

Seattle's Pre-Approved DADU Plans

PSRC TOOLBOX SERIES

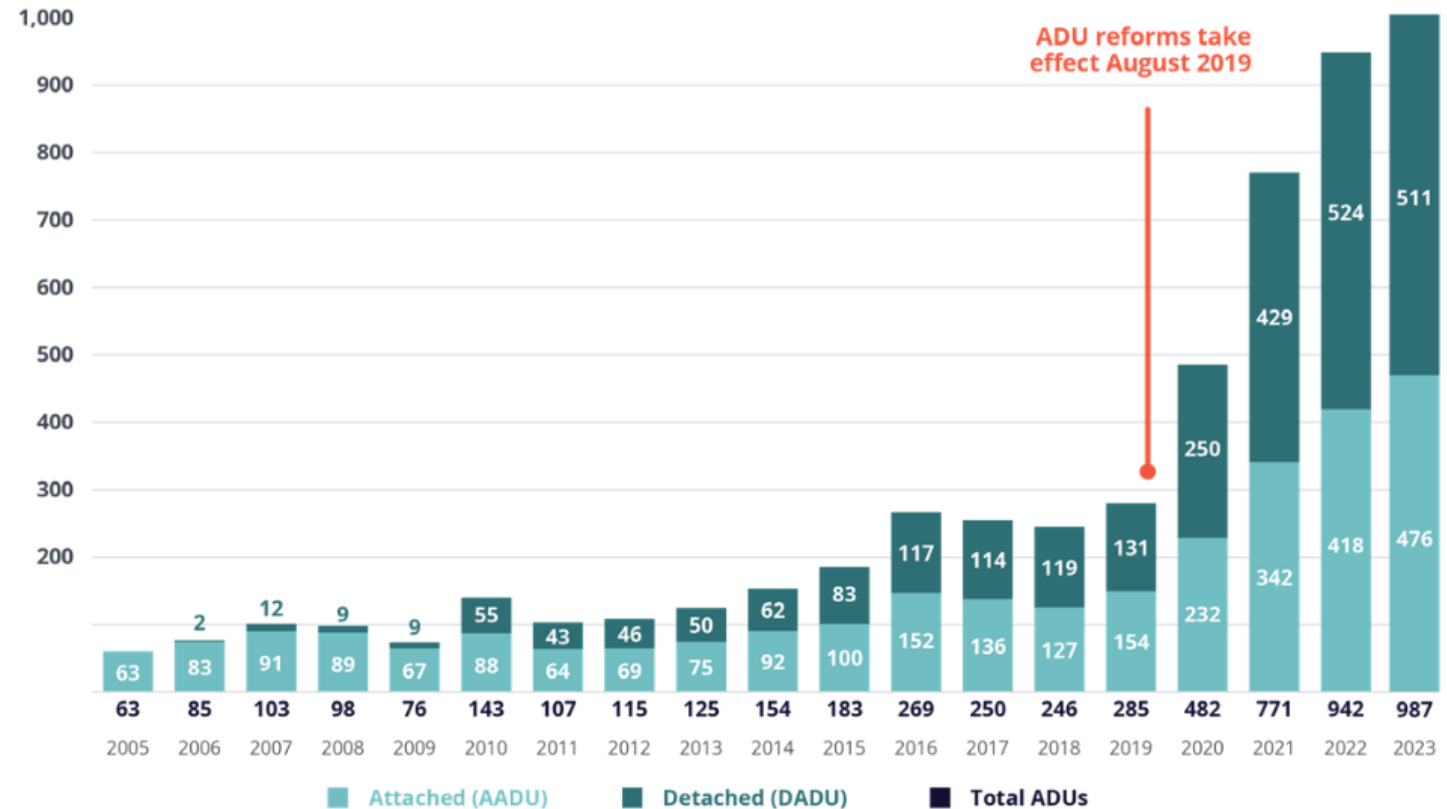
Nick Welch, Senior Planner
Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development

