

GMS Housing

The basics of ADUs

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Washington State
Department of
Commerce

We strengthen communities



HOUSING AND
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ECONOMIC
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Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)



is ... a dwelling unit located on the same lot as a single-family housing unit, duplex, triplex, townhome or other housing unit.

A dwelling unit is a residential living unit that provides complete independent living facilities for one or more persons and that includes permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking and sanitation

Tools to support communities

Accessory Dwelling Unit Guide

ADU Fact Sheet

ADU Checklist

New ADU webpage: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growth-management/housing-planning/adus/>

State law supersedes local regulations if consistent regulations are not adopted within 6 months of the periodic update due date HB 1337, codified as RCW 36.70A.680 and .681

ADU – building permit review checklist

Allow at least two ADUs per lot

At least **two** ADUs on a **legal lot** in all zoning districts that allow for single-family homes **within an urban growth area**. RCW 36.70A.681(1)(c)

May be any combination of:

- One attached and one detached;
 - Two attached ADUs; or
 - Two detached ADUs
- **Must allow conversion of existing structures, even if they violate current setback or lot coverage requirements.** RCW 36.70A.681(1)(j)

Examples of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

ADUs in blue; main residence in white

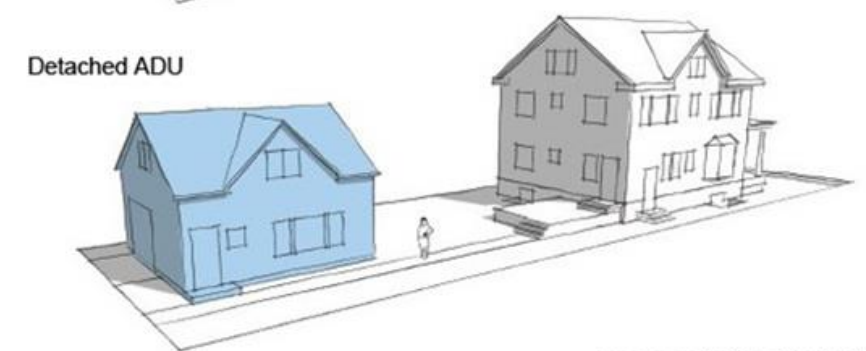
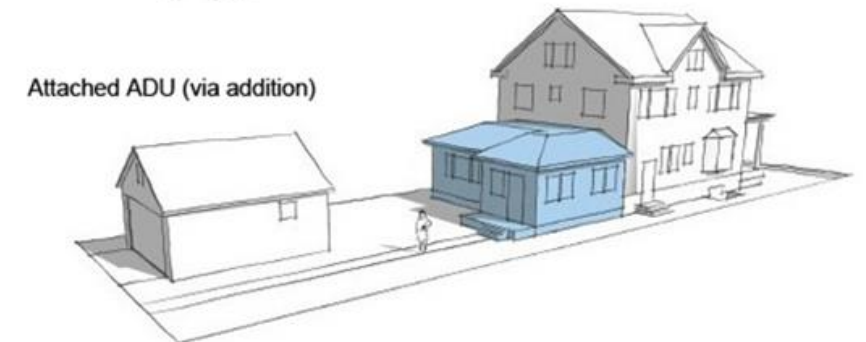
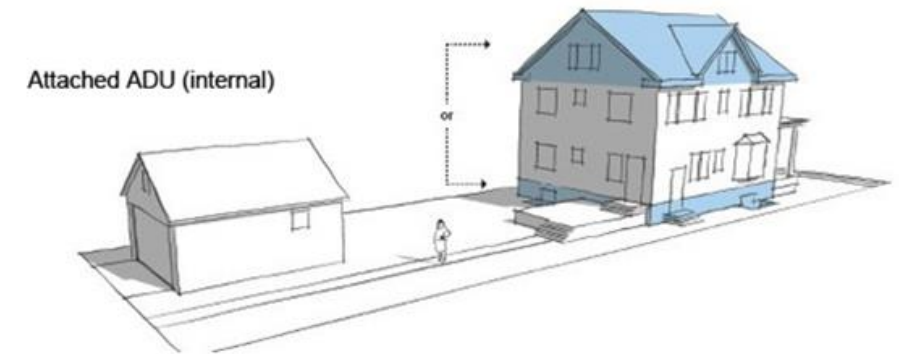


