




TO: Elizabeth A. Pauli, City Manager
FROM: Elliott Barnett, Senior Planner, Planning and Development Services
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SUBJECT: **Outcomes from Tacoma's 2019 Accessory Dwelling Unit Code Updates**
DATE: September 9, 2020

At the City Council's direction, Planning and Development Services (PDS) staff are providing an update on the outcomes of the 2019 changes to Tacoma's Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) code. In summary, the updates have resulted in a substantial increase in the number of ADUs being built in Tacoma. PDS is gathering ideas for further actions to promote ADUs as part of a broader package of infill housing options.

BACKGROUND:

On March 19, 2019, the City Council passed Ordinance No. 28576 enacting changes to the City's regulations for ADUs (effective as of May 1, 2019). ADUs are an infill housing type intended to provide flexibility to homeowners and increase the range of housing options and price points, while fitting in harmoniously within residential neighborhoods. The 2019 amendments modified the City's prior ADU regulations in the following ways:

- Allowed detached ADUs in single-family zoning districts;
- Removed a requirement that the property owner occupy one of the dwellings;
- Reduced regulatory barriers and increased flexibility regarding lot size, building design, size and location;
- Included design, location and building controls intended to ensure that ADUs fit the scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood.

With the adoption of Ordinance No. 28576, the City Council expressed interest in considering further changes and refinements in the future, and directed staff to report back regarding the outcomes. This memo provides an update on implementation of the new ADU code approximately 16 months from its effective date.

Home In Tacoma Project

As part of Affordable Housing Action Strategy (AHAS) implementation, the City is launching the **Home In Tacoma Project** to identify actions to promote Tacoma's housing supply, affordability and choice throughout the City's neighborhoods. The City will evaluate additional ADU code and administrative changes through this effort, as part of the broader review of infill housing strategies. PDS staff will provide an introduction to the **Home In Tacoma Project** at the September 15, 2020 study session, followed by an in-depth discussion on October 27, 2020. For more information, visit www.cityoftacoma.org/homeintacoma.

ADU PERMITTING OUTCOMES:

The rate of applications to construct ADUs increased substantially after the 2019 changes, particularly for detached ADUs. Previously, the City processed an average of **about 0.5 ADU permit applications per month** (during a representative 6-year period between 2008 and 2014). In the 16 months since the 2019 code changes (from May 1, 2019 to August 12, 2020), the City has processed 148 ADU building permit applications, which is **an average of 9.25 per month**.



The increase appears to reflect pent up demand, particularly for detached ADUs. Some applicants also took advantage of flexibilities offered through the ADU amnesty program, intended to encourage people to legalize existing, unpermitted ADUs. The amnesty program offers flexibility regarding standards such as ADU size, location and height, in order to encourage bringing existing dwellings into compliance with health and safety standards. The amnesty program sunsets at the end of 2020.



People are building ADUs throughout the City's neighborhoods (see map, below). In most cases, the property owner lives in either the main unit or the ADU, though some ADUs have been built as part of rental properties. Anecdotally, people are interested in ADUs for reasons including housing family members, generating rental income, and aging in place.

Permitting and Technical Support

PDS has ramped up staffing to support the increase in ADU applications. PDS maintains an ADU resources page, including a tip sheet, ADU Design Guidelines, and surveys asking for input from property owners and developers at www.tacomapermits.org/accessory-dwelling-units.



New Detached ADU - 2019

The following table summarizes key data points regarding ADU permitting since the 2019 code changes became effective.

ADU Building Permit Applications (05/01/19 to 08/12/20)	
Total ADU permit applications	148
Applications by Council Districts	<i>District 1: 43 District 2: 24 District 3: 25 District 4: 36 District 5: 20</i>
ADU Building permit application rate	About 9.25 applications per month
Attached ADUs applications	43 total Within existing house: 22 Addition to existing house: 13 New SFD built with an ADU: 8
Detached ADUs	69 total Convert existing garage: 29 New Detached ADU: 40
Incomplete applications (on hold, pending information, or cancelled)	36
Permits issued	71
Certificate of Occupancies (C of O's) issued	9
Average time from application to C of O	184 days
Owner occupies main house or ADU (reported)	71%
Detached ADU height	From 9.5 to 21 feet (average 15.6 feet)
ADU square footage	From 250 to 1,300 sf (average 700 sf)
Affordability/rent	Incomplete data
ADU parking	Parking is not required for ADUs. While some add and some remove parking, generally the net is zero for each site.

