Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections

Tip 116A

Seattle Permits

Part of a multi-departmental City of Seattle series on getting a permit

Establishing an Attached Accessory Dwelling Unit (AADU) in Residential Zones

Updated November 19, 2026

This Tip explains how to establish an Attached Accessory Dwelling unit (also called an AADU or mother-in-law unit).

Please see Tip 116B, Establishing a Detached Accessory Dwelling Unit (DADU) for information about DADUs.

You will need to pay a King County capacity charge when you construct a AADU. You will get your capacity charge bill from King County about three months or more after we report your sewer connection. King County will send you a bill every three months for 15 years, or until the balance of your property's account is paid. You may pay the remaining balance in one lump sum at a discount any time during that 15-year period.

Visit the King County Wastewater Division webpage for more information.

What is an AADU?

An AADU is a room or set of rooms designed and established by permit to be a separate dwelling unit. AADUs can be located in a single-family home in the Neighborhood Residential (NR) NR3, NR2, and NR1 and Neighborhood Residential Small Lot (RSL) zones. In the RSL zone they can also be located in a principal dwelling of an apartment unit, carriage or cottage house, rowhouse, or townhouse. In the lowrise (LR) zones, AADUs can be located in a single-family home, rowhouse or townhouse unit.

AADUs must include living, sleeping, kitchen, and bathroom facilities and have a lockable entrance door, and are located within the same structure as a principal or primary dwelling unit.

What are the requirements to establish an AADU?

In all eligible zones, an AADU may be established only if it meets all of the following:

- For lots with one accessory dwelling unit (one AADU or one DADU) the total number of residents in both the primary dwelling and the accessory unit cannot exceed eight people, unless all residents of both units are related to each other. For NR zoned lots with two accessory dwelling units (two AADUs or one AADU and one DADU), the total number of unrelated residents cannot exceed 12 people.
- Parking is not required for any AADU or DADU. However, you cannot remove any existing required off-street parking space(s) to build an AADU, unless you replace the parking space(s) somewhere else on the lot, in conformance with the code.
- There must be at least one operable window or exterior door approved for emergency escape and rescue openings in rooms that were built as sleeping rooms or that were converted or established by permit as sleeping rooms after August 10, 1972. You must be able to open the window or door from the inside. All emergency escape windows must have an unobstructed opening of at least 5.7 square feet (openings that are at-grade and on the floor are allowed to be five square feet). The window's usable opening must be at least 24 inches tall and at least 20 inches wide. The escape window must have a finished sill that is not more than 44 inches above the floor. You can measure the sill height from the top of a constructed step that extends the width of the window, as long as the riser is no more than eight inches and the tread is no less than nine inches.
- The AADU's entrance must be a locking door separate from the entry door to the main dwelling unit.
- If an AADU is within an existing single-family residence (it is not in a proposed addition), fire and sound separation is required between the

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AADU and the primary dwelling as per two-family dwelling requirements of the Seattle Residential Code. If interconnected smoke alarms are provided throughout the entire structure, the fire and sound separation between the primary dwelling and the AADU is waived.

- A building will no longer be reviewed under the Seattle Residential Code if an AADU is within an existing duplex or townhouse, or if two AADU's are proposed in an existing single-family residence. It will be reviewed to Seattle Existing Building Code requirements as an apartment building. Substantial alteration provisions would be: Sprinkler, seismic, egress and energy code. See Tip 314, Seattle Building Code Requirements for Existing Buildings that Undergo Substantial Alterations. The regulations for Land Use in Title 23 still apply.
- If the AADU is part of a proposed new single-family residence or addition, then the construction must meet all Seattle code requirements that apply to two-family dwellings, except for Land Use regulations in Title 23. The requirements that must be met include fire and sound separations between the main living space, the accessory dwelling unit, and any common spaces.
- If the AADU is part of a proposed new duplex or townhouse, then the construction must meet all Seattle Building Code and Land Use Code requirements that apply to multifamily buildings.
- If you are converting a space or structure to a residential use, you must fully comply with the Seattle Energy Code and a permit for Change of Use pursuant to Title 23.
- Electrical circuit breakers and temperature controls must be located in the dwelling unit that they serve, or be located in common areas accessible to all residents. You are required to have smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms.

You can establish an AADU in NR zones only if these additional criteria are met:

- An AADU in a single-family home may be no larger than 1,000 square feet, excluding garage area, unless the area of the home where the AADU is located existed as of December 31, 2017.
- In NR3, NR2, and NR1 zones, you may only have one entrance on each street-facing side of your residence, unless all entrances existed as of January 1, 1993, or unless SDCI determines that topography, screening, or another design solution de-emphasizes the second entrance.
- In NR3, NR2 and NR1 zones, lots may have up to two accessory dwelling units (either 2 AADUs, or one AADU and one DADU). The second unit must meet the criteria of subsection 23.44.041.A.2 to either a) meet green building standards or b) be an affordable unit reserved for income-eligible households.
- In the RSL zone, each principal dwelling unit may only have one accessory dwelling unit.