Image credit: City of Saint Paul, MN

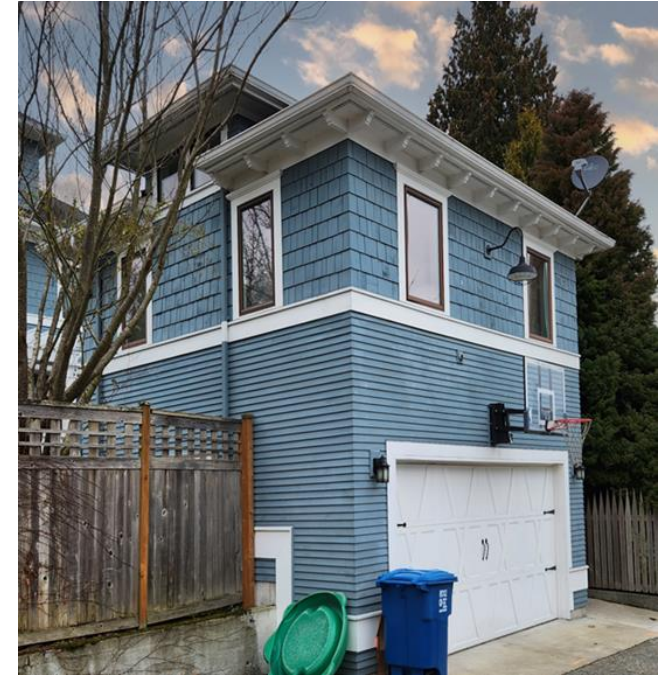
ADUs in all zones that allow single-family homes

- Must be allowed to be at least 1,000 sq. ft. [RCW 36.70A.681\(1\)\(e\)](#)
- Must be allowed to be at least 24 feet in height, unless lower height applies to principal unit [RCW 36.70A.681\(1\)\(f\)](#)
- May not impose stricter standards than the principal units regarding:
 - Restrictions on entry door location
 - Aesthetic requirements / design review requirements
 - Setbacks
 - No rear setbacks for ADUs on alleys – unless plowed for snow
 - Yard/lot coverage
 - Tree retention mandates [RCW 36.70A.681\(1\)\(h\)](#)

Continued standards

- Must not require off-street parking within ½ **mile** walking distance of a major transit stop
- May require one off-street parking space/unit on lots smaller than 6,000 sq. ft.
 - Or up to two off-street parking spaces/unit on lots greater than 6,000 sq. ft.
- A local government may increase ADU parking standards – must conduct an empirical study and request certification from Commerce if shows less parking is significantly less safe

RCW 36.70A.681(2)



More standards for ADUs

- May not require public street improvements as a condition of permitting ADUs [RCW 36.70A.681 \(1\)\(I\)](#)
- May not require owner to live on-site (i.e., neither in the primary residence nor an accessory dwelling unit) [RCW 36.70A.696\(9\)](#)
 - **Owner** is defined as any person who has at least 50% ownership in a property on which an ADU is located
 - Cities and counties may restrict the use of ADUs for **short term rentals** and then may require owner occupancy [RCW 36.70A.680\(5\)\(a\)](#)

