



OKC Development Codes Update

Frequently asked questions (FAQ) for proposed changes to the Oklahoma City Municipal Code regarding Accessory Dwellings.

An “Accessory Dwelling” is a small, secondary living unit allowed in residential areas. The existing zoning code does not define accessory dwellings, nor does it make allowances for them in any zoning districts. The proposed ordinance amendment would allow accessory dwellings as a conditional use in the Urban Medium (UM) and Urban High (UH) land use typology areas (LUTAs) as defined by *planokc*, where properties are either zoned NC or R-1 or are occupied by a single-family structure in R-2, R-3, and R-4 districts.

These FAQs provide answers to questions about the accessory dwellings ordinance as it will be proposed at the November 14th Planning Commission meeting.

1) Where would Accessory Dwellings be allowed in the city?

*Accessory Dwellings would be allowed in the Urban High (UH) and Urban Medium (UM) Land Use Typology areas as identified in *planokc*, except that they would not be allowed in Historic Preservation (HP) or Historic Landmark (HL) zoning districts. To see the LUTA boundaries go to:*

<https://data.okc.gov/portal/page/viewer?datasetName=Interactive%20PlanOKC%20Map&view=map>

2) How many ADs does the City estimate would be built in the Urban Medium and Urban High areas of OKC?

Accessory dwellings represent a very small fraction (2 percent or less) of the housing stock of cities that have allowed them for many years. Reference also this report from the American Association of Retired Persons at

<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/housing/info-2019/accessory-dwelling-units-adus/>

3) Why do we need Accessory Dwellings in our community?

Accessory Dwellings will provide many benefits to our community, including:

- expanding housing supply, especially in areas where infrastructure such as utilities, roads, parks, schools, and services already exists;
- creating additional housing in traditional neighborhoods;
- supporting home ownership by providing homeowners with supplemental income from accessory dwelling rentals;
- social benefits of accommodating multi-generational households and the ability to age-in-place;
- providing more housing in locations where residents may walk or use transit for shopping and services; and,
- accommodating the continued use and rehabilitation of existing non-conforming accessory dwellings.

Oklahoma City's 2020 *Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice* report found that fair housing was negatively impacted because accessory dwelling units were not allowed in Oklahoma City's existing zoning code and recommended that accessory dwellings be allowed in existing single-family zoning districts as either internal, attached, or detached units.

4) Why aren't Accessory Dwellings proposed citywide at this time?

Allowing accessory dwellings in suburban areas or in the Historic Preservation (HP) or Historic Landmark (HL) zoning districts is not proposed at this time because Planning staff have not yet completed enough study for the new zones in those areas. Discussion and outreach will continue in these areas and may be addressed in a future code update.

5) If I build an accessory dwelling in my backyard, can I split the lot and sell the accessory dwelling separately?

No, the ordinance states that an accessory dwelling may not be separated from the principal dwelling.

6) Can I build more than one accessory dwelling in my backyard?

No, only one accessory dwelling per parcel is allowed.

7) What if there is already an accessory dwelling in my backyard?

The proposed ordinance would allow that dwelling to come into compliance and meet the zoning code (except for setback requirements) so long as it meets Building Code requirements.

8) How do we know that these dwellings would contribute to housing affordability?

There are three parts to the answer to this question:

- *Accessory dwellings are smaller than traditional single-family homes and therefore cost less to rent. Limited studies of rents in other parts of the country have found that rent for an Accessory Dwelling may be as much as \$400 per month less than a unit at an apartment complex.*
- *Rental income from accessory dwellings can provide supplemental income to homeowners to help offset the costs of home ownership, thus making the existing home more affordable.*
- *When more choices are available, the housing market becomes more fluid and offers homes with more variability in price. For example, if a senior can move to a smaller accessory dwelling closer to family, their former house may provide another choice in the market that is more affordable to other families than newer products.*

9) How can I be assured ADs will be compatible with my neighborhood?

The ordinance includes many conditions addressing compatibility that must be met before an accessory dwelling can be constructed or occupied. These include:

- *maximum size*
- *maximum height of the dwelling*
- *side and rear yard setbacks*
- *a limit one accessory dwelling per lot*
- *a prohibition roof top decks*
- *parking requirements*
- *design requirements for second floor windows and balconies*

10) Will the presence of an Accessory Dwelling increase the number of cars parked on-street on my block?

The ordinance requires a minimum of one parking space per Accessory Dwelling, unless the unit is very small (under 600 sq. ft.), or the street width is equal to or greater than 26 feet in width.

A small dwelling accommodates only one to two person households, which limits the number of cars. Also, because the vast majority of the area of the urban core where Accessory Dwellings are proposed is within ¼ mile of an existing or funded transit stop, multi-use trail, or shared route bike facility, it is possible for small households to travel to work, school, and services without a car.

A standard neighborhood street is 26 ft wide and is designed to accommodate parking on both sides of the street as well as the movement of emergency vehicles in between. Studies from other communities across the country have found that ADs do not significantly increase on-street parking; see

<https://www.aducalifornia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Implementing-the-Backyard-Revolution.pdf>

If street parking becomes a concern, residents can apply (at no charge) to the City of Oklahoma City Traffic Commission to post signs restricting parking on one or both sides of the street, or restricting parking during certain hours. An application needs to show approval from every person who resides on the block or blocks requested in the application. For more information, see the OKC Traffic and Transportation Commission webpage:

<https://www.okc.gov/departments/public-works/divisions/traffic-services/traffic-and-transportation-commission>

11) Will the presence of Accessory Dwellings strain the water or sewer capacity in the older parts of the City or decrease water pressure at my house?

The Utilities Department has stated that the existing water and wastewater infrastructure has sufficient capacity to support a large number of additional dwellings and residents. From a system-wide perspective, both the water and sewer systems have only reached 50 percent capacity in the core area and system improvements to increase capacity and service delivery continue to be made.

For example, on the water system side, new on-demand monitoring technology will help with moving water supplies faster to where they are needed. Also, new pump stations and system software that can detect line breaks more quickly will help to increase capacity.

Regarding water pressure, water pressure at a resident's home is not related to system capacity. It is related to the amount or volume of water that is required at the house and how fast the water has to travel through the size of pipe. The State Department of Environmental Quality requires water suppliers to pressure a system at 25 psi (pounds per square inch). To ensure adequate water delivery, the City's system is designed to deliver at 40 psi. Adding more homes in the form of accessory dwellings to the system may slightly increase the demand or volume of water but will not change the system delivery needed to maintain the average 40 psi pressure.

On the sewer system side, most wastewater lines in the urban core are 8 inches in diameter, which is more than sufficient to serve large amounts of infill development in these areas. The city has also augmented the capacity of some older sewer lines by supplementing older materials with liners that smooth the interior surface of the pipe and therefore increase flow and system capacity.

12) Will allowing Accessory Dwellings increase the number of home shares/short term rentals in my neighborhood?

An AD could only be used for home sharing/short term rentals if the AD is located on the same parcel as the host's primary residence and the host's primary residence is occupied by the host at the time of the rental. A Special Exception from the Board of Adjustment and a license must also be obtained. The Special Exception process also requires mailed notice and a public hearing before it can be approved.

13) How can I know if an Accessory Dwelling is planned to be built next to or behind my property or elsewhere in my neighborhood?

If an AD is proposed on a property, the proposed ordinance requires that the property owner place a temporary sign on the property that includes the property address and a link to the online Access Portal permit database. With this information, neighbors will be able to view information about the proposed project including its size and location on the property.