You can establish an AADU in lowrise zones in a single-family home, rowhouse, or townhouse unit when:

- The AADU is no more than 650 square feet.
- The floor area of the AADU is no more than 40 percent of the total floor area on the lot or unit lot that is used for residential purposes, excluding garages, storage sheds, and other non-habitable spaces.
- The entrance to the AADU in a townhouse or rowhouse is through the primary entry of the main structure or through an entry on a different façade than the primary entry. The entrance to the AADU can be on the same façade as the primary entry provided the door to the AADU less prominent.
- Exterior stairs to an AADU must be less than four feet tall, unless the stairs serve a unit above a garage

Plan to add internet service to the AADU?

If you want to have an internet service connection to your AADU, contact your internet service provider (ISP) early in your planning process. This provides time for ISP permitting and construction coordination and avoids possible delays in having connectivity once the AADU is complete. For more information see Seattle IT Tip 6000, Ensuring Boradband Service Access for Multiple-Dwelling-Unit Development Projects.

What are the process, cost, and submittal requirements for establishing a unit?

If you need to contact us for coaching or if you need special assistance or have specific questions about your proposal visit our SDCI Services page.

Step 1: To begin the process to establish a AADU, you must first prepare a site plan and submit a Building and Land Use Pre-Application through the Seattle Services Portal. You will need to create an account.

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Once we receive your application, we will confirm the legal description and address of your property and assign you a record number (in the format of XXXXXX-CN). We will notify you if your project requires a Pre-Application site visit.

When you submit your preliminary application, we will assign you a project number.

Step 2: Schedule an intake appointment using your Seattle Services Portal account. The next available appointment may be two to four months out. Read this article to get more information on how to schedule an appointment.

Step 3: Prepare your application drawings and other documents:

- Prepare the detailed site plan and floor plans (for both the main house and the AADU), and energy calculations.
- Prepare exterior elevation drawings if you are building a new structure or making changes to the building envelope.
- f you are building a new structure or an addition, prrepare full structural plans, including framing plans, foundation plans, and sections.
- Plans must clearly identify:
  - the number of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) proposed
  - if the AADU is part of new or existing accessory structure
  - the size of the AADU
  - the total lot coverage for the site
  - number of parking spaces provided for the ADUs (if any)
- Note that you will need to convert any paper plans and documents into digital files (pdfs).

Your plans must clearly identify where you are doing new work to create the AADU. For information on plan requirements, see Tip 103, Site Plan Requirements, Tip 106, General Standards for Plans and Drawings, Tip 303, Applicant Responsibilities and Plan Requirements for Single Family and Two-Unit Dwelling Units, and Tip 303A, Common Seattle Residential Code Requirements.

Step 4: Upload all of your documents (as digital files) to the record number given to your project. Note that if they are all uploaded well ahead of your appointment, your appointment will likely be moved up. Check out our article about how to submit material.

After your intake appointment, you must pay your permit intake fee and a plan review fee based on the value of the work to be done.

After the initial fees are paid, we will review your permit application and plans to make sure they conform with City of Seattle codes. We will notify you if you need to make corrections and to inform you of our decisions on any waiver requests. Do not assume that your waiver request will be granted. If you need to make corrections, you will see the correction letters in your Portal. You will need to upload the corrected plans and any requested information.

As you build your accessory unit, you must schedule your required inspections online. When your project is complete, request a final inspection. We will issue your permit once we approve your plans. The permit and approved plans will be in your Seattle Services Portal, for you to download, print, and have available on the site.

There won't be a public comment period or an appeal opportunity to the Hearing Examiner or City Council.

You are responsible for complying with all applicable code and rule requirements, whether or not they are described in this Tip. As you build your AADU, you must request inspections either through the Seattle Services Portal or by calling us at 206-684-8900. When your project is complete, contact your inspector and request a final inspection. Once we give you the final inspection approval, a tenant may occupy the accessory unit.

What other permits are required?

You will need a separate electrical permit from us for any electrical work. Generally, electrical circuits must be altered when you establish an AADU. Unless the property owner is performing all electrical work, the electrical contractor must apply for the electrical permit, which can be obtained in the ASC. Contact our electrical technical backup line at 206-684-5383 for information and assistance.

If you are doing any plumbing work, you will need a plumbing permit from the Seattle/King County Health Department. For information on plumbing permits, call 206-263-9566 or visit their website.

If you are connecting to an existing side sewer, you will be required to get a side sewer permit. For more information about side sewers, call 206-684-5362 or email sidesewerinfo@seattle.gov.

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What happens when a lot with an accessory dwelling unit is sold?

A permit is not required from SDCI if the new owner chooses to keep the ADU.

If the new owner chooses to remove the ADU, the owner will have to get a permit to remove the features that make it a separate unit.

What if a unit is created without a permit?

If we receive a complaint about an accessory dwelling unit that was built without permits, we may inspect the unit and send the owner a Notice of Violation. We will require the owner to legalize the unit or remove the features that make it a separate unit. In addition, the owner may be subject to penalties as provided in Section 23.90.018, 23.90.019, and 23.90.020 of the Seattle Land Use Code. Tenants that are displaced when an illegal unit is removed may be entitled to relocation assistance paid by the owner. See Seattle Municipal Code 22.206.160C.1.j.

How can you learn more about establishing an accessory dwelling unit?

Visit our Accessory Dwelling Unit page for more information about ADU's. Visit our Contact Us page if you have questions. Also, see Director's Rule 7-83, Determining the Existence of a Dwelling Unit for Purposes of Code Enforcement.

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