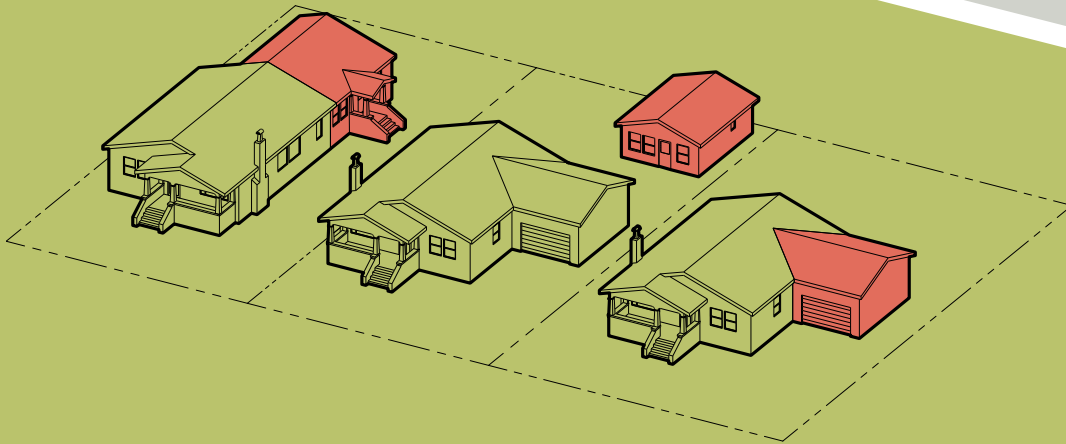




CITY OF
**PALO
ALTO**

GUIDEBOOK 2025

ACCESSORY **D**WELLING **U**NIT



INTRODUCTION

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) expand housing opportunities in the city and provide affordable housing options for family members, friends, students, the elderly, in-home health care providers, and others. The purpose of this guide is to promote, educate, and assist homeowners with getting started and developing ADUs. This guide provides an overview of ADUs and Junior ADUs (JADUs) including the different types, their development standards and best practices, and where to start if you want to build on your property.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide outlines the types of second units available for your property, and introduces applicable State and City regulations. The development standard sections of this guide detail the design requirements homeowners should consider in evaluating which type of second units best suits their needs and property layout. See more below for how to navigate and review the development standards in this guide.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD SECTIONS

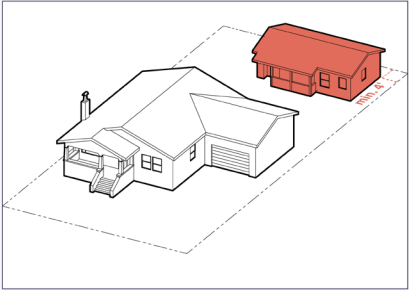
This guide is consistent with State law requirements but also highlights the City's more progressive zoning for second units. Within the development standard sections of this guide, the State and the City's standards are identified with the following icons.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS
SINGLE-FAMILY DETACHED ADU

The **bolded** standards below indicate City ADU standards that exceed State-level standards.

CONSTRUCT A DETACHED ADU
An 800 SF detached ADU can be built on any eligible lot.

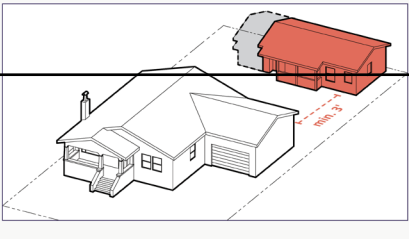
- S.10** max. size is 800 SF
- S.11** max. height is 16 ft
18 ft if within 1/2 mile from transit.
Additional 2 ft permitted to align roof pitch with the primary home.
- S.12** min. setback 4 ft (rear/side lot lines)
underlying zone for front setback



WANT A LARGER ADU?
A 900 to 1,000 SF detached ADU can be built.

Additional City standards apply (see pg. 13-14)

- CS.13** max. size is 900 SF or 1,000 SF for 2+ bed
- CS.14** max. height 25 ft (in RE zones) and 30 ft (in OS zones)
- CS.15** min. 3 ft setback from primary dwelling (or larger if required by the Building Code)



ALREADY HAVE A DETACHED ACCESSORY STRUCTURE?



S = state standard
CS = city standard

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CS = city standard

- **State standards** are baseline second unit requirements that all California cities must meet. These standards are also outlined in section 18.09.030 of the City's Municipal Code.
- **City standards** are **bolded** throughout this guide and reflect the City's progressive zoning standards. These standards provide added options and flexibility that modify or exceed State standards, such as larger unit size. Second units that utilize the City standards are subject to **Additional City standards** (see more below). The City standards and additional City standards are outlined in section 18.09.040 of the Municipal Code.

ADDITIONAL STANDARDS AND BEST PRACTICES SECTION

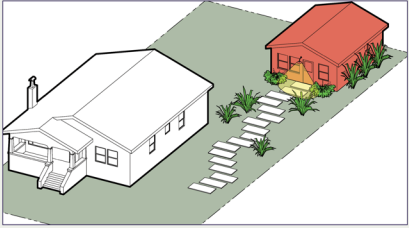
As described above, **Additional City standards** are required for second units that follow **City standards**. Pages 13 and 14 highlight these additional standards as well as describe design best practices (not required). These standards and best practices are identified with the following icons.

ADDITIONAL STANDARDS AND DESIGN BEST PRACTICES

The **bolded additional City standards** below are required for second units that follow City standards.

PRIVACY
LANDSCAPING AND EXTERIOR

- ACS.7** exterior lighting shall be mounted at 7 ft or below
- ACS.8** exterior lighting shall be directed downwards
- BP.3** consider utilizing landscaping around the entry and along property lines



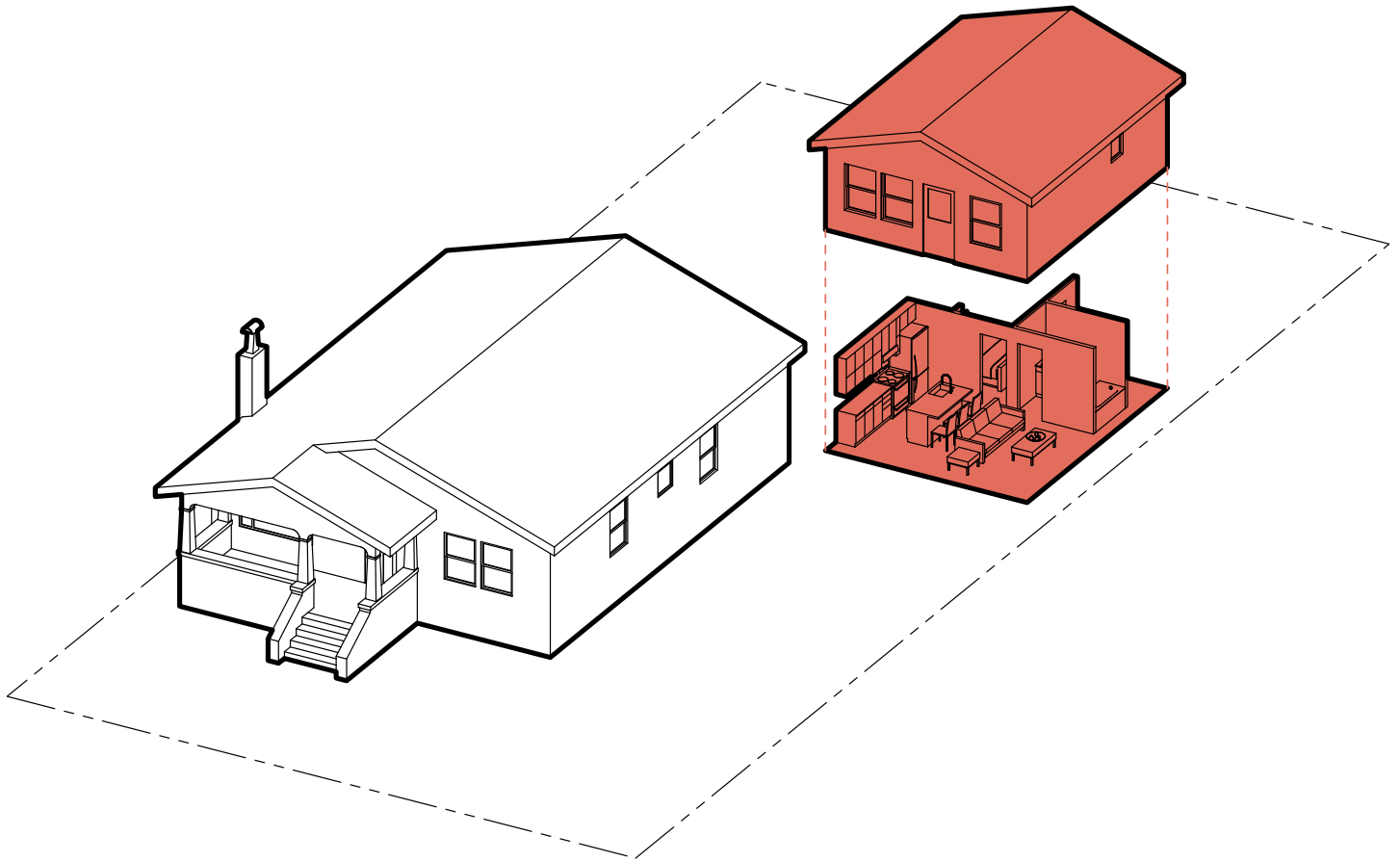
2ND FLOOR DOORS & DECKS

ACS = additional city standard (required)
BP = best practice (not required)

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BP = best practice (not required)

WHAT IS AN ADU?

