

BUILDING AN ADU

GUIDEBOOK TO ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS
IN THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

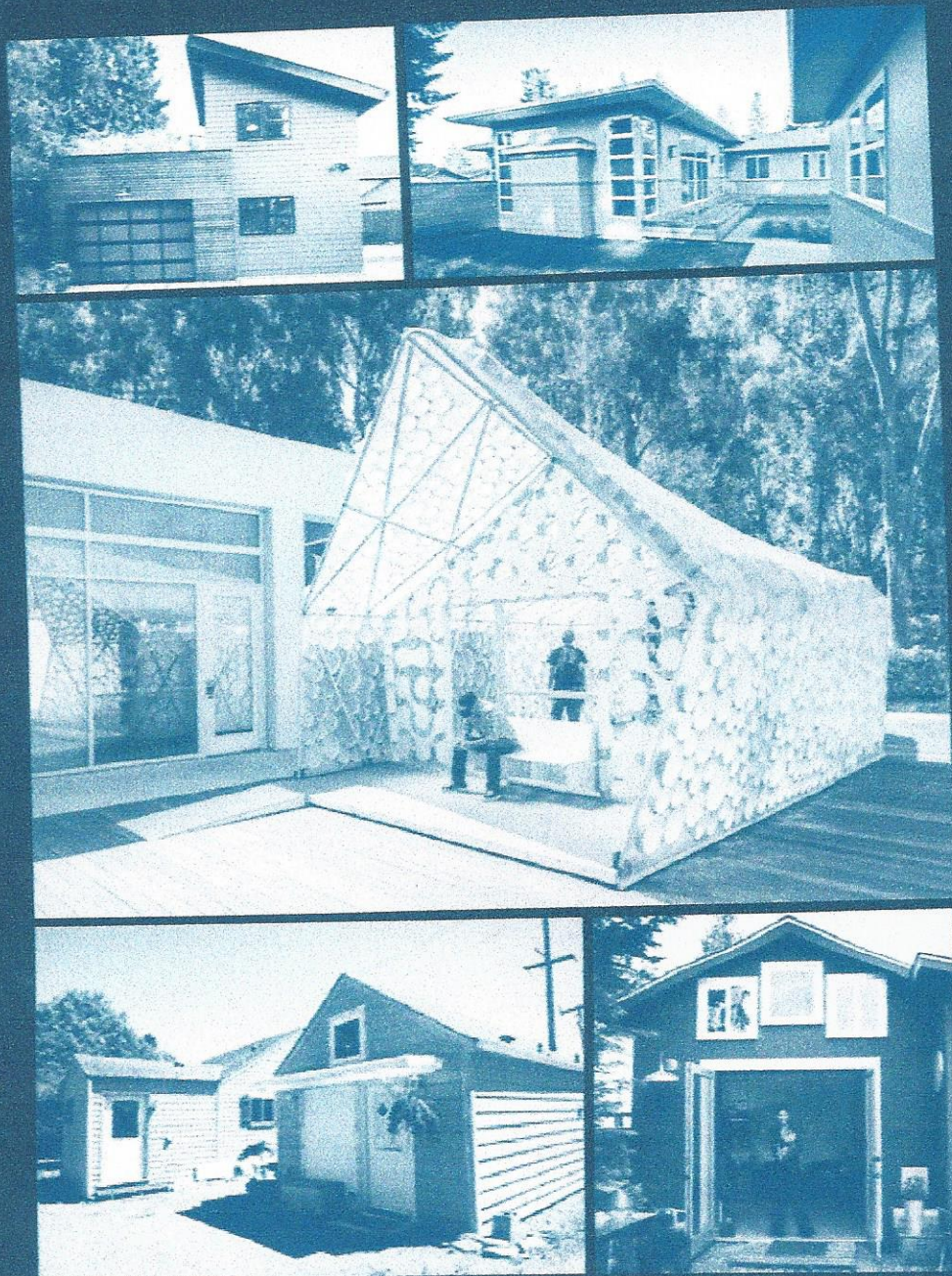


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OVERVIEW

In January of 2017, a new California state law took effect that encourages homeowners to build "granny flats." These housing units go by many names (backyard homes, secondary units, garage apartments, and the one we use here: accessory dwelling units or ADUs). Most homeowners can imagine many ways to use a rental unit on their property—for an elderly relative, extra income, a caregiver, or a grown child living at home. But many homeowners do not know that the City of Los Angeles has made it easier than ever to add a legal rental unit to a single-family home. Even still, the planning and building process is complicated. This handbook serves as a guide so homeowners can decide if it is possible to build an ADU on their property. It provides preliminary answers to key questions and shows the steps the City will require, and what the design and construction of an ADU will entail.