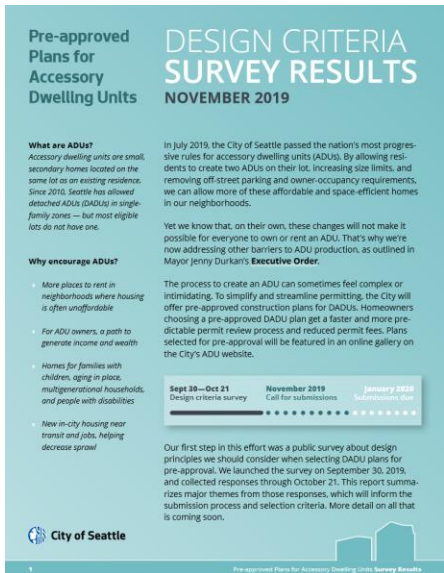


City of Seattle

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

- New ADU regulations (2019)
- During engagement, many homeowners described feeling intimidated or overwhelmed by the design and permitting process
- Undertook effort to address barriers — regulatory, knowledge, process, and financial
- Since 2019, ADU production has increased fourfold





SEATTLE'S PROCESS FOR CREATING PRE-APPROVED PLANS

2018

Secured budget (~\$80k)

Summer 2019

Consultation with AIA Seattle
Public survey on selection criteria

December 2019

Call for submissions launched

February 2020

165 submissions received

April 2020

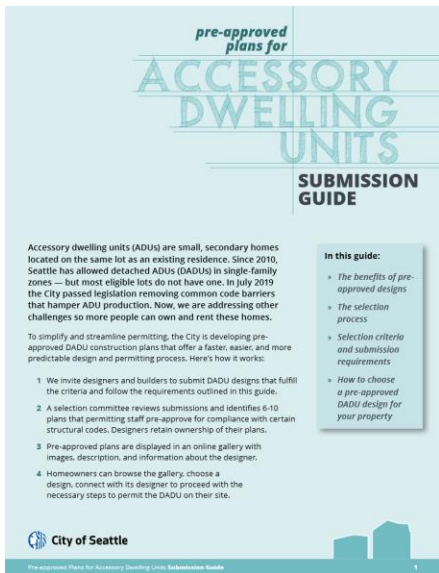
Selection process identifies 10 plans
for pre-approval

May–August 2020

Permitting staff review and pre-
approve plans

September 2020

ADUniverse launched with gallery of
designs



May 2025

Office of Planning and
Community Development

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City of Seattle

WE WANTED A CATALOG OF DESIGNS FEASIBLE THROUGHOUT SEATTLE AND SUITABLE FOR A DIVERSE RANGE OF HOUSEHOLDS



Small-footprint DADUs. We seek designs that, whether one or two stories, have a footprint of 250-300 square feet, a size likely to meet coverage limits on lots as small as 3,200 square feet, the minimum lot area required for a DADU. On small or narrow lots, treed lots, and lots with limited available yard space or lot coverage, an ADU with a small footprint may be desirable, or possibly the only feasible option. Smaller units also tend to cost less to construct.



Family-friendly DADUs. We seek designs with at least two bedrooms. Larger households and families with children may need multiple bedrooms to meet their needs. Large lots with ample yard space may be able to accommodate larger ADUs, which can work for many families or offer more potential rent.



Accessible DADUs. We seek designs that meet accessibility requirements. Some people require a single-story accessible design. We recognize that accessibility depends in part on site conditions, which vary for each lot. But single-story ADUs designed with accessibility in mind meet the needs for some residents. We also encourage plans that, even if not fully accessible, include universal design features and are visitable.¹



Low-cost DADUs. While we encourage cost-saving measures in all submissions, we seek designs that specifically offer a substantially lower price point than conventional DADU designs.²



Garage DADUs. In July 2019, the City passed new ADU regulations that no longer require an off-street parking space when constructing an ADU. Nevertheless, we know some homeowners may desire a DADU that includes a garage or may require such a design in order to preserve the required parking space for the principal unit. Therefore, we seek designs that includes a garage space.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

- Reflective of “design development” phase
- Submissions could include up to three options for variation in roof form, window packages, etc.
- Plans for constructed projects welcome / encouraged
- Submissions had to include:
 - Name and contact information
 - Project description (150 words maximum)
 - Narrative describing how the submission fulfills the design criteria (300 words maximum)
 - Estimate of construction cost (this can be a range, can include assumptions for site conditions, and for built DADUs can denote when the project was built and any noteworthy or anomalous factors that affected cost)
 - Floor plans (1/4” scale) with dimensioned room sizes
 - Sections (1/4” scale) showing wall and roof assembly
 - Building elevations (1/4” scale)
 - Three-dimensional views (maximum of four)
 - Major materials
 - List of mechanical systems
 - Photographs of completed DADU (if submitting plans for a built project)
 - Plan use fee (up to \$1,000) and hourly rate for further work



SELECTION PROCESS

- Formed committee composed of volunteer members with design expertise from Design Commission, Planning Commission, Construction Codes Advisory Board, plus engineering staff from Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections
- First round of review
 - Blind review of submissions
 - Low cost, green building & design, privacy, context, culturally responsive design, constructability
 - 165 submissions winnowed to two dozen shortlisted designs
- Second round of review
 - Architect/designer identified
 - Reviewed for a set of designs that, collectively advance architectural variety and broad applicability
- Selected designs then:
 - Developed and submitted a full permit-ready plan set
 - Signed a Memorandum of Agreement — copyright provisions, liability, insurance, etc.