An **Accessory Dwelling Unit** (ADU) is an additional residential unit either part of, or detached from a primary single-family home or multi-family residential building. The ADU must have a kitchen, bathroom, and place to sleep and can range in size from a 150 SF unit to a 1,000 SF unit with multiple bedrooms.



WHAT IS A JADU?

A **Junior ADU** (JADU) is a smaller unit attached to or within a single-family home. The JADU may share a bathroom with the main home and include just an efficiency kitchen.

See more on page 11.

NOT AN ADU

Structures with no permanent foundation.



RVS



YURTS



**TINY HOMES
ON WHEELS**



**STORAGE
STRUCTURES**

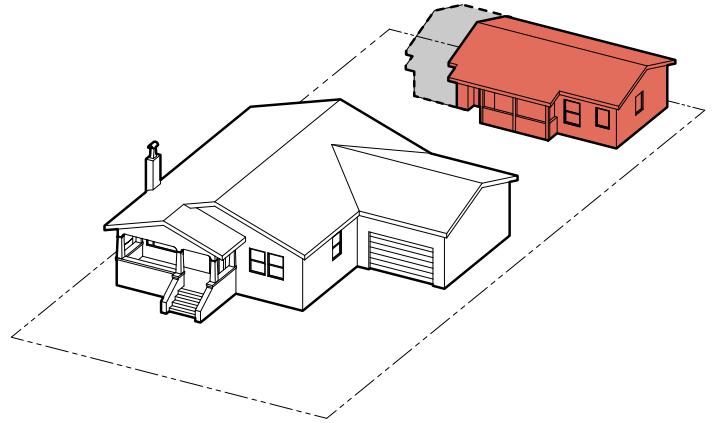
TYPES OF ADUS

WHY BUILD AN ADU

- ADUs can provide supplemental income.
- ADUs provide multigenerational living and aging in place opportunities.
- ADUs help cities meet their housing goals.
- ADUs increase housing choices closer to jobs, promoting sustainability by reducing commutes and using less energy.

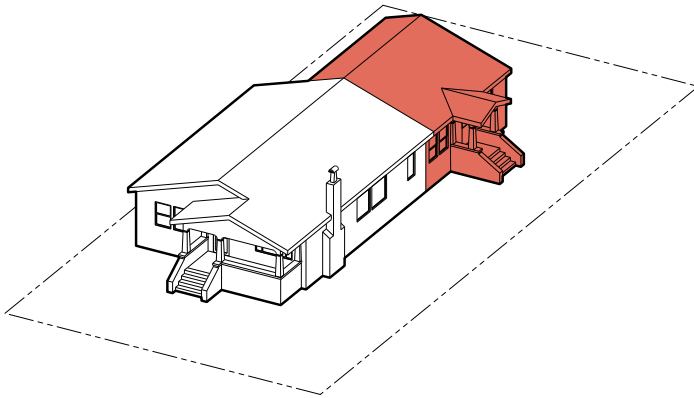
Did you know...

Under recent State laws, ADUs are permitted by-right in all single-family and multi-family lots.



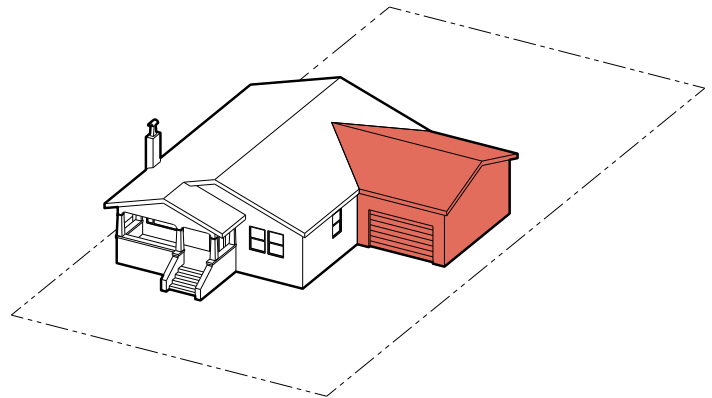
DETACHED

New freestanding structure separate from the main home, like a backyard cottage.



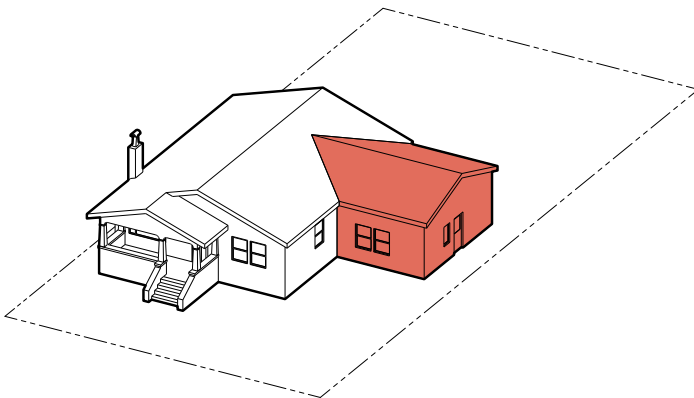
ATTACHED

New structure (may include some converted space) sharing at least one wall with the primary home.



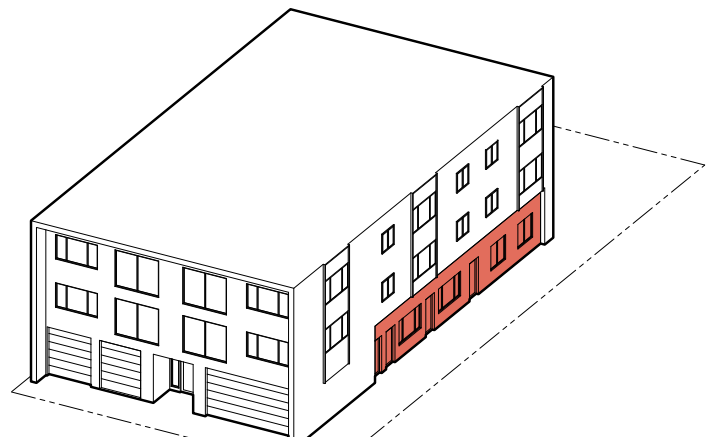
CONVERSION

Converted existing space (conforming or non-conforming) in the main home or on the property (bedroom, basement, detached garage).



JADU

A type of conversion up to 500 SF within the main home (existing or proposed).