This guidebook helps you to get started and to prepare the basic information you will need to give the City (at the Dept. of City Planning and the Dept. of Building and Safety), your lender, your designer, and your contractor. When you have taken photographs, measured your backyard, and sketched your idea for an ADU, as this guidebook illustrates, you will be well on your way.

There are architects, builders, and planners ready to help you at every stage. This guidebook does not replace their services, but it does provide helpful advice, websites, phone numbers, and office locations where your more specific questions can be answered. Because ADU rules can change, check the date of the guidebook in your hands (at the bottom of the page). More up-to-date information will be available from the City Departments of Planning and Building and Safety.

Good luck designing and building your ADU!

NOTE: Since every ADU project will be unique, there are important questions that we cannot answer, for instance: How much will it cost? How long will it take to build? In addition, this guidebook does not substitute for required review by City agencies. All questions should be directed to the Dept. of City Planning and the Dept. of Building and Safety. Please see page 19 for contact information.

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 home. ADUs can be detached (a separate building in a backyard), attached to or part of the primary residence, or a garage conversion. ADUs are independent rental units that have their own kitchens, bathrooms, living areas, and entrances.

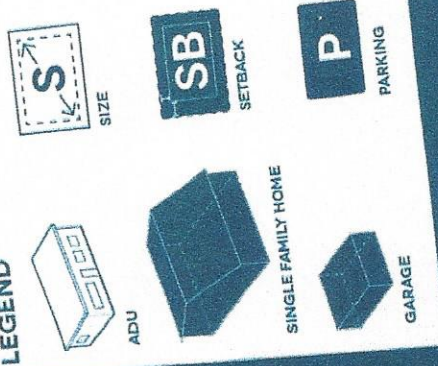
WHY BUILD AN ADU?

ADUs can provide additional space for caregivers, grown children, elderly parents, or renters. Because ADUs are rental units, they produce additional household income. "Empty nesters" can stay in their neighborhoods by moving into a smaller ADU and renting their larger existing home to pay the mortgage. An ADU can be built to house a relative or caregiver. There are many reasons for building an ADU on your lot.

WHAT IS THE LAW FOR ADUS IN THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES?

The new state law (AB 2299, effective January 2017) applies to LA and makes it easier to build an ADU on a single family lot. The state law encourages the construction of accessory units because the City needs more housing. You can read the entire law at the California Legislative Information website by searching California AB 2299. Please be aware that the City may pass new laws that will affect ADU construction.

LEGEND



HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook provides general guidelines for property owners who want to add an ADU to a lot that already contains an existing home. It describes the various physical forms that ADUs can take, like garage conversions or backyard homes. Please be aware that other city ordinances apply that could impact your process. Consult the Dept. of City Planning and the Dept. of Building and Safety for site visitation. See the Appendix for contact information.

THIS HANDBOOK ANSWERS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

- Can I add a unit to my lot?
- What could my unit look like?
- Can I convert my garage?
- What are the necessary steps to build an ADU?

The "FAQ" SECTION contains additional information to help understand issues at play and answer common questions. This handbook is a first step to understand how an existing property might accommodate a new unit. However, it is not a replacement for hiring a professional to help plan your project.

CAN I ADD A UNIT TO MY HOME?

☒ CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

1. I OWN A SINGLE FAMILY HOME



2. MY HOME HAS...

EXTRA SPACE IN MY BACKYARD

A GARAGE IN MY BACKYARD

ROOM THAT CAN BE CONVERTED INTO A UNIT WITH ITS OWN ENTRANCE

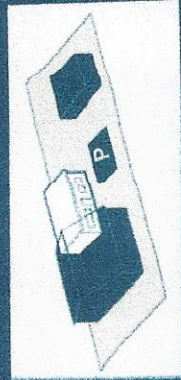


3. MY HOME ...

IS LOCATED WITHIN 1/2 MILE FROM PUBLIC TRANSIT?

HAS ROOM AND ACCESS FOR AN ADDITIONAL PARKING SPACE

SEE PARKING REGULATIONS P. 12



IF YOU CHECKED ALL THE BOXES YOU MAY BE ABLE TO BUILD AN ADU!

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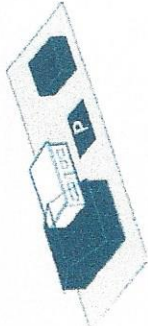
TYPES OF ADUS

I WANT TO... IT MAY LOOK LIKE...