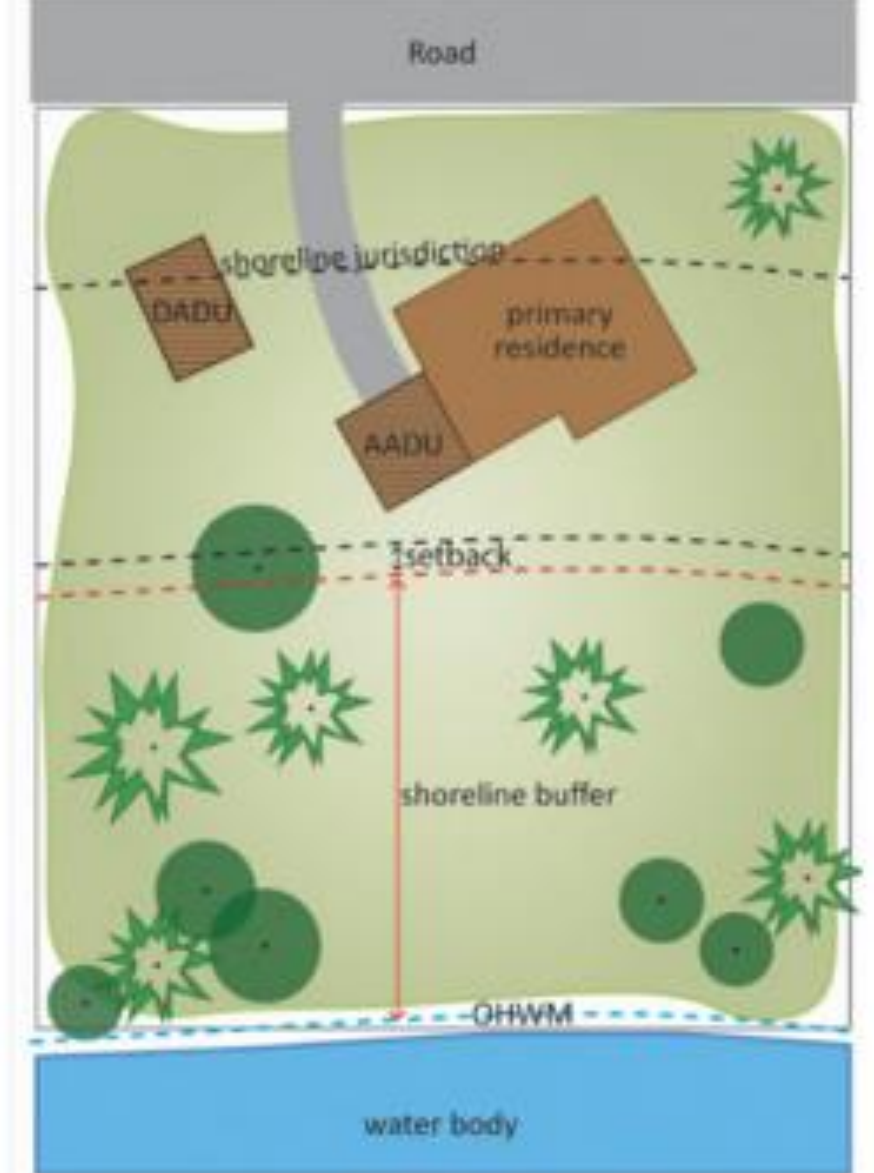
Impact fees, when applicable

- **No more than 50% of principal unit fees** [RCW 36.70A.681\(1\)\(a\)](#)
 - Additionally, [RCW 82.02.060](#) *Impact fee schedule shall reflect the proportionate impact of new housing units, including multifamily and condominium units, based on the square footage, number of bedrooms, or trips generated, in the housing unit in order to produce a proportionally lower impact fee for smaller housing units.*
 - *No similar requirement for system development charges (aka “utility connection fees”)*

ADUs may be restricted in certain situations

- Within areas designated as critical areas
- In zones with very low densities within UGAs, so designated to protect a critical area.
- In designated shoreline areas
- On lots in a watershed used for potable water
- Within a mile radius of SeaTac airport
- Where no sewer service exists
- Where prohibited by HOA covenants & restrictions
 - Cities are not required to consider/review covenants