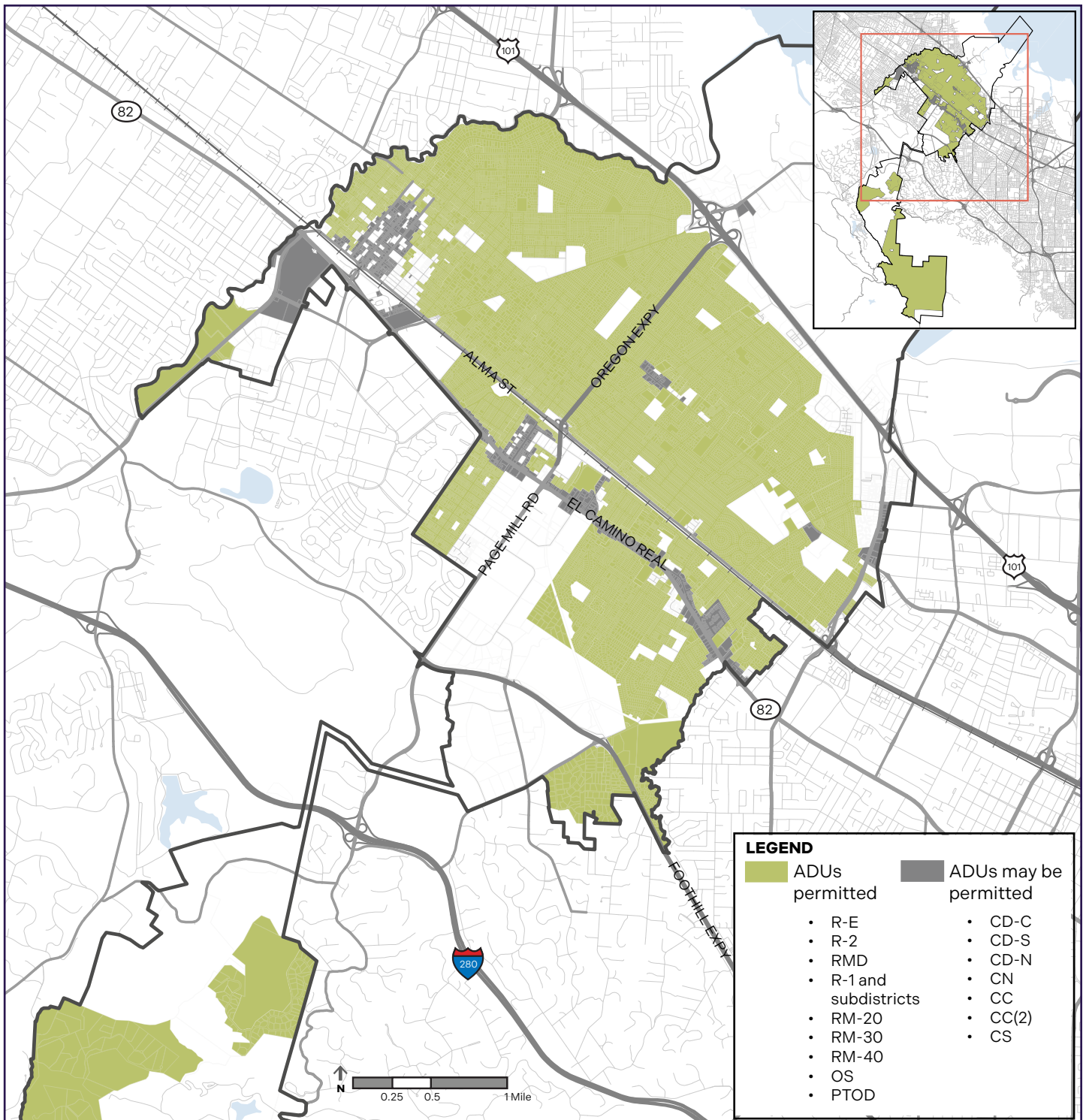
MULTI-FAMILY

Any of the above (except JADU) that is part of a multi-family building (existing or proposed).

CAN I BUILD AN ADU?

1 CHECK YOUR ELIGIBILITY

ADUs are allowed on any property where single- or multi-family residential is a permitted use. If you currently have a single- or multi-family home on your property you are eligible to build an ADU. If not, check your zoning by finding your property on the City's [Property Information Map](#). The zoning districts shown in green below are eligible for an ADU. If your property is in one of the gray zoning districts below, you may be eligible for an ADU and should schedule an appointment with the Planner on Duty [here](#).



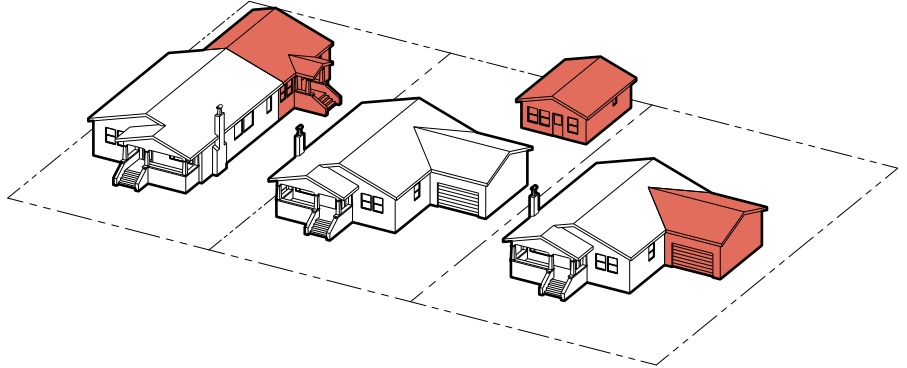
CAN I BUILD AN ADU?

2 CONSIDER... DO YOU HAVE EXTRA SPACE IN:

- Your House
- Your Backyard
- Your Garage

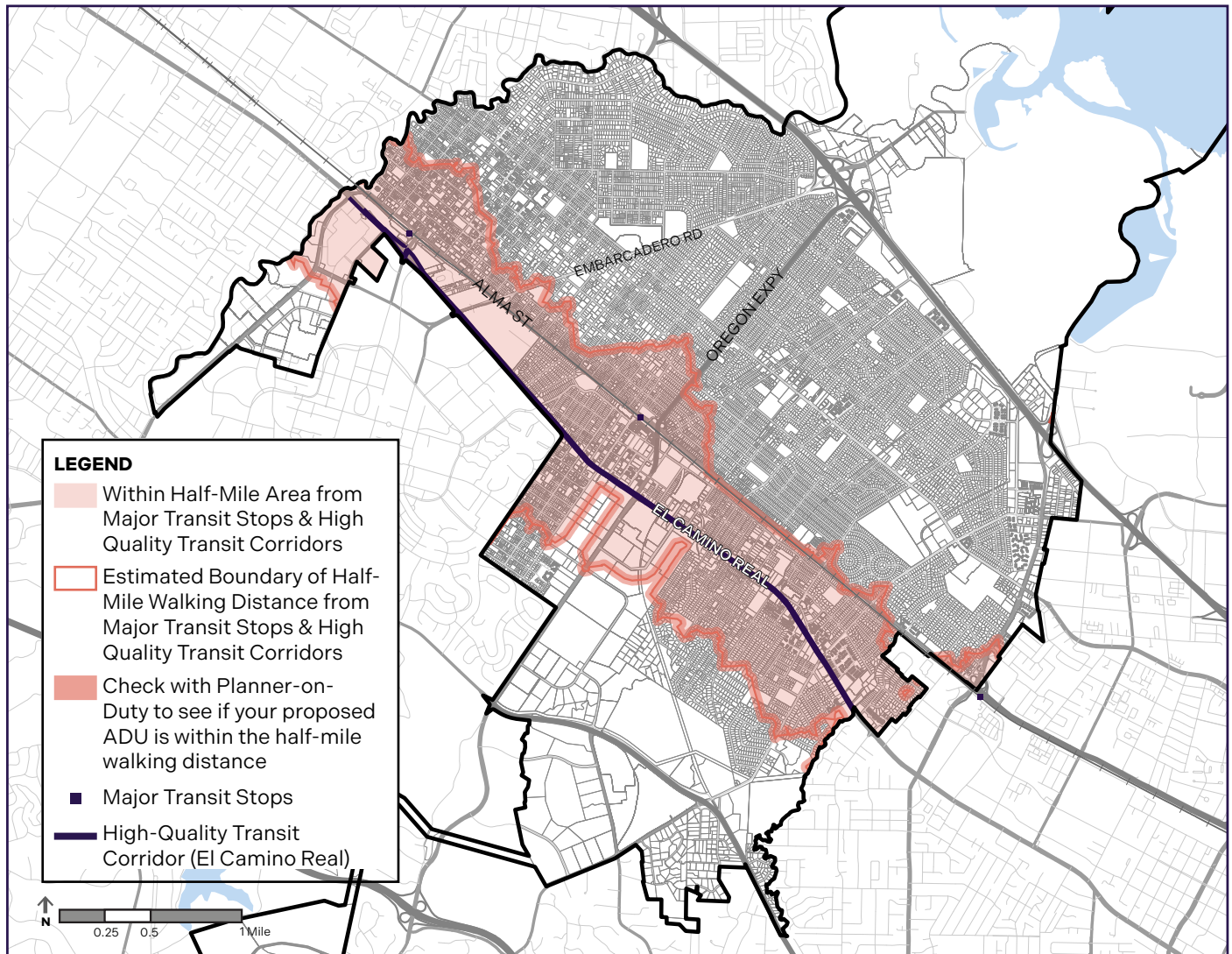
Did you know...

Lots with single-family homes can build 2 ADUs **and** 1 JADU.



3 DO YOU LIVE WITHIN 1/2 MILE OF TRANSIT?

If your property is within a **1/2 mile of walking distance from a major transit stop or a high-quality transit corridor**, you can build a taller ADU. Check if your property qualifies [here](#).