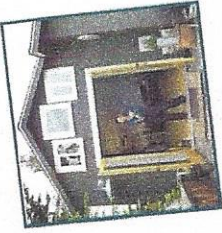
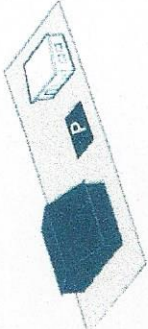
ADD A DETACHED UNIT ON MY LOT (SEE PAGE 6)



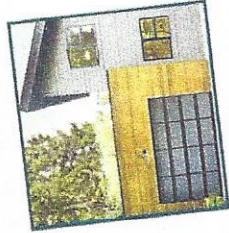
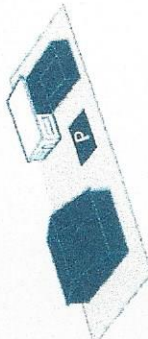
ADD AN ATTACHED UNIT TO MY HOME (SEE PAGE 7)



CONVERT MY BACKYARD GARAGE (SEE PAGE 8)

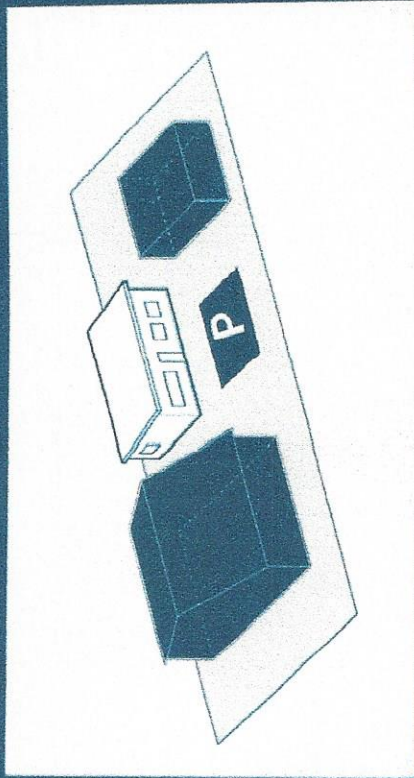


ADD AN ATTACHED UNIT TO MY BACKYARD GARAGE (SEE PAGE 9)



NOTE: Parking restrictions apply, please see pg.12 for more information.

DETACHED UNIT WITH EXISTING GARAGE



ADU REQUIREMENTS



Max. of 1200 sq ft
See also FAQ 8 p.18



5 ft min. from side and rear property lines
10 ft min. between main house and ADU

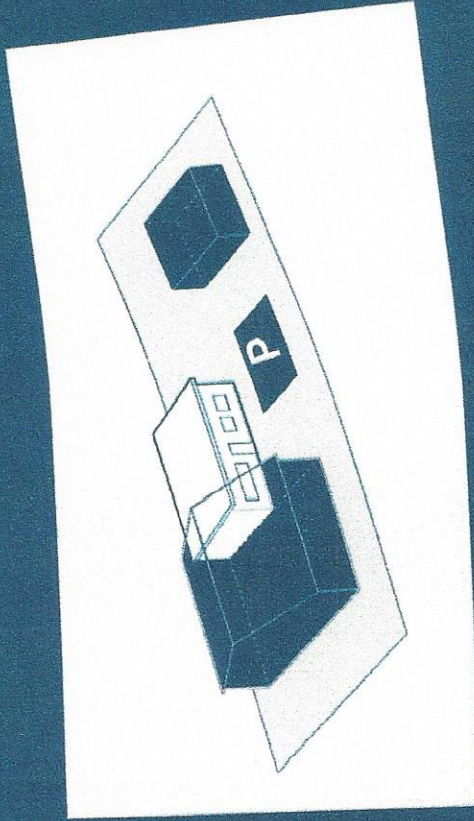


See parking p.12



BUILDING AN ADU OUTLAGE

ATTACHED UNIT AS ADDITION TO HOUSE



ADU REQUIREMENTS



No more than 50% of existing house and max of 1200 sq ft
See also FAQ 8 p.18



Side and rear setbacks as required by zoning



See parking p.12



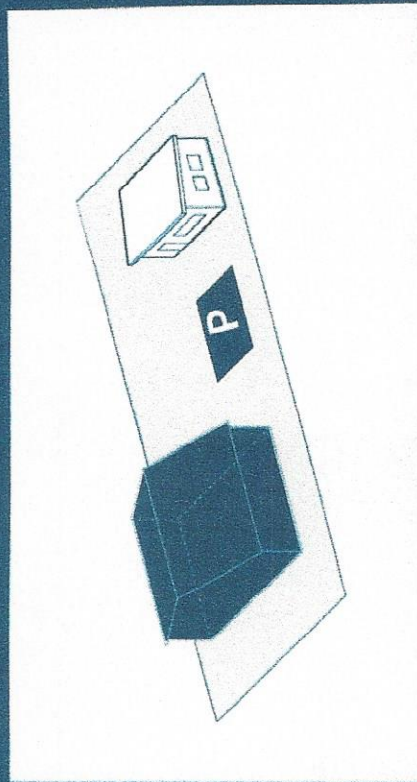
ATTACHED UNIT VARIATION WITHIN HOUSE

Size cannot exceed 50% of existing house; no other maximum size requirement applies to this variation



VERSION 10 | SUMMER 2017

BACKYARD GARAGE CONVERSION



ADU REQUIREMENTS



Max. of 1200 sq ft
See also FAQ 8 p. 18



No change to existing setbacks



See parking p. 12
If replacement parking is required, it may be uncovered.

