

# HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE TO ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

December 2023



Steilacoom first made it legal to have an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) on a lot in 1995. Sometimes known as "mother-in-law" apartments or "carriage houses", ADUs are intended to increase housing opportunities for Steilacoom residents while better utilizing existing infrastructure, reducing the cost of homeownership by providing income, and maintaining the character of neighborhoods.

## ***What is an accessory dwelling unit?***

Accessory dwelling units are dwelling units added to, created within or detached from an existing single family dwelling, duplex, triplex, townhome, or other housing unit for use as a complete independent unit with provisions for cooking, eating, heating, sanitation and sleeping.

## ***Who may live in an ADU?***

Anyone can live in an ADU: the property owner, a guest, or a tenant. Property owners are not required to live in the principal unit or the ADU.

## ***Can the ADU be separate from my home?***

Yes, however, new detached ADUs must still comply with other zoning requirements including setbacks and lot coverage and must have separate utility connections for water, sewer and electric.

## ***Are there size limitations?***

The minimum gross floor area of an ADU is 320 square feet and the maximum gross floor area is 1000 square feet

## ***Are there other design considerations I should be aware of?***

Yes. The ADU must comply with the Town's zoning regulations regarding setbacks, lot coverage, and parking. The Town may allow some deviation from the standards of the ADU ordinance if the ADU is being designed for handicap accessibility. If your property is within the historic district and installing the ADU will require exterior modifications to the home, the plans for the ADU must be reviewed and approved by the Historic Preservation and Review Board before the ADU permit can be issued. Contact the Town Planning Department if you are not sure if your home is in the historic district. Finally, to receive an ADU permit, you must demonstrate that one off-street parking space is available for the resident of the ADU, in addition to the two parking spaces required for the principal home.

## ***What if I just want to put an extra kitchen in my basement? Do I need an ADU permit?***

Only if the basement is designed to be a complete independent living unit. This determination will be made when you apply for a building permit to put in the second kitchen with facilities for cooking, eating, heating, sleeping, and sanitation.

***Do I need an ADU permit to rent a spare bedroom?***

No. The Town permits “boarding houses” under a separate code provision. You would only need an ADU permit if the bedroom is a separate living unit that has all the facilities required of an ADU, that is, facilities for cooking, eating, heating, sleeping, and sanitation.

***What if I already have an ADU?***

If you were issued a building permit, or Town codes otherwise allowed the unit at the time it was installed, then you may continue to use the unit as permitted. No further permits or approvals are required.

If on the other hand, your unit was installed without a building permit or in violation of Town codes, then the unit must be made legal. First, drop by the Steilacoom Public Works Building and complete an ADU permit application. There is a \$100 application fee. Your permit will receive final approval if the requirements of section 18.16.020 of the Steilacoom Municipal Code are met. Before the ADU permit is issued, the building inspector will visit your home to see if your ADU meets these minimum standards.

***I am a builder constructing 10 new homes. Can I install ADUs in all of them?***

Yes, ADUs can be installed in new homes.

***How do I apply for an ADU permit?***

Expect the ADU application process to go like this:

1. Review this guide and SMC 18.16.020 prior to designing the ADU. Town planning and building staff are available to answer questions.
2. Pick up and complete an ADU permit application and a building permit application. These forms are available on the Town website and at the Town Public Works Building at 1030 Roe Street. Once completed, the application materials should be returned to the Planning Department at the Public Works Building.
3. Within 30 days of receiving these materials, the Town will either deny or give preliminary approval to your ADU permit. If the proposed ADU complies with the ordinance, the Town will notify adjacent property owners that an ADU has been given preliminary approval. This notice provides an opportunity for the neighborhood to appeal the ADU permit based on the grounds that your plans do not comply with the ADU ordinance. If no appeal is filed, the Town will issue a building permit so you can start constructing the ADU.
4. After the unit is installed, your ADU will receive final inspection. If the unit passes final inspection, the ADU permit is issued by the Town. The building department will notify the utility billing department of the new ADU permit and applicable utility charges will begin during the next billing cycle.

***What if I sell my home after I install an ADU?***

The ADU permit issued is tied to the property and the existence of facilities that constitute an ADU on the property. The sale of a home/property does not invalidate an ADU permit. Cancellation of an ADU permit only occurs if one or more of the facilities required for an ADU are physically removed from the property and evidence of removal is sent to the Town.

***More Questions?***

Contact the Steilacoom Planning Department at 1030 Roe Street, (253) 581-1912.