ADU BASICS

DEFINITIONS

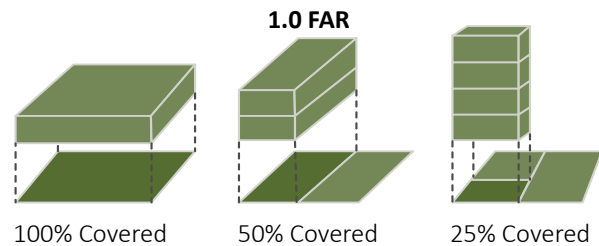
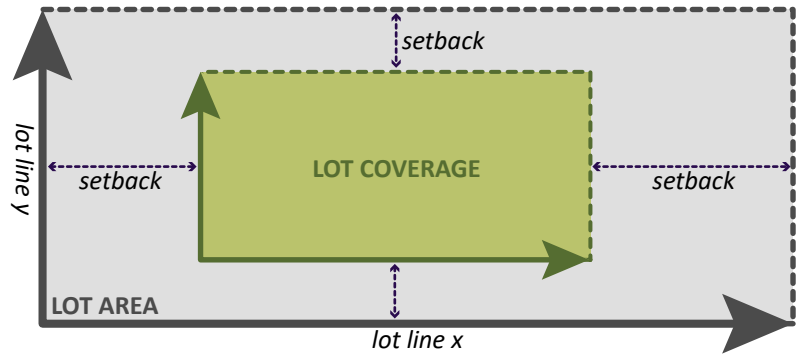
see municipal code section 18.04.030

The **lot area** is the total area of the lot from lot line to lot line.

The **lot coverage** is the portion of the lot that is covered by structures including footprint of the main residence, covered parking, porches and balconies, etc.

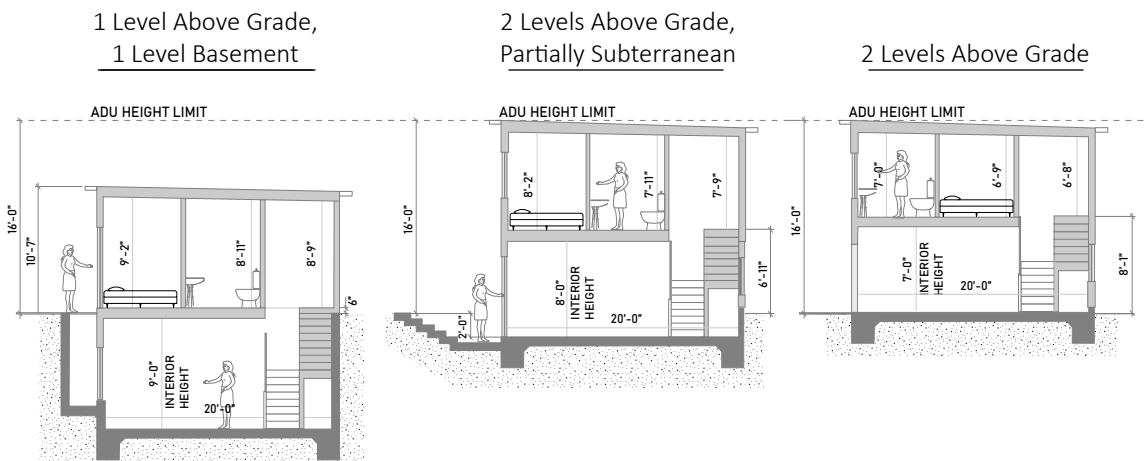
A **setback** is the separation between a lot line and a building.

The **floor area ratio (FAR)** is the proportion of a building's entire usable floor area to the lot area.



HEIGHT

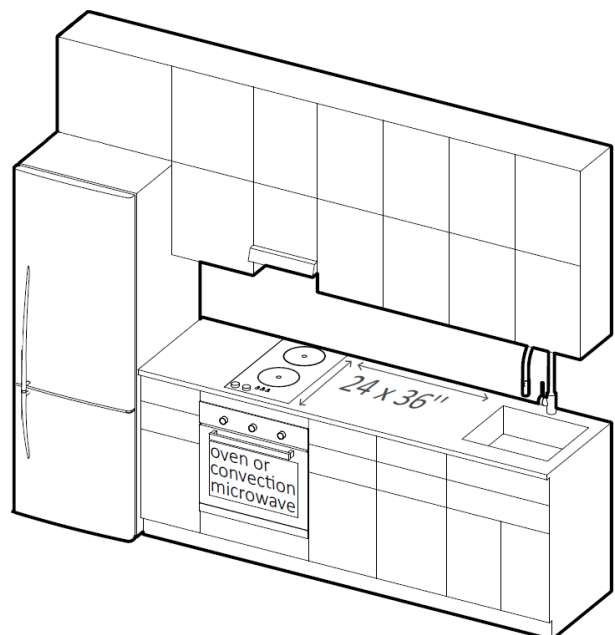
Height is measured from grade to top of roof material of the highest peak.



KITCHEN

All ADUs and JADUs must include an **efficiency kitchen**.

	Efficiency Kitchen
min. burner range	1
oven or convection microwave	yes
freezer / refrigerator combo	10 cu. ft.
min. counter space	24" x 36"
sink (hot & cold water)	yes



DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

SINGLE-FAMILY **ATTACHED** ADU

S = state standard
CS = city standard

The **bolded** standards below indicate City ADU standards that exceed State-level standards.

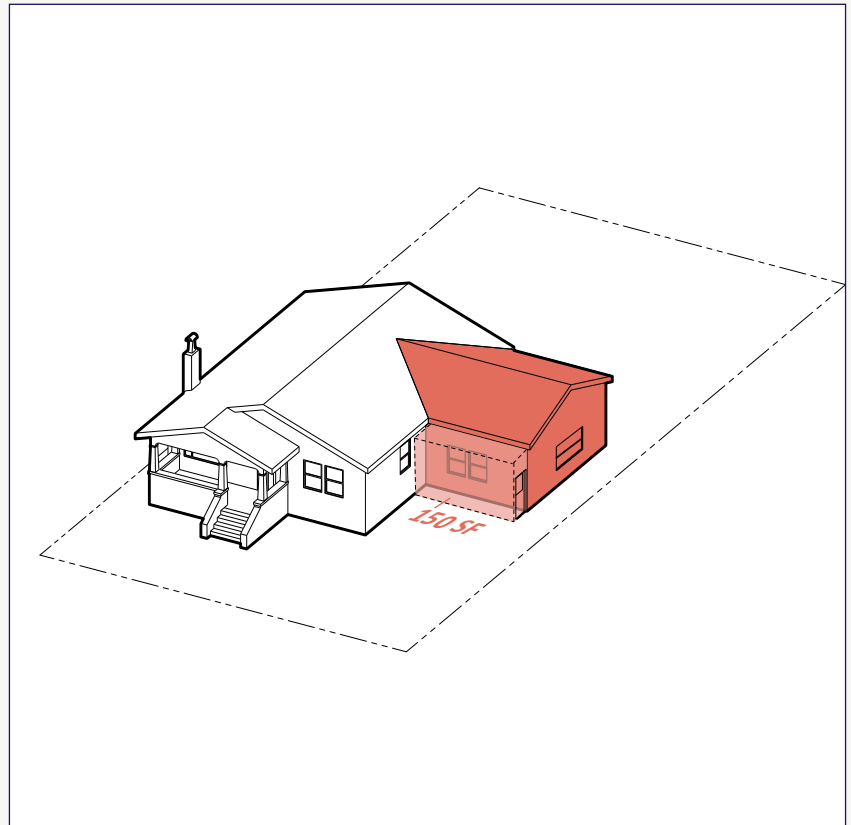
CONVERT EXISTING SPACE

Utilize existing or underutilized space in your home or garage.

- S.1** max. expansion of 150 SF for ingress egress
- S.2** max. unit size is 800 SF
- S.3** separate entrance required
- S.4** no access between primary dwelling and ADU

Did you know...

Converted garage/carport parking spaces do not need to be replaced. See more on page 16.

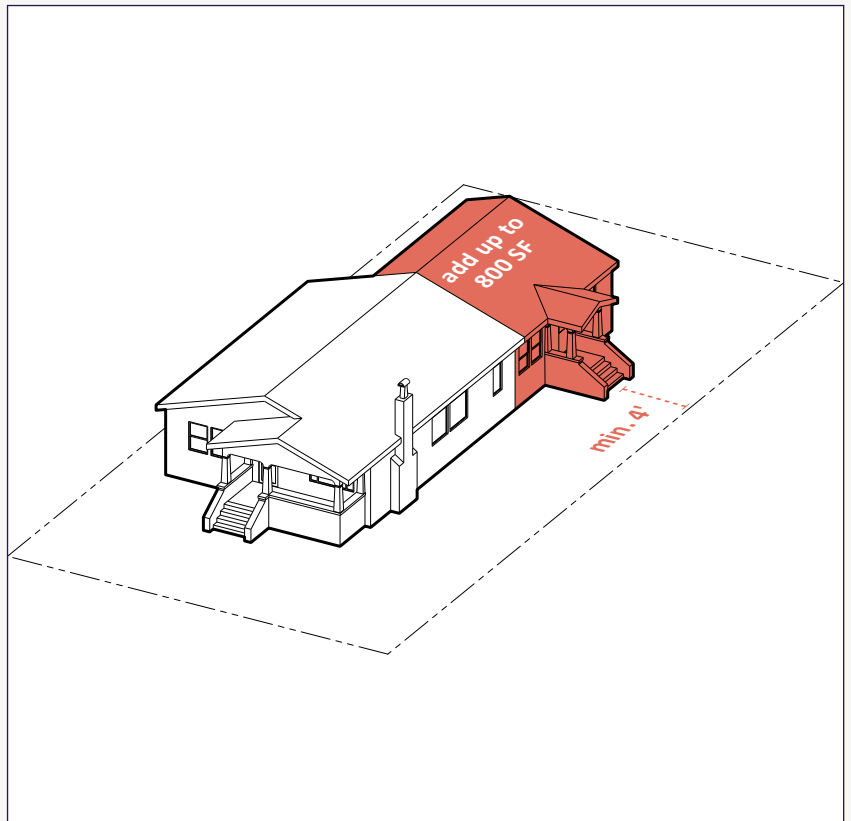


DON'T WANT TO CONVERT EXISTING SPACE?