BEFORE

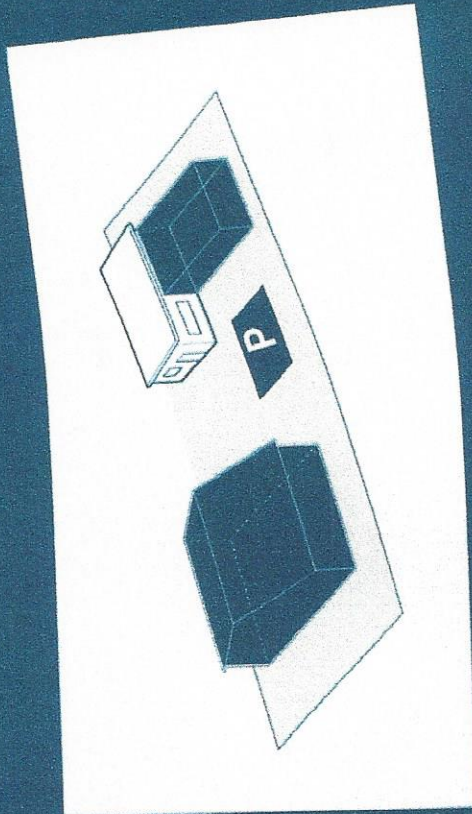


AFTER



BUILDING AN ADU CITY AS

BACKYARD GARAGE ATTACHED UNIT



ADU REQUIREMENTS



Max. of 1200 sq ft
See also FAQ 8 p. 18



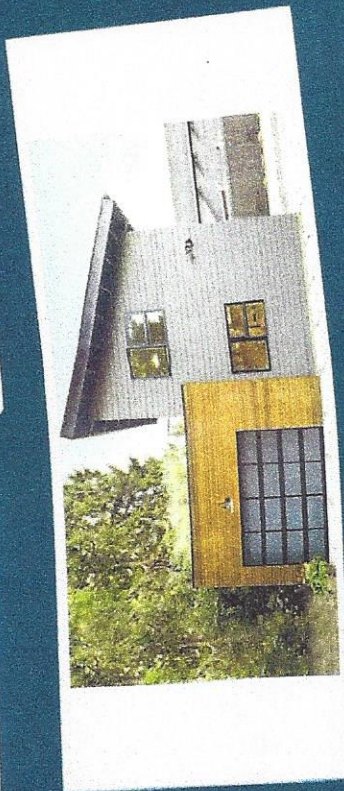
5 ft min. from side and rear property lines (required only for the ADU, not the garage itself)

10 ft min. between main house and ADU



See parking p. 12

ATTACHED UNIT VARIATION ABOVE GARAGE



VERSION 10 | SUMMER 2017

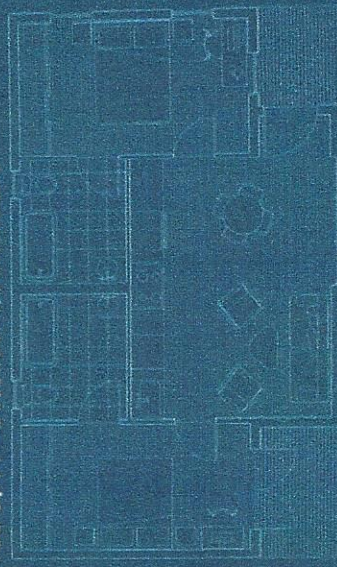
EXAMPLES OF ADU FLOOR PLANS

NOTE: The following are sketches showing possible room arrangements, but not plans for construction.

