hard costs (e.g., building construction, septic upgrade, and site improvements) and soft costs (e.g., design costs and study costs, such as septic analysis). Utilize ADU finance resources via [California Housing Finance Agency](#) to estimate your costs including useful financing guides, including average costs, and free cost estimator tools.

In addition, estimate the rental income amount, if you plan to rent your ADU. Below are some rules of thumb to calculate ADU costs:

New construction is typically 125% more expensive than conversions (assuming the structure to be converted is in good physical condition).

The bigger the ADU, the more expensive, but less expensive on a per square foot basis. In other words, each additional square foot you add has a marginally decreasing cost.

The higher the quality of the fixtures and finishes, the more expensive the ADU.

Separately metered utilities (water, electrical, gas) cost more than using existing utility lines and supplemental permits are required.

Building on slopes or hillsides adds significant additional cost. New detached ADUs are required to have solar systems, which should be considered in overall project costs.

Renting an ADU

Do I want to be a landlord?

Not everyone is ready to be a landlord. With an ADU on your property you can rent your ADU for long-term use but, you cannot rent the ADU as a short-term vacation rental (for a period of less than 30 days). If you plan to rent, it is crucial you understand what your landlord responsibilities will be.



Renting your ADU means you are sharing your property with another household who has tenancy rights and the right to expect quiet enjoyment of the home for which they are paying rent. Additionally, as a landlord, you are subject to all of the same requirements under local, State and federal law, such as non-discrimination and the requirement to give notice of changes to the lease.

To learn more about your responsibilities, check out [“A Guide to Residential Tenants’ and Landlords’ Rights and Responsibilities”](#).

Lease Agreements

A legally enforceable lease describes both landlord and tenant expectations. A lease dictates what will make sharing your property work for you—for example, will you allow your tenant to smoke in the unit? If not, be sure the lease agreement states that very clearly. Will you allow pets? If so, think about the number, type and size that will be acceptable and spell it out in the lease. What are your expectations for guests? Where will the tenant park? You should plan to inspect the unit once a year to be sure everything is in working order, such as the smoke alarm—be sure the lease makes it clear you will do this and how you will give notice to the tenant when you plan to enter the unit.

There are many resources available and you are encouraged to seek help from organizations that can provide the most up-to-date, legally enforceable list of typical lease conditions. You can also build and customize your lease for free on various websites including Zillow Rental Manager.

When selecting tenants, landlords must adhere to federal Fair Housing laws that may apply. The [State of California's Civil Rights Department](#) provides information on Housing Discrimination. When considering tenant applications, you may encounter potential renters that participate in the Housing Choice Voucher program. This is a program managed by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and has several potential advantages to you

as a landlord. Find more information about this program and how landlords benefit from it on [HUD's website](#).

Setting Rent Levels

When deciding on how much you will charge to rent your ADU, you may want to consider how much income you need in order to cover your costs and pay down any debt you acquired.

To determine the “right” rent you should charge for your ADU, start by finding out what the current market is charging. To do so, you can search for “average rent” on the internet and compare similar rental price listings. You can also check [HUD's HOME Rent Limits](#) for your community, which publishes Fair Market Rent every year. HOME Rent Limits for the County, which publishes Fair Market Rent every year.



Frequently Asked Questions

Where can I find the most updated information about current ordinance on ADUs?

See the [County's ADU and JADU Regulations handout](#) for more information.

Who can I talk to for ADU-related planning questions?

Contact the County Planning and Development Services Department at or visit the front counter in-person at 5510 Overland Ave, San Diego, CA 92123 or email pdszoningpermitcounter@sdcounty.ca.gov

Can I build more than one ADU?

Yes, single-family properties can have one ADU (attached, detached, or converted) and one JADU. Multifamily properties are allowed a maximum of two detached ADUs, including non-conforming properties. Detached ADUs on multifamily properties are subject to the same process as those on single-family properties with the only difference in requirements being the height limitation mentioned on page 6. See the [County's ADU and JADU Regulations handout](#) for more information.

My property is on septic. Can I still build an ADU?

Consult with the Department of Health and Quality early in the process. Although ADUs are allowed on any parcel with a single-family home, all performance standards for sanitation must be met and approved.

How big can I make an ADU?

The allowable size of an ADU is dependent on the type being proposed. Specifically, whether the ADU is attached to the existing house or detached. If the ADU is attached to the existing house, it cannot be bigger than 50% of the existing house or 1,200 square feet, whichever is less. If the ADU is detached, then it can be no larger than 1,200 square feet in size.

Can I sell my ADU separately from my primary unit?

The ADU may not be sold or otherwise conveyed separate from the primary residence. ADU may be rented but is not intended for sale separate from the primary residence.

Will adding an ADU raise my property taxes?

Yes. ADUs/JADUs will be assessed by San Diego County at their current valuation. However, existing square footage which is not touched by the project will not be re-assessed.

Do I need to live on the property to build an ADU?

There is no owner-occupancy requirement for an ADU. However, there is an owner-occupancy requirement for a JADU.

Can my ADU be used as a short-term rental?

No. ADUs/JADUs must be rented for a period exceeding 30 days.

What if the structure was already converted into a rental without permits?

The requirements for ADU's would still apply and if this were the only conversion on the property it could be eligible as an ADU. You will need to process plans for an As-Built structure and it will still need to be designed as if it were new. County staff can discuss options with no obligations by emailing to PDS.ADUquestions@sdcounty.ca.gov

Resources

The following are external resources providing additional information to help navigate the ADU process:

[HCD ADU Website](#) - Provides links to various resources on ADUs, including an [ADU handbook](#) published by the California Housing and Community Development Department.

[California Government Code Section § 65852.2](#) - Provides State Accessory Dwelling Unit law.

[Zoning Regulation Part 6 General Regulations \(ADUs\)](#) - Provides pertinent zoning regulations related to ADU construction.

[California Housing Finance Agency](#) - State agency providing opportunities for ADU projects via third-party lending.

[California Energy Commission](#) – Building Energy Efficiency Standards

[Contractors State License Board](#) – Find a licensed contractor.

Contacts

Reach out to the appropriate San Diego County agencies for further guidance on the development of your ADU. Determining which fire district, water authority, sanitation district, and other special districts, your property is located will help guide you to the right agency to follow up with.



Planning & Development Services

[Online Land use and Parcel Research Tools](#)

For ADU questions: PDS.ADUquestions@sdcounty.ca.gov

For zoning questions: pdszoningpermitcounter@sdcounty.ca.gov

(858) 694-2960

Building Division

[Building Forms and Handouts](#)

[County Standard Building Plans](#)

[Self-Service Reports](#)

For building permit questions: PDSBuildingPermitCounter@sdcounty.ca.gov,

(858) 694-2960

Engineering Services

For engineering questions: PDSEngineeringPermitCounter@sdcounty.ca.gov,

(858) 694-2830

Department of Environmental Health & Quality

For environmental health questions: lwqduity.deh@sdcounty.ca.gov,

(858) 694-2888



Fire Protection District Development Services

[Fire District Contact List](#)



Water Authority Members



San Diego Gas & Electric Builder Services