An **extra 800 SF** can be added to your home for an attached ADU above and beyond maximum FAR and Lot Coverage.

Additional City standards apply (see pg. 13-14)

- CS.5** max. expansion of 800 SF above max FAR and Lot Coverage
- CS.6** max. size is 900 SF (1 bedroom) or 1,000 SF for 2+ bedrooms
- CS.7** min. setback of 4 ft (rear/side lot lines)
- S.8** max. height is 25 ft or underlying zone (whichever is lower)
- S.9** max. no. stories is 2



DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

SINGLE-FAMILY **DETACHED** ADU

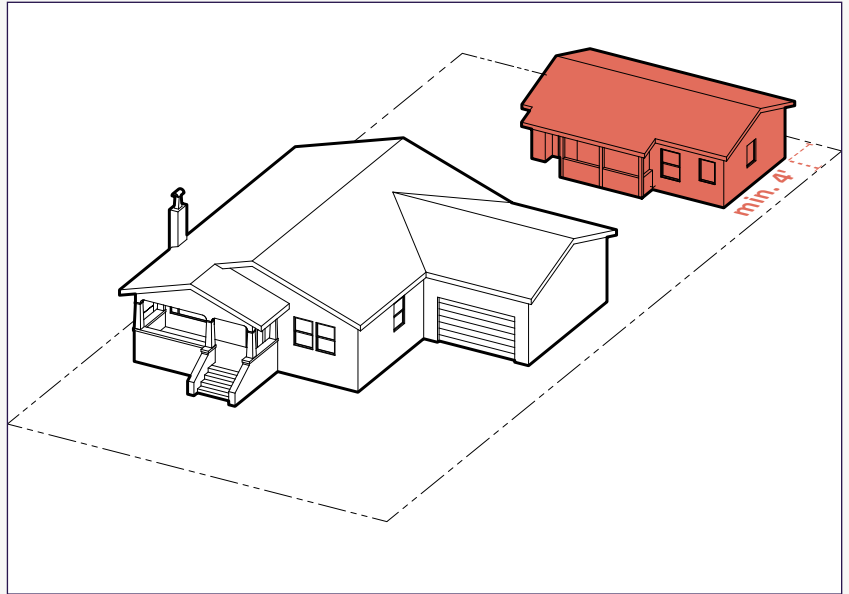
S = state standard
CS = city standard

The **bolded** standards below indicate City ADU standards that exceed State-level standards.

CONSTRUCT A DETACHED ADU

An 800 SF detached ADU can be built on any eligible lot.

- S.10** max. size is 800 SF
- S.11** max. height is 16 ft
18 ft if within 1/2 mile from transit.
Additional 2 ft permitted to align roof pitch with the primary home.
- S.12** min. setback 4 ft (rear/side lot lines)
underlying zone for front setback

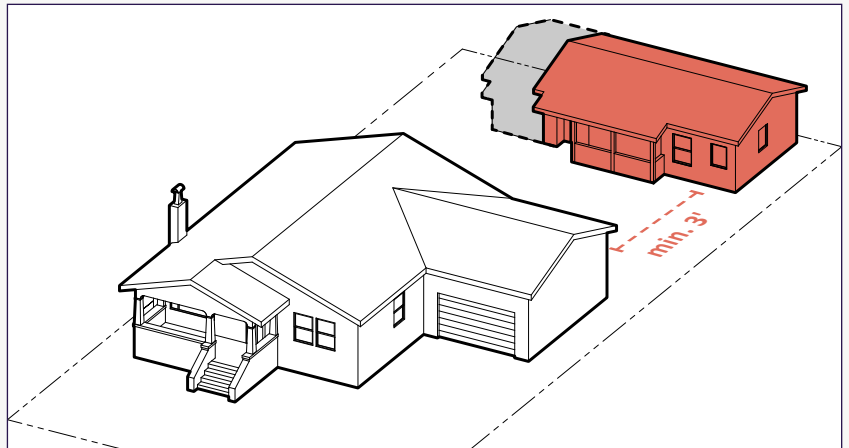


WANT A LARGER ADU?

A **900 to 1,000 SF** detached ADU can be built.

Additional City standards apply (see pg. 13-14)

- CS.13** max. size is 900 SF (1 bedroom) or 1,000 SF for 2+ bedrooms
- CS.14** max. height 25 ft (in RE zone) and 30 ft (in OS zone)
- CS.15** min. 3 ft setback from primary dwelling (or larger if required by the Building Code)

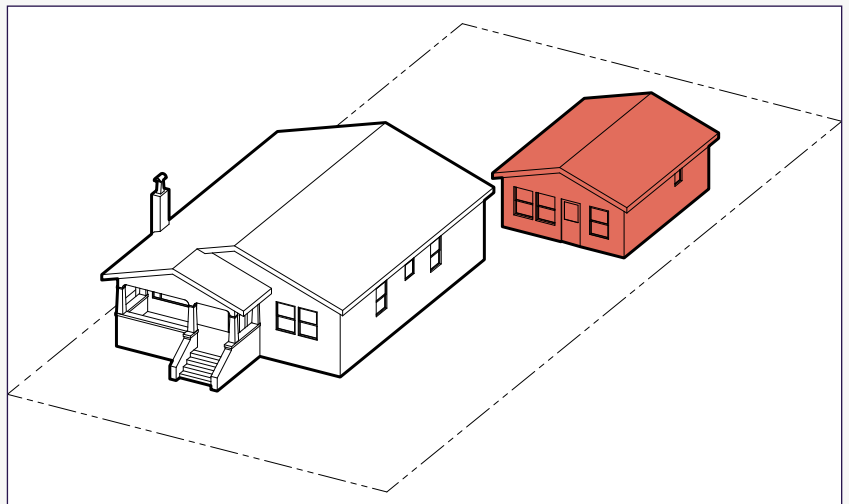


ALREADY HAVE A DETACHED ACCESSORY STRUCTURE?

Consider converting to an ADU*.

- S.16** no max. size
- S.17** max. height is the existing height of the structure or underlying zone

*Expansions or additions to an existing accessory structure are subject to **Additional City standards**.



DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

JUNIOR ADU

S = state standard
CS = city standard

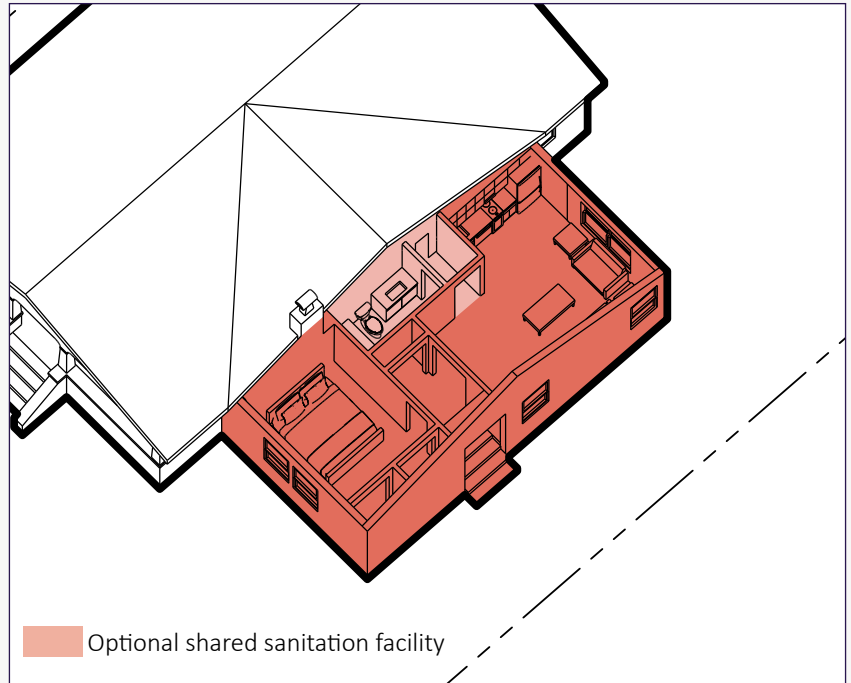
The **bolded** standards below indicate City ADU standards that exceed State-level standards.