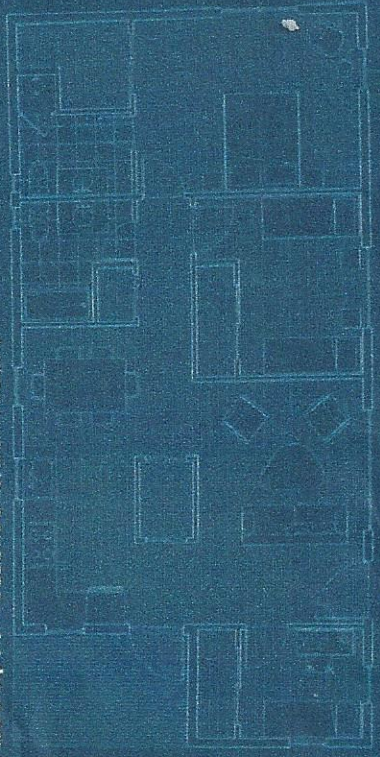
450 SQ FT - 1 BEDROOM, 1 BATHROOM



700 SQ FT - 2 BEDROOMS, 2 BATHROOMS



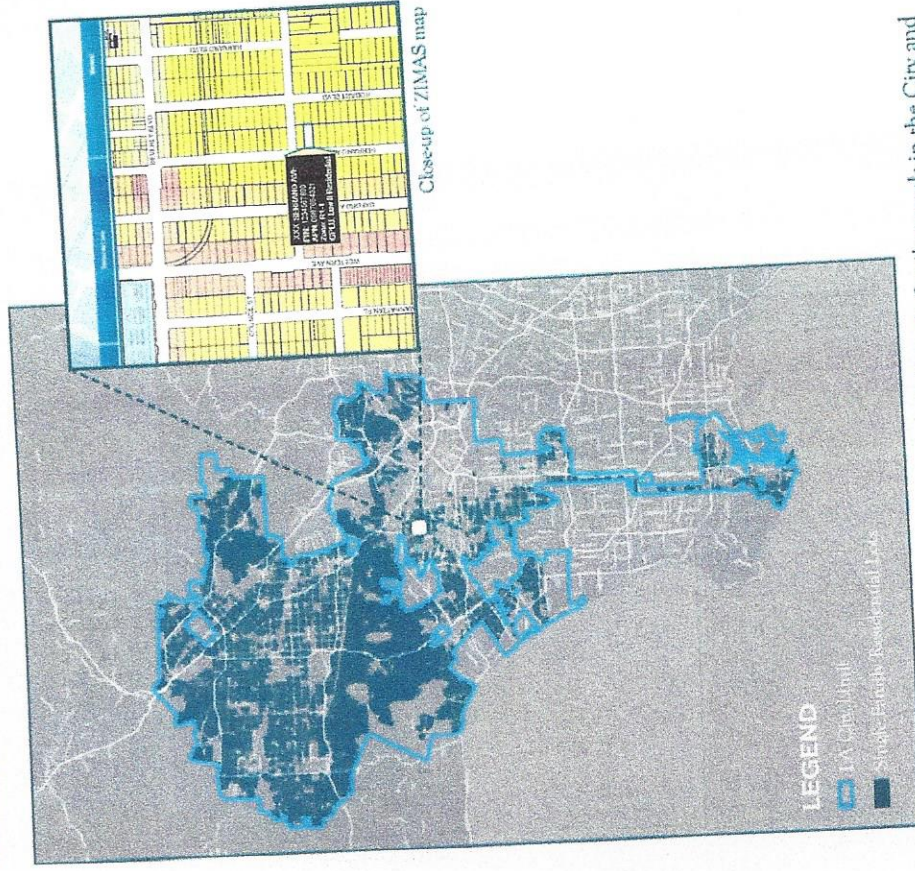
1200 SQ FT - 3 BEDROOMS, 2 BATHROOMS



CHECKING FOR ELIGIBILITY

FIND YOUR LOT ON THE LA RESIDENTIAL ZONING MAP (ZIMAS)

Every neighborhood in Los Angeles falls under specific zones. To build an ADU, your current house must be located in a residential zone, and most likely in a single-family residential zone. ADUs are permitted in all single-family zones. Any lot in these zones, regardless of its size, can add an ADU if it will fit. Your lot must have an existing house, only one ADU per lot is permitted, and the ADU cannot be sold separately from the house. An ADU must meet additional site requirements as well as building construction requirements as described in this booklet.



The above map of LA shows the location of all single-family parcels in the City and gives you an idea of whether your home is located in a single-family zone. Most standard lots are 3,500 sq ft or more, and may comfortably fit an ADU. Lots under 3,500 sq ft may face feasibility issues. Visit ZIMAS.cityofla.org and enter your address to check lot eligibility.

PARKING

HOW MUCH SPACE WILL I NEED FOR PARKING?

Many lots already accommodate two parking spaces in a garage or carport. When you add an ADU, you may need to fit one extra parking space on your lot. If an additional space is required, the space may be covered or uncovered.