LESSONS LEARNED:

There continues to be significant interest in ADUs in Tacoma. Based on applicant, community, and departmental input, staff have identified a list of potential ADU changes for further study as part of the **Home In Tacoma Project**:

Potential ADU Code Changes:

- Consider allowing two ADUs in some circumstances
- Clarify or simplify ADU design standards
- Clarify how ADU size and accessory structures size work together
- Consider increasing detached ADU size and height when the main house is small
- Consider increasing detached ADU height to facilitate second story garage ADUs
- Clarify how specific uses, such as adult family homes, work with ADUs
- Consider allowing ADUs with non-single family development
- Consider allowing habitable space within detached structures that are not ADUs

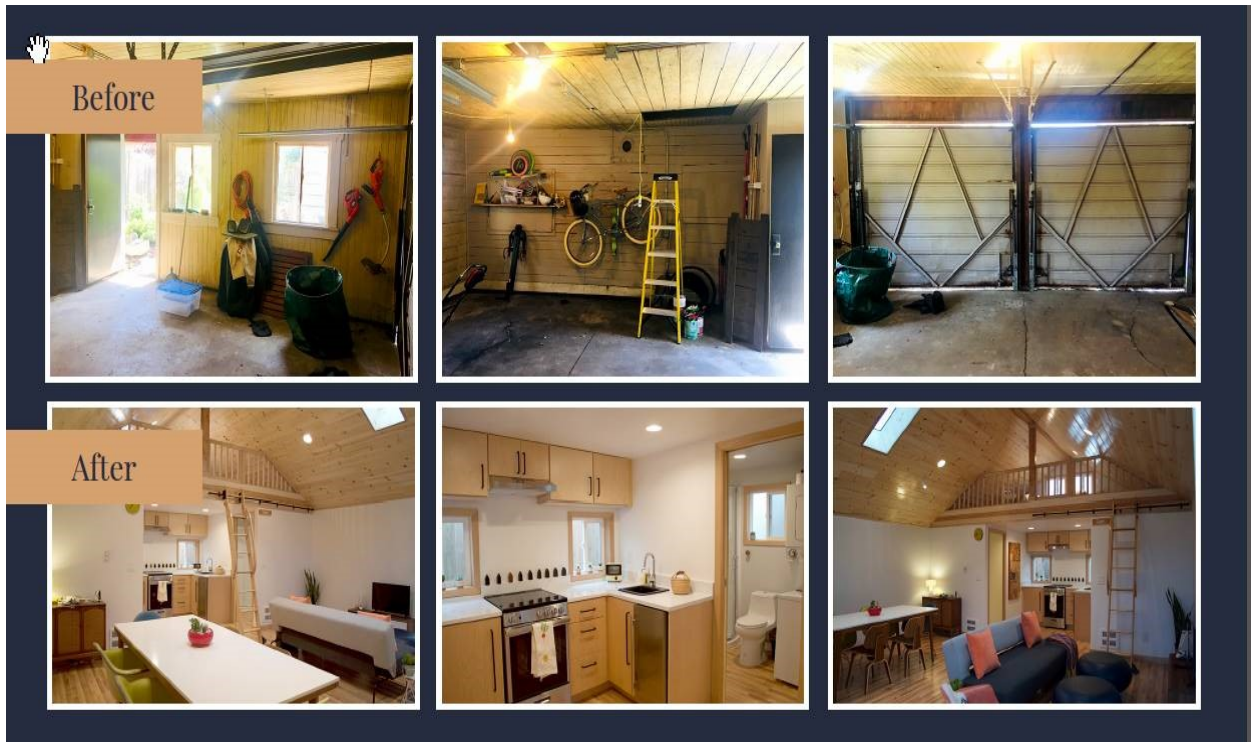
ADU Technical Support:

- Make the City's ADU guidance documents easier to understand for non-professionals
- Offer information about construction cost, financing and cash flow
- Offer City-recommended ADU designs

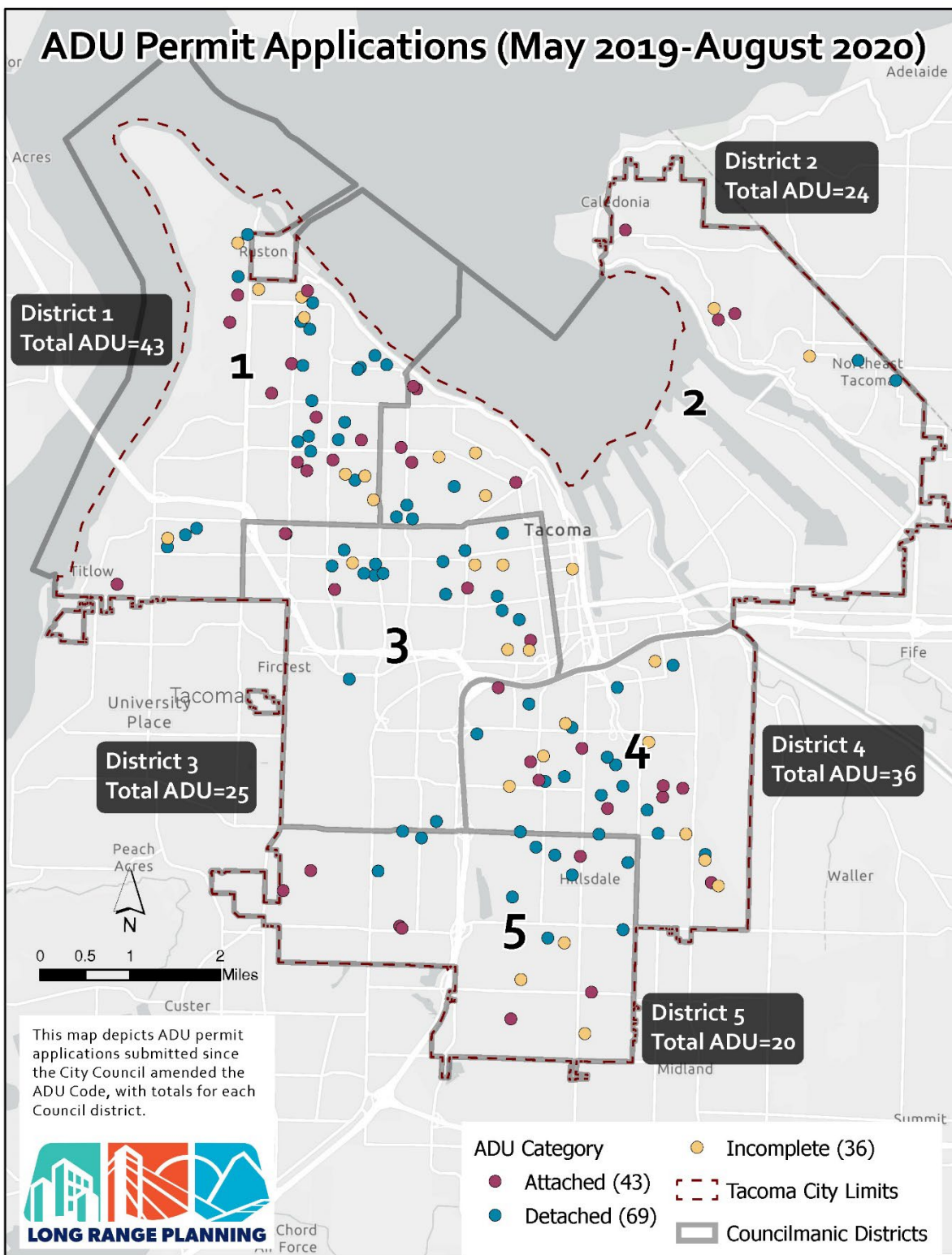
Fees, Building Code and Utilities:

- Consider Building Code changes to reduce barriers
- Consider reduced utility standards for ADUs
- Work with Tacoma Public Utilities to consider permit streamlining/utility reductions/financial support

For more information, please contact Elliott Barnett, Senior Planner, at ebarnett@cityoftacoma.org or (253) 312-4909. More information about upcoming housing policy work is at www.cityoftacoma.org/homeintacoma.