What's different about JADUs? Junior ADUs must be attached to the primary home; they must be 500 SF or less; they can share sanitation facilities with the primary house and can include an efficiency kitchen. Junior ADUs may have an internal door to the primary home.

CONVERT EXISTING SPACE

Utilize existing or underutilized space in your home.

- S.18** must be within the primary home
- S.19** max. expansion of 150 SF for ingress egress
- S.20** max. size is 500 SF
- S.21** efficiency kitchen required
- TIP** JADUs may share sanitation facilities such as bathrooms and laundry facilities with the primary dwelling



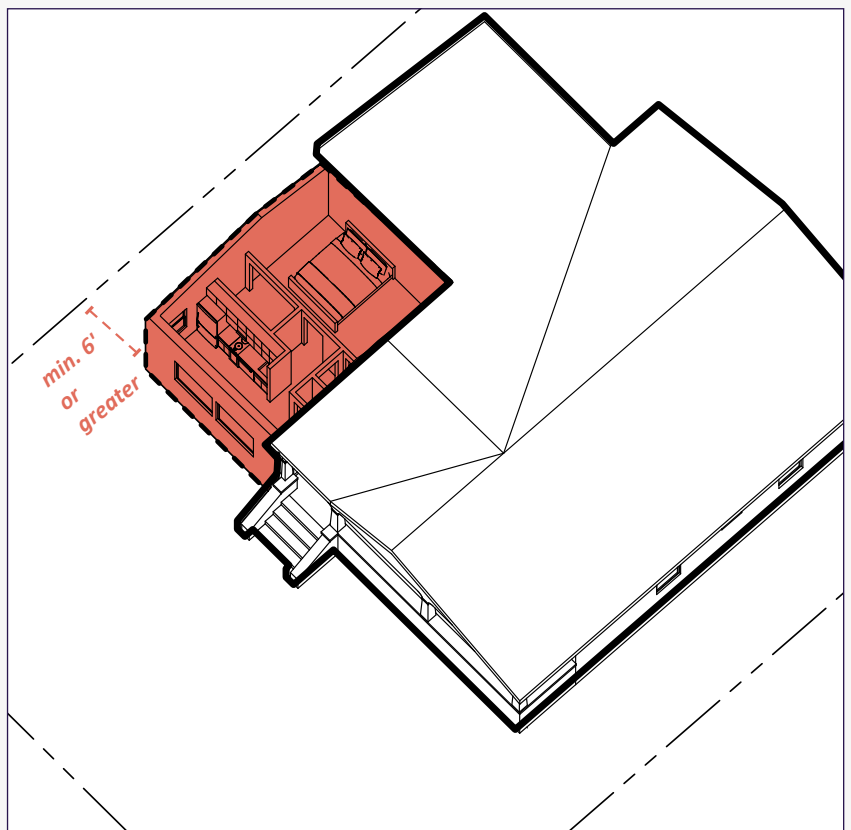
DON'T WANT TO CONVERT EXISTING SPACE?

An **extra 500 SF** can be added to your home for a JADU above and beyond maximum FAR and Lot Coverage.

*Up to 800 SF if building an ADU **and** JADU.*

Additional City standards apply (see pg. 13-14)

- CS.22** max. expansion of 500 SF above max. FAR and Lot Coverage
- S.23** max. size is 500 SF
- S.24** max. height is the underlying zone
- S.25** efficiency kitchen required



DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

MULTI-FAMILY

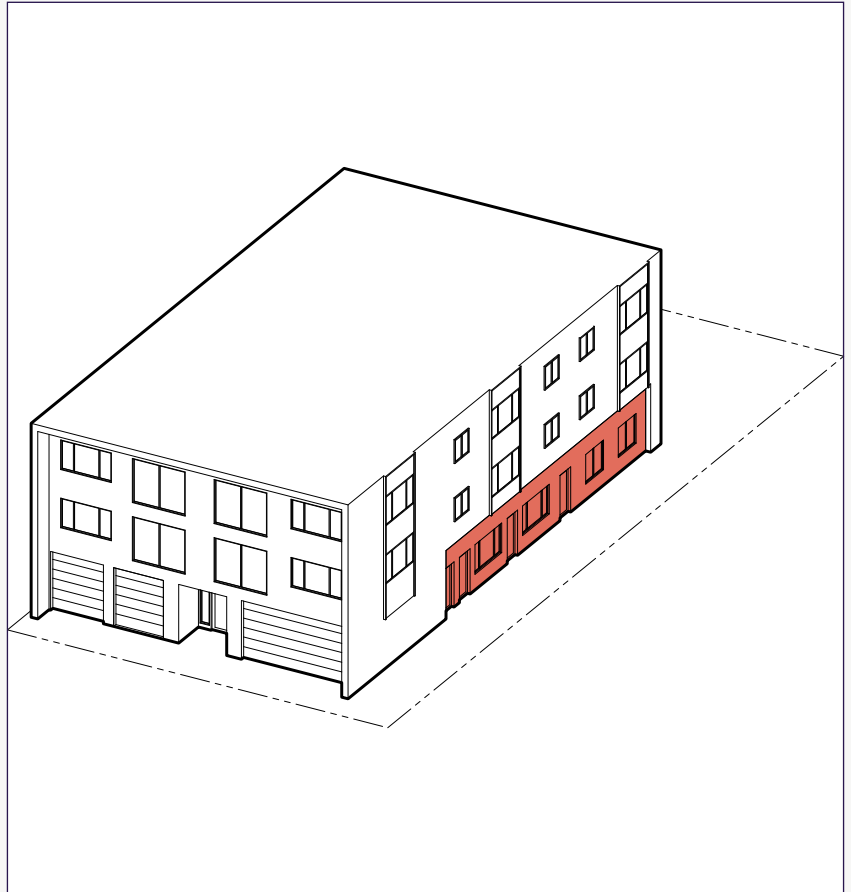
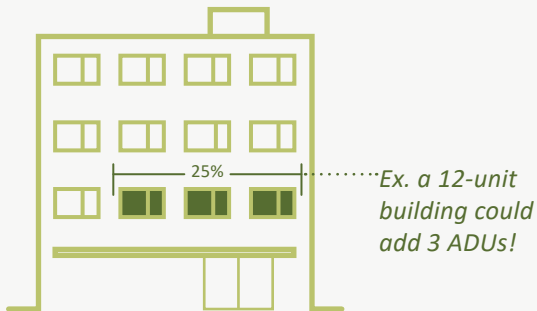
S = state standard

CONVERSION ADU

Convert non-livable space (such as attached garage, storage, or carport) to an ADU.

- S.27** min setback 4 ft (rear/side lot lines) for additions to converted structures
underlying zone for front setback
- S.28** separate entrance required
- S.29** full kitchen required

HOW MANY ADUS CAN I BUILD? A minimum of 1 ADU or up to 25 percent of the existing number of units.



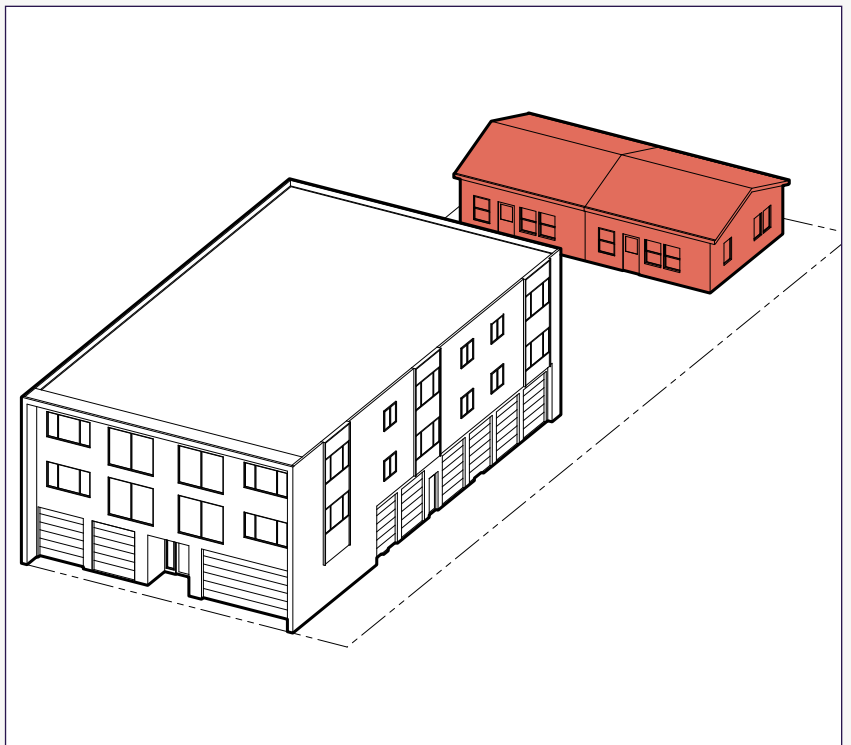
DETACHED ADU

Build up to 8 detached ADUs on a multi-family lot.* The ADUs must be separate from the primary structure but may be attached to each other.