YOU MAY NOT NEED ADDITIONAL PARKING IF:

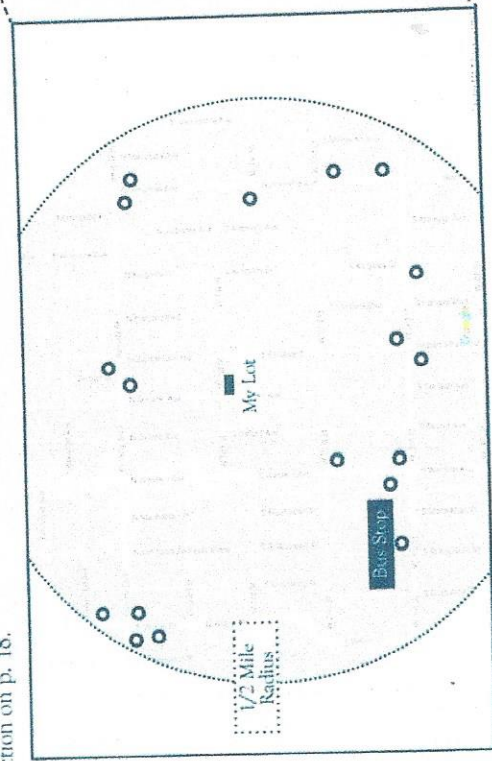
1. ADU is located within one-half mile of public transit.
2. ADU is located within an architecturally and historically significant district.
3. ADU is part of the existing primary residence or an existing accessory structure.
4. on-street parking permits are required, but not offered to occupant of the ADU.
5. there is a carshare vehicle located within one block of the ADU.

These are the five current parking exemptions as of July 2017, but parking requirements may change. Check with the Dept. of City Planning for current requirements.

IS YOUR LOT NEAR TRANSIT?

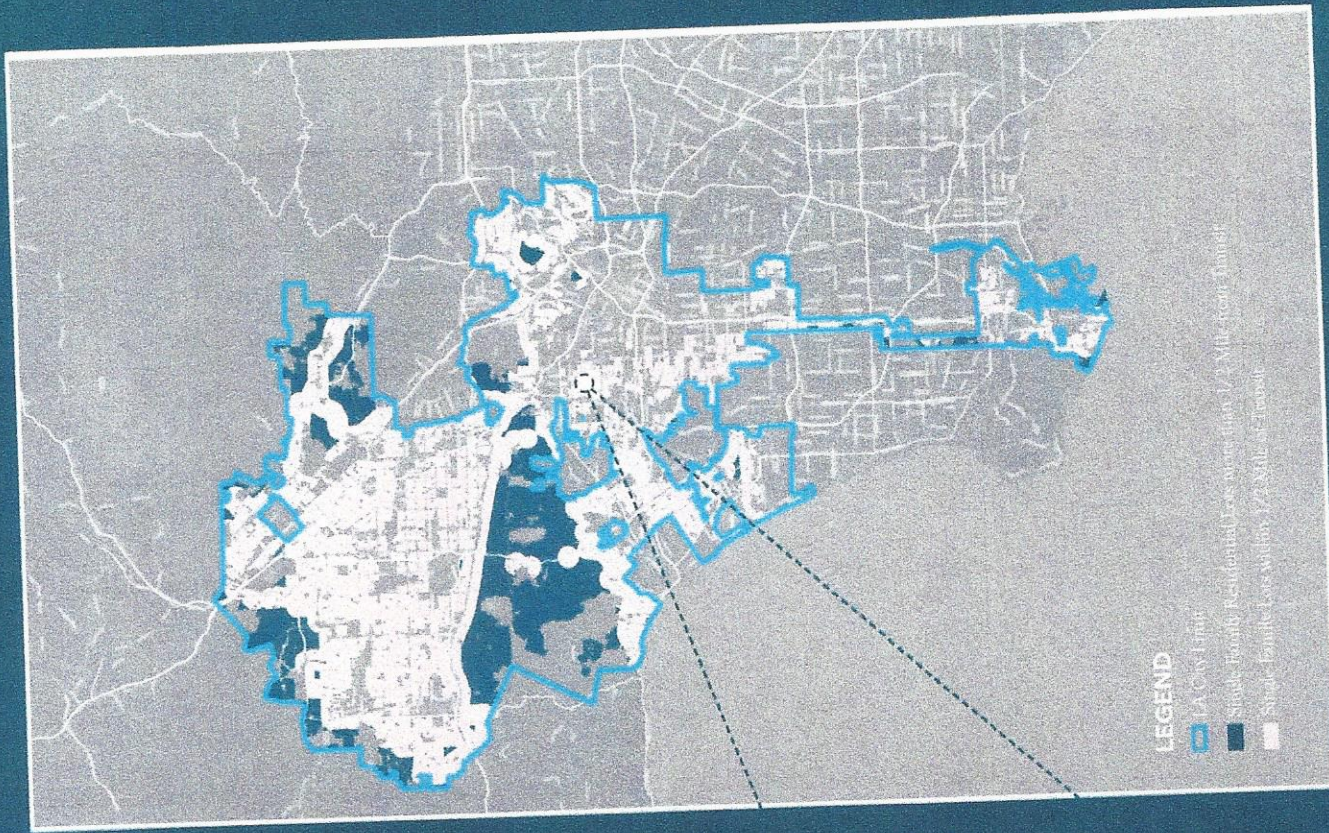
Your lot may not need additional parking for your ADU, leaving room for open space, a patio, a bigger ADU, etc. If your lot is located within one-half mile of transit (defined as one-half mile from any bus stop or rail station), it should meet the parking exemption. Map II (p. 13) shows that many lots (coded in pink) meet the transit exemption. Verify your specific lot status with the Dept. of City Planning or the Dept. of Building and Safety, particularly since bus stops can move.