GALLERY ON ADUNIVERSE

- ADUniverse launched in September 2020 as a one-stop resource website offering illustrated guidance, property search tool, and gallery of pre-approved designs
- Designs retain ownership of their plan; property owners contact directly, negotiate, license plan
- Of initial set of 10 designs, seven are still active
- Pre-approved designs permitted 297 times
- Possible changes: plan mirroring roof options (some), floor plans (1 plan), materials, color, finishes
- Cannot move structural walls, windows



CAST Architecture
Cedar Cottage

467 SQUARE FEET • 1-2 BED • 1 BATH

At only 467 square feet of interior floor area, the Cedar Cottage is an extremely efficient footprint that provides well daylight space for living, necessary storage, flexibility on many sites, including sloped ones, covered outdoor porch space plus easy expandability for families or roommates as a two-bedroom model.

[View](#)

[Contact Designer](#)



Fivedot Architects
Schooner

1,000 SQUARE FEET • 2 BED • 2 BATH

This family-friendly, 1,000-square-foot, two-bedroom, low-cost DADU can provide housing for a family of four or more. This design can easily be mirrored or rotated to work on a variety of sites and is easily adaptable to sloping sites as well.

[View](#)

[Contact Designer](#)



Ahouse Studio
The Family

808-964 SQUARE FEET • 2-3 BED • 2 BATH

"The Family" has a flexible plan layout that fits up to three bedrooms, serving a variety of family sizes and needs. This two-story design is just under the maximum allowable square footage for a backyard cottage in Seattle, and may be built on lots starting at 30'-0" wide.

[View](#)

[Contact Designer](#)



HAAS Building
Urban Cottage

288 SQUARE FEET • STUDIO, 1 BED, 2 BED

Urban Cottage offers a range of floor plans consisting of a studio (288 sq ft), one-bedroom (432 sq ft) and a two-bedroom (576 sq ft) dwelling unit. Each plan is adaptable to site conditions and constructed from a unique "kit of parts" providing a simple and effective way to self-construct substantial portions if desired.

[View](#)

[Contact Designer](#)



Artisans Group
Seattle DADU

600 SQUARE FEET • 1 BED • 1 BATH

Detached one-bedroom ADU capable of being an accessible home, aesthetically flexible to work with varied neighborhood styles, and architecturally designed for understated awesomeness. The Seattle DADU is 600 square feet of graceful aging-in-place and energy-efficient considerations ready to add value, possible passive income, and flexible, poetic living opportunities.

[View](#)

[Contact Designer](#)



Mobile Office Architects
MOA Family ADU /// 16x26

850 SQUARE FEET • 2 BED • 1 BATH

Calling to mind the Swedish philosophy of *lagom*, or living with "just the right amount," the MOA Family ADU offers a fully functioning family dwelling in a small package.

[View](#)

[Contact Designer](#)

WHY DIDN'T WE JUST BUY THE PLANS?

1. **Design community preference.** Through engagement with AIA Seattle, architects generally preferred an approach that was more inclusive and kept them involved as plans were used, rather than a traditional RFP.
2. **Liability.** Designers retaining ownership of their IP protected the City from liability.
3. **More support for homeowners.** Program goal was to simplify and streamline for homeowners. A City-owned plan, even if offered for free, still needs to be put on a site for additional reviews like zoning, drainage, etc.
4. **More options.** Given our fixed budget, we could either buy 2-3 plans outright or pay for the internal review of 10.