- S.30** max. height is 16 ft
18 ft if within 1/2 mile from transit or if existing dwelling is multi-story
- S.31** min. setback 4 ft (rear/side lot lines)
underlying zone for front setback
- S.32** full kitchen required

*Number of ADUs may not exceed the number of existing units on site.

Covered parking converted to an ADU does not need to be replaced.



ADDITIONAL STANDARDS AND DESIGN BEST PRACTICES

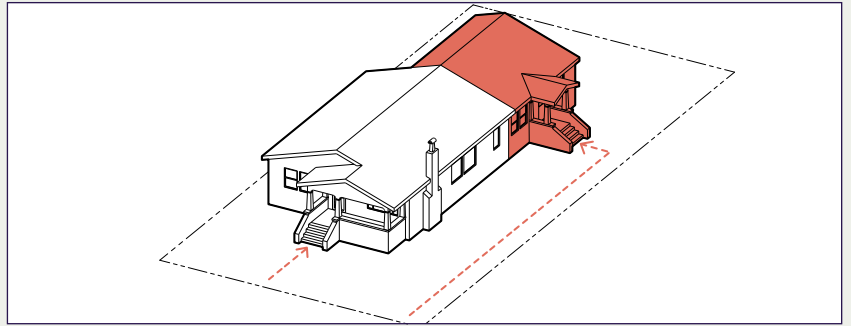
ACS = additional city standard (required)

BP = best practice (not required)

The **bolded additional City Standards** below are required for second units that follow City standards.

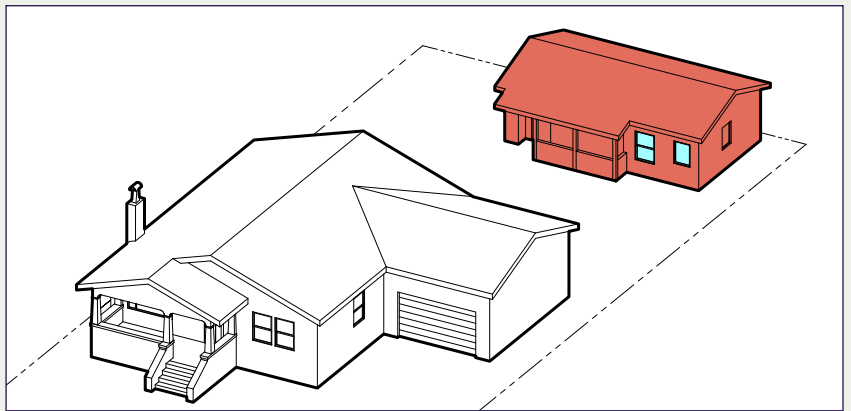
ORIENTATION

- ACS.1** entryway shall face a different property line than primary dwelling, unless in rear half of the lot or on a corner lot



WINDOWS

- BP.1** consider maximizing first floor windows facing the interior yard
- BP.2** consider utilizing skylights to maximize brightness and maintain privacy



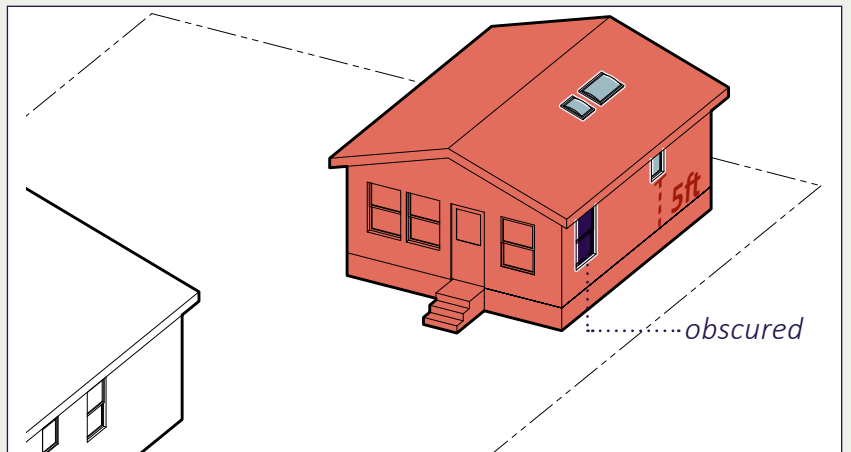
EGRESS WINDOWS

- ACS.2** egress windows/doors facing neighboring property line shall utilize obscured glazing

1ST FLOOR NON-EGRESS WINDOWS

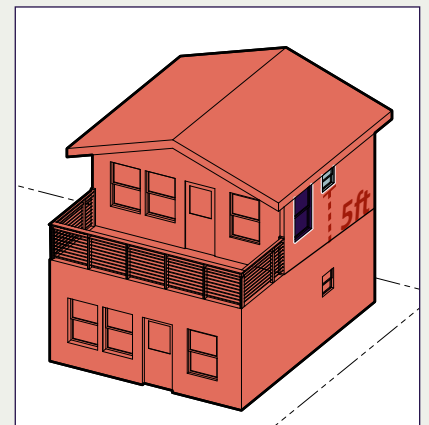
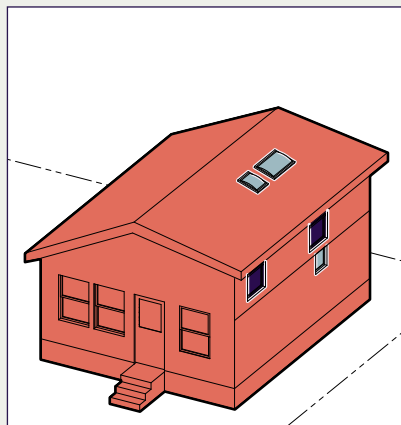
If finished floor is 2+ ft above grade

- ACS.3** non-egress, operable windows facing neighboring property line, shall have min 5 ft sill height above finished floor
- ACS.4** non-egress, non-operable windows facing neighboring property lines shall utilize obscured glazing below 5 ft from the finished floor



2ND FLOOR & LOFT NON-EGRESS WINDOWS

- ACS.5** if facing a neighboring property line, 2nd floor non-egress windows shall have a 5 ft sill height or obscured glazing
- ACS.6** 2nd floor windows shall be offset from neighbor's windows to maximize privacy



ADDITIONAL STANDARDS AND DESIGN BEST PRACTICES

ACS = additional city standard (required)

BP = best practice (not required)

The **bolded additional City standards** below are required for second units that follow City standards.

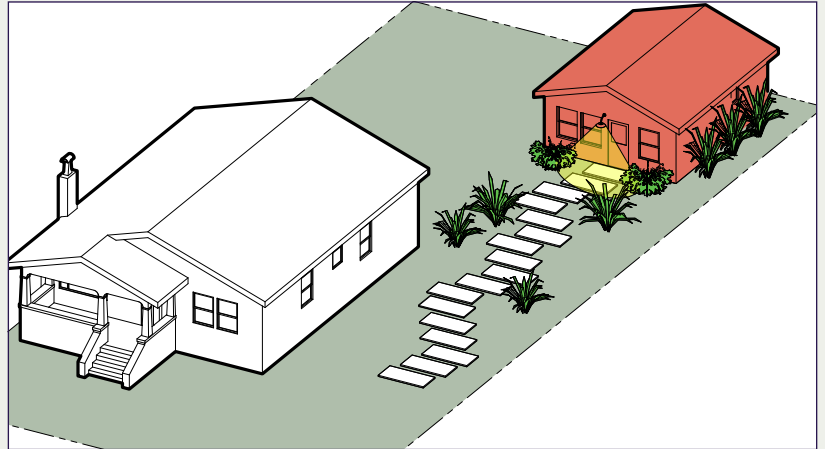
PRIVACY

LANDSCAPING AND EXTERIOR

ACS.7 exterior lighting shall be mounted at 7 ft or below

ACS.8 exterior lighting shall be directed downwards

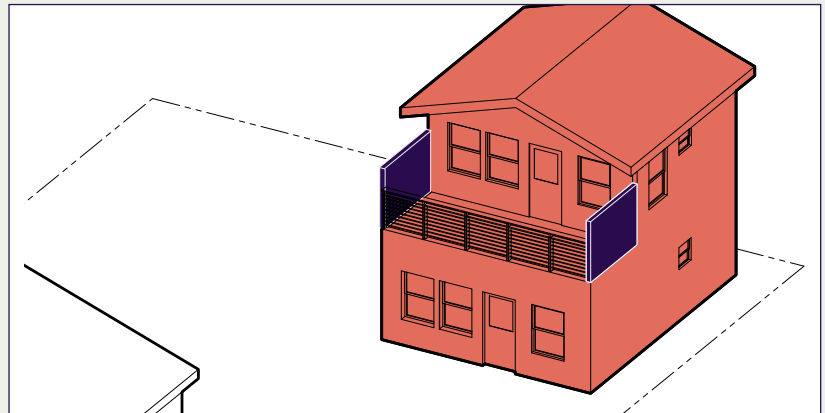
BP.3 consider utilizing landscaping around the entry and along property lines