Not located near transit? Read about additional parking exemptions in the FAQ section on p. 18.



Google Maps show transit stops. Bring a map like this to the Planning Dept.

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LOOKS LIKE I CAN ADD A UNIT TO MY LOT! WHAT'S NEXT?

1. COLLECT INITIAL INFORMATION



TAKE PHOTOS OF YOUR LOT

to capture angles that show the available space relative to existing structures



MAKE A SKETCH

of your existing house and yard, showing the location and dimensions of structures on your lot



BRING YOUR INFORMATION

to the pre-application process with the Dept. of Building & Safety.

2. DESIGN + PERMITTING



SUBMIT BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATION

and pay fees



COMPLETE CONSTRUCTION DRAWINGS



BEGIN PRELIMINARY PROJECT DESIGN

and DETERMINE FINANCING



REVISE DRAWINGS

as required by city



BUILDING PERMIT ISSUED



OBTAIN BIDS

FROM CONTRACTORS

3. CONSTRUCTION



CONSTRUCTION INSPECTIONS



BEGIN CONSTRUCTION



SELECT CONTRACTOR



CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY

DONE! YOUR NEW UNIT IS READY



BUILDING AN ADU CITYLAB

TIPS FOR DRAWING YOUR EXISTING LOT

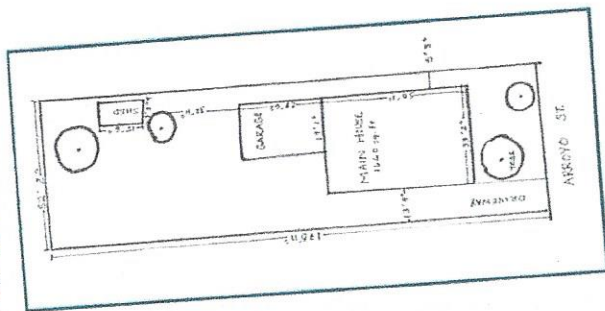
Measure and draw the shape of your lot.

Make notes of measurements on the sketch in terms of feet and inches.

As precisely as you can, draw the outline of your current house with measurements.

Measure and draw other permanent structures where they exist on your lot, such as a garage.

Mark the location of the driveway, major trees, and all structures (even if they will be demolished).



SKETCHING AN ADU ON YOUR EXISTING LOT

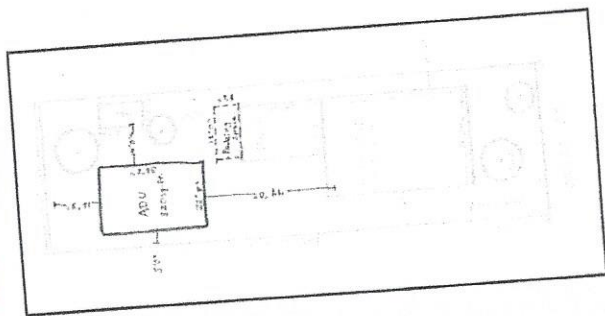
Make a copy of the drawing of your existing lot and sketch a floor plan of the ADU you want to build.

Show where you would park a car(s).
Tip: a typical parking space is 8ft 6in x 18 ft

Show any streets and alleys adjoining your lot.

Measure and block out 5 feet from each property line (for the setbacks).

Remember to leave at least 10 feet between the main house and your ADU, and avoid placing any structure(s) in the side and rear setbacks.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. HOW MUCH WILL MY ADU COST?

Since the size and construction of each ADU will differ, it is impossible to estimate the cost of your ADU. The cost per square foot of an ADU is likely to be the same as any other new residential construction; builders and architects can give you rough estimates.

2. HOW DO I PAY FOR MY ADU?

There are a number of ways to pay for the construction of an ADU. A common way is to borrow from a home equity line of credit if you have equity in your existing house. Other ways can be more complicated: 1. You could refinance your existing mortgage to take out a larger loan to provide cash for ADU construction (this will require equity in the home); 2. You may be able to obtain a private construction loan to build the ADU and refinance the loan with a new mortgage when construction is complete. You should start by talking to the bank that holds your current mortgage.

3. HOW DO I TELL IF I'M NEAR TRANSIT?

Many lots in LA are within a half-mile of transit, so that ADU parking will not be required. The City publishes a transit map at media.metro.net/riding_maps/images/system_map.pdf. First, see if your lot appears to be within a half-mile radius of a bus stop, rail station, or a dedicated space where a shared-bicycle is parked. Second, call the Dept. of Building and Safety to give your property address. They can confirm whether you need to provide parking for your ADU.