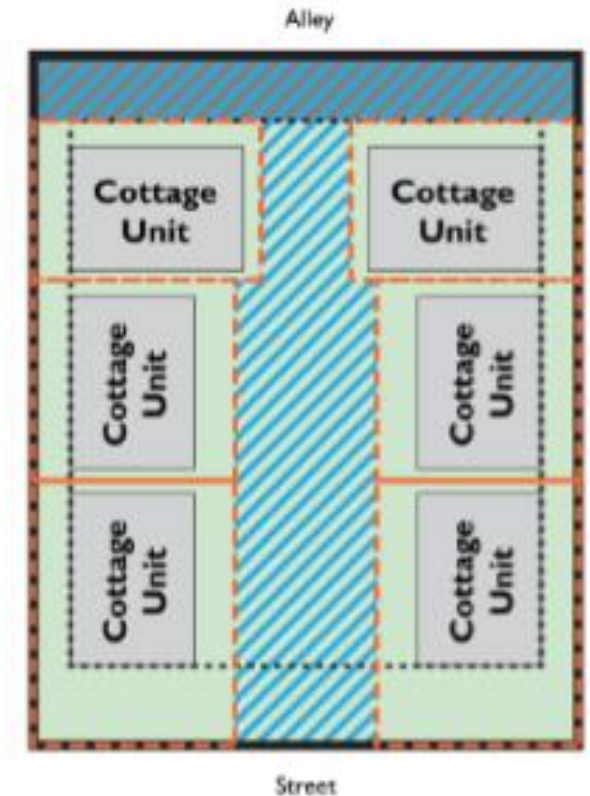
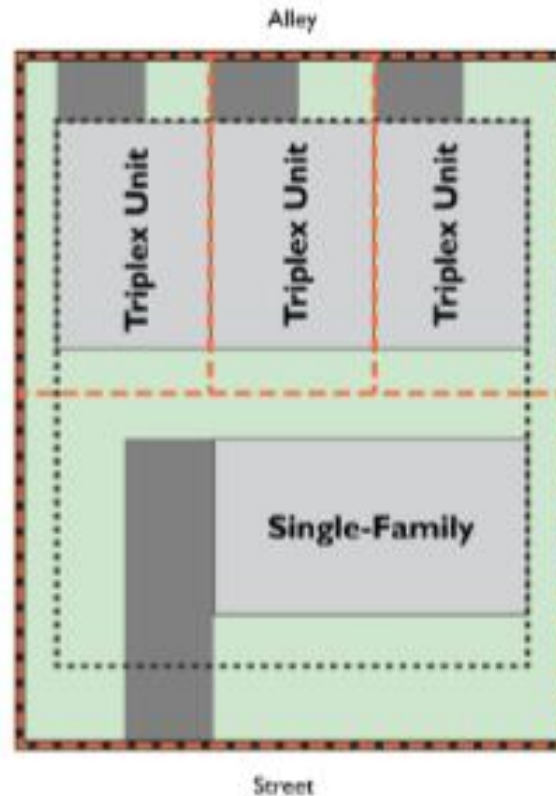
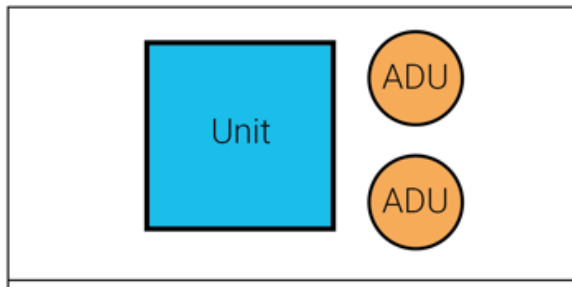
RCW 36.70A.680(4&5) and .681



If allowed, ADUs within shoreline jurisdiction should be outside of buffers and setbacks. Credit: Ecology.

Increased ownership options

- **Condominiums**
RCW 36.70A.681(1)(k)
- **Unit lot subdivision**
RCW 58.17.060



Pre-approved plans

- Construction ready plans which have been reviewed and approved by the building department (ready to issue)
- May be leased from the architect or purchased from the city (depending on program)
- Only require a site plan
- Reduced plan review fee
- Expedited review times

Thank you



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<https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growth-management/housing-planning>