Credit Fivedot Architects

LESSONS & CHALLENGES

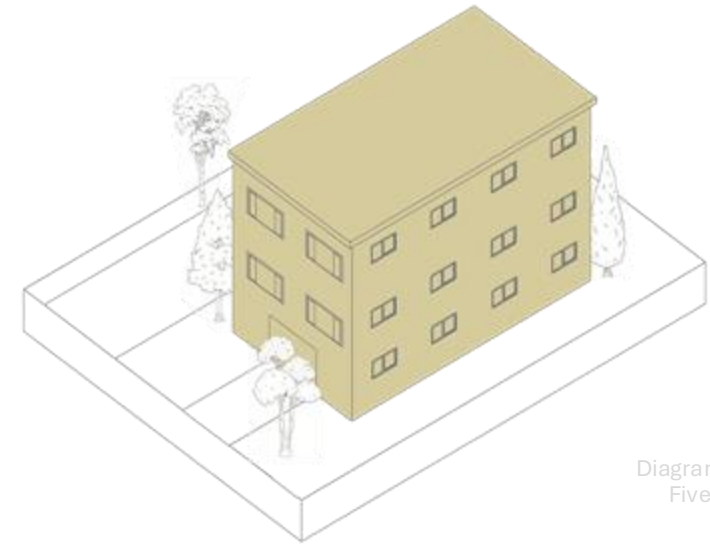
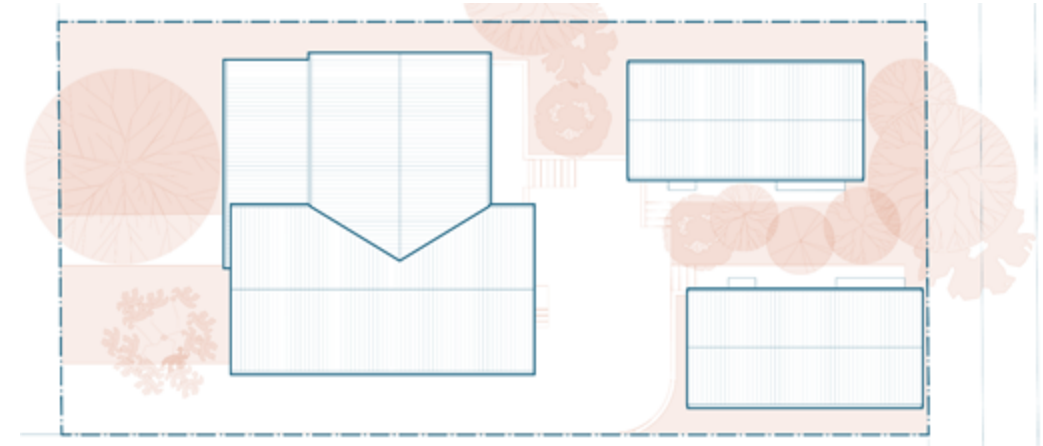
- Intensive staff time up front; ongoing group of permit staff who steward process & troubleshoot
- Designs with complex structural engineering were hard to pre-approve
- Help articles help
- Larger designs are popular and comprise majority of permits
- Builders are using pre-approved plans when redeveloping a site (typically with condos)
- Have a plan (and budget) for renewing approval for three-year construction code cycle
- We have ongoing interest from designers, but do not have ongoing budget to pre-approve more

The screenshot displays the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections website. At the top, it says 'Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections' and '310 Seattle Permits'. Below this, there's a section for 'Standard Plans' updated July 28, 2022. It explains that standard plans are pre-approved construction plans that comply with applicable building and energy codes. A list of advantages includes: construction requirements known prior to submittal, reduced permit fees once established, and a faster plan review process. It also mentions limitations like detached one- and two-family dwellings (three stories or less), multiple single-family dwellings (townhouses), and accessory structures. To the right, there's an article titled 'How To Apply for a Detached Accessory Dwelling Unit Using a Pre-Approved Standard Plan' by ADUniverse, dated 1 month ago. The article describes the expedited review process for pre-approved standard plans and lists eligibility criteria: use in residential zones (NR-1, NR-2, or NR-3), no environmental critical areas, and less than 750 square feet of ground disturbance. Below the article, there's a 'Create New' section with a 'Permits - Trade, Construction & Land Use' link circled in red. At the bottom, it instructs users to expand 'Building Permits', click the 'Building & Land Use Pre-application' radio button, and then click 'Continue Application'.

LOOKING AHEAD

Exploring how to refresh and expand our gallery with new types as we implement state legislation and update Seattle's Neighborhood Residential zoning

- More DADU forms and styles
- Double DADU (allowed under HB 1337)
- Stacked duplex (permitted under IRC)
- Maybe even stacked fourplexes and sixplexes



Diagrams courtesy of
Fivedot Architects



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Visit ADUniverse at **maps.seattle.gov/ADU**

CAST Architecture / Cindy Apple Photography