Converted garage Detached ADU - 2019



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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 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 13.06.700.B, additional height is subject to TMC 13.06.645 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.
 - In the Rear Yard of the primary structure.
 - A minimum of 5 feet from side and rear property lines, except no setback is required from alleys.
 - Provide fire separation from the primary structure per the Building Code.
 - Accessory building standards (per TMC 13.06.100.F).
- **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 13.06.100.D.7).
- **Walkways.** For ADUs with a separate entrance, a walkway must connect to the nearest public sidewalk or right-of-way.
 - 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).
 - A minimum 3-foot width (per Building Code).
- **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.



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).

TTY or STS users please dial 711 to connect to Washington Relay Services.

Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)

- **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 the property line shall be constructed to reduce direct views into the neighboring property.
 - 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.
 - Clear addressing 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 should be constructed to duplex design with fire separation and rated supporting structure.
 - Standards for home occupations, short-term and long-term rentals apply.

See Tacoma's [ADU Design Guide](#) for further information, illustrations and examples of these standards.

PERMIT REQUIREMENTS

Construction permits are required for creating, converting, and legalizing an existing attached or detached 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, Electrical, and/or Minimum Housing Code Inspection.

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

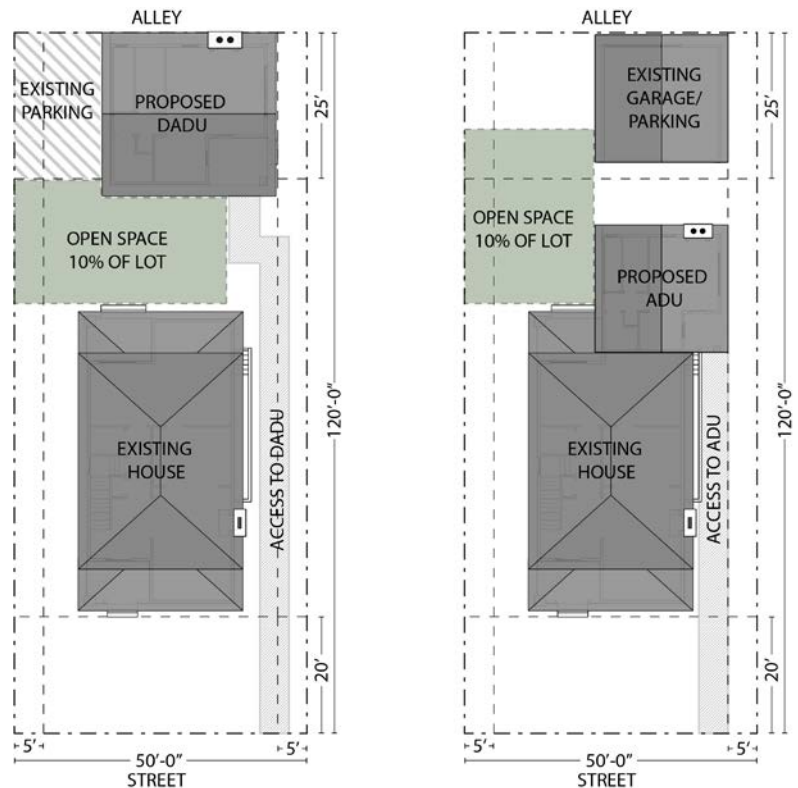
APPLICABLE REGULATIONS

- Tacoma Municipal Code Section: [13.06.150 - Accessory Dwelling Units](#), [13.06.100.F – Accessory building standards](#), [13.06.602 - General Restrictions](#), [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 in person at Planning and Development Services (PDS), Tacoma Municipal Building, 747 Market Street, 3rd Floor. Or, apply online at TacomaPermits.org.
 - The plans may need a 1-3 week review time.
 - After work is completed, contact PDS to request a new address and schedule Final Building Inspection.



Example Attached and Detached ADU site plans



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