2ND FLOOR DOORS & DECKS

ACS.9 doors and decks shall not face a neighboring property line

ACS.10 decks and balconies shall utilize screening barriers (min. 5 ft. 6 in.) to prevent views toward an adjacent property line



NOISE

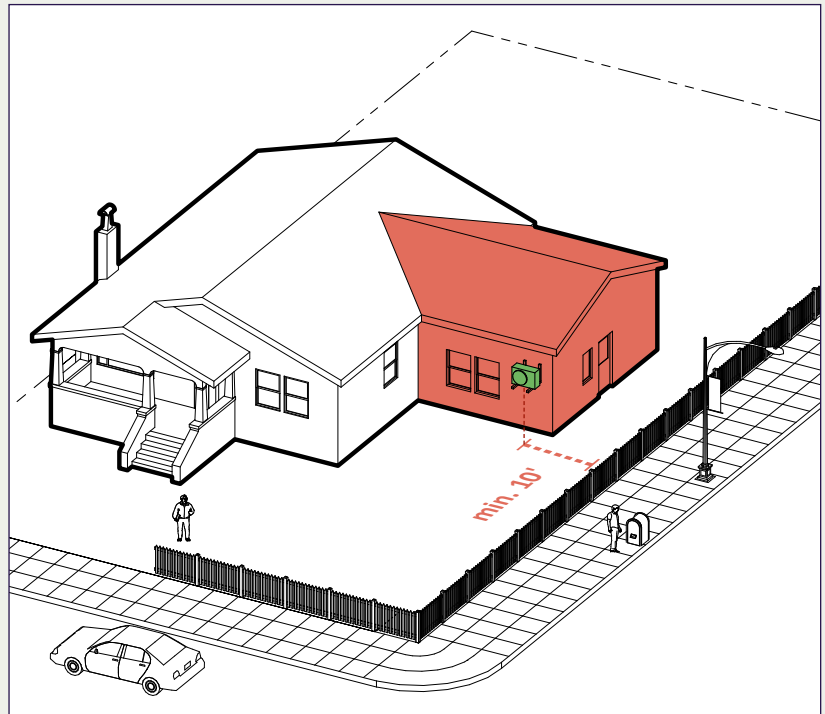
BP.4 consider soundproofing between attached units

NOISE-PRODUCING EQUIPMENT

air conditioner, heat pump, etc.

ACS.11 equipment may be located anywhere on site but shall maintain underlying front setback and 10 ft street side setback for corner lots

ACS.12 equipment shall meet the City's noise ordinance at the nearest property line (PAMC Ch. 9.10)



WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW?

EARLY CONSIDERATIONS

SPECIAL DISTRICTS



- Specific building and design requirements may be required if you are:
- In a flood zone
 - Part of a Historic District, or
 - Listed as a historic resource

Not sure if you're in a special district? Check your status at the City's [Property Information Map](#) and speak with the Planner on Duty.

OWNER OCCUPANCY



Building a Junior ADU? Owner occupancy is required in either the primary dwelling or the JADU.

DEED RESTRICTION



- JADU's require a deed restriction stating:
- The JADU cannot be sold separate from the sale of the primary dwelling.
 - Restricted size and attributes of a JADU.
 - See JADU deed restriction process [HERE](#) and form [HERE](#).

BECOMING A LANDLORD

- 1 Understand State and local rental laws.**
 - The California Department of Consumer Affairs: [A Guide to Residential Tenants' and Landlords' Rights and Responsibilities](#).
 - Local rules and resources are available on the City's webpage [HERE](#).



Short-Term Rentals
Rental of any ADU or JADU shall be for a term of 30 days or more.

- 2 Set your rent, write your lease, and find a tenant.**
- 3 Consider on-going management** of your rental including maintenance, rent increases, eviction, and managing disputes.

COST & FEES

Fees vary based on JADU an ADU details and size. Speak with Building and Planning staff at the Development Center for a more detailed estimate.

The following provides an overview of the types of fees and cost ranges for each type.

- Building Permit [Fees](#) \$2,000 to \$8,000**
- Development Impact [Fees](#) \$10,000 to \$80,000**
Fee is proportional to the size of the primary unit. **Not applicable** to JADUs or ADUs under 750 SF
- School [Fees](#) \$4.79 per SF**
Not applicable to JADUs or ADUs under 500 SF
- Utility [Fees](#) See Utility Department**
Utilities.Engineering@cityofpaloalto.org

\$ ADU Financing
Check out the Santa Clara County ADU Handbook pages 21 to 24 for financing options [HERE](#).

ADU Budget Calculator
Check out the Santa Clara County ADU Calculator [HERE](#).

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW?

PARKING

PARKING REQUIREMENTS



- No parking is required for new second dwelling units.
- Replacement uncovered parking is required when building a new home with a second unit and no covered parking.

COVERED PARKING



- Covered parking (up to 220 SF) can be provided. This space does not contribute to the J/ADU unit's size, but does contribute to the FAR and lot coverage for the property as a whole.
- Attached garages shall not have interior access to the J/ADU unit.

BASEMENTS & LOFTS

BASEMENTS



- Basements are permitted, but habitable basement space will contribute to unit size.
- A basement for the primary dwelling may not be extended underneath a JADU or ADU.

LOFTS



- Lofts are permitted.
- Lofts do not contribute to unit size as long as the floor-to-ceiling height is less than 5 feet.

FAQ

Can I sell my ADU?

- Only ADUs developed by a qualified non-profit corporation can be sold separately from the primary residence.

Can I build more than 2 ADUs and 1 JADU on my property?

- Check out more information on Senate Bill 9 on the City's website [here](#).

Will my property taxes increase if I build an ADU?

- Yes. The primary residence will not be reassessed but your taxes will increase based on the value of the ADU. For more information visit the Santa Clara County Office of the Assessor [here](#).

OTHER RESOURCES



Learn more at City's ADU Website

See the latest updates on ADU law and find additional resources.

<https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Departments/Planning-Development-Services/Accessory-Dwelling-Units>



Make an Appointment with the Planner on Duty

Virtual and InPerson Appointments can be made online [here](#).

Location: Development Center
285 Hamilton Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 94301

Hours: 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Monday - Thursday with remote service on Fridays

Contact: (650) 617-3117
Planner@CityofPaloAlto.org



See the County's Website on ADUs

<https://aduscc.org/>

TIMELINE

1 PLANNING (1-3 MONTHS)

- A. Confirm you can build an ADU on your property (see Page 6 and 7).
- B. Consider the type of ADU you want to build (see Page 5).
- C. Budget for the project (see Page 15).
- D. Identify your financing (see Page 15).
- E. Make an appointment with the Planner on Duty to discuss the process [here](#).

2 DESIGN (2-6 MONTHS)

- A. Hire a design professional.
- B. Confirm the type of ADU you want to build.
- C. Work with your design professional to finalize designs and update your budget.
- D. Prepare construction drawings for permit submittal.

ADU PROFESSIONALS

- Architect
- Designer
- Contractor
- Design/Build
- Modular/Prefab

3 PERMITTING (1-2 MONTHS)

- A. Submit permit application and plan set to the City for initial review and completeness check.
- B. Pay permit fees (see Page 15).
- C. Wait for comments on from City's plan check review.
- D. Respond to plan check comments and resubmit plans, if needed.
- E. Obtain permit approval.
- F. Pay outstanding fees.
- G. Receive permit.

4 BIDDING (1-3 MONTHS)

- A. Request bids from qualified contractors.
- B. Compare bids.
- C. Select contractor and engage them to start work.

5 CONSTRUCTION (6-12 MONTHS)

- A. During construction, your contractor will call for inspections as required by the City.
- B. Receive final inspection approval when construction is complete.

6 MOVE IN / RENT

- A. Find a qualified tenant.
- B. Prepare lease.
- C. Start renting.

PROJECT TEAM



CITY OF
PALO ALTO

Planning & Development Department

URBAN
PLANNING
PARTNERS
INC.

Urban Planning Partners



Syncopated Architecture