4. CAN I SELL MY ADU?

No, you can only sell your house and ADU together. ADUs can be rental units or occupied by the homeowner or family members.

5. MUST THE HOMEOWNER LIVE ON THE PROPERTY?

No, both the existing house and the ADU can be rental units.

6. WHAT IF MY CURRENT GARAGE IS IN THE FRONT OF MY LOT?

If your existing garage is at the front of your house, in most cases you cannot convert it into an ADU. You may be able to build an ADU

elsewhere on your property. You should check with the Dept. of City Planning.

7. CAN I LEGALIZE AN UNPERMITTED ADU ON MY LOT?

Although this guidebook focuses on new construction, you may be able to get permits that will legalize an existing rental unit on your property. You can contact the Dept. of Building and Safety for more information.

8. HOW BIG CAN I MAKE MY ADU?

There are some limits on the size of an ADU, based on the size of your lot and existing house. First, an attached ADU cannot be bigger than 50% of the existing house. For example, if your existing house is 2,000 sq. ft., the attached ADU cannot exceed 1,000 sq. ft. in size. Second, there is a "mansionship ordinance" that usually restricts the total square footage of all structures on a lot to 45% of total lot size. For example, if your lot is 10,000 sq. ft., the total built area (existing house, ADU, garage, etc.) cannot exceed 4,500 sq. ft. In addition, most ADUs cannot exceed 1,200 sq. ft. The Dept. of City Planning will need to verify the specifics related to your project.

9. MY LOT SEEMS TOO SMALL OR UNUSUAL. CAN I STILL BUILD AN ADU?

Almost every lot in LA is unique, so this guidebook addresses the most common conditions. There are various types of ADU that work on different lots. For example, if a detached ADU will not fit in your backyard, you might attach a new unit to your current house. If the garage behind your house is inconveniently located, you could demolish and rebuild it with an ADU above. Sketch your ideas as suggested in the guidebook, and talk them over with the Dept. of Building and Safety.

10. IS AN ADU SUBJECT TO THE RENT STABILIZATION ORDINANCE?

If you add an ADU to your home, you can rent one or both of the units. If your home was built before 1979, one or both of the units may become subject to the City's Rent Stabilization Ordinance (RSO). To determine if an ADU triggers the RSO on your property, call (866) 557-7368. For more information about the RSO, visit homeforrenters.org.

RESOURCES

PROPOSED ADU ORDINANCE

As of July 2017, only state law regulates ADUs in the City of LA. The City may propose some modifications to the law in the future. <https://planning.lacity.org/ordinances/docs/ADU-InformationSheet.pdf>

AB 2299 FULL TEXT

https://leginfo.ca.gov/pub/09_10/bills_0001_0299_0001_2299_00_000.html#bills_0001_2299

SB 1069 FULL TEXT

https://leginfo.ca.gov/pub/09_10/bills_0001_0299_0001_1069_00_000.html#bills_0001_1069

LA DEPT. OF CITY PLANNING

<https://planning.lacity.org>
Due to the complex nature of planning and building regulations, web-based information may be difficult to navigate and interpret. Questions may be addressed to Matthew Gleason at nathaniel.gleason@lacity.org or 213-978-2666.

LA DEPT. OF BUILDING AND SAFETY

<https://www.ladbs.org/>
Call 311 within the City limits
From outside Los Angeles call (213) 473-3231.

CREDITS

AUTHORS

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Dana Cuff and Jane Blumenthal

Thank you to the following individuals, whose expertise and willingness to lend their consistent feedback made this guidebook possible. Their enthusiastic support for this project will ensure that more Angelenos interested in building an ADU will have the resources and support they need. We especially wish to thank Council District 7, which supported this effort.

GRAPHIC DESIGN AND LAYOUT

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LADCP / LABBS MEMO PERTAINING TO ADUS, DECEMBER 2016
<https://planning.lacity.org/documents/Citywide-Memo-AB2299.pdf>

ZIMAS

<https://zimas.lacity.org/>

CITYLAB - UCLA

<https://citylab.ucla.edu/>
citylab@ucla.edu
310.794.6125

FURTHER READING

Accessory Dwelling Units
<http://nathaniel.gleason@lacity.org>

Backyard Homes LA - a pamphlet that describes the history, design, and implementation of Backyard Homes as a response to current housing conditions in LA.
<https://www.laplanet.org/>
41976676166 / 419766585878 / 2010, Backyard Homes, Inc.

CITYLAB - UCLA, Backyard BHOHOME

<https://citylab.ucla.edu/backyard-bhohome/>

ZONING AND POLICY REVIEW

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