

Accessory Dwellings Ordinance Review 2017

Civic Engagement Plan

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BACKGROUND

With the high costs of housing and the aging of the baby boomer population, finding creative and flexible living arrangements is becoming increasingly important in communities. One strategy used throughout the country is allowing the creation of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) through amended zoning codes. ADUs, also known by names such as “granny flats” and “in-law suites,” are small apartments built on a property with a preexisting home as the primary structure. Units typically function as studio apartments and tend to accommodate one or two people. This type of housing can allow for seniors to age in place, provide homeowners with extra rental income and fill a gap in affordable rental units.

An ADU can be constructed as either an interior, attached or detached unit, although Arlington currently permits interior only. Interior units are located within the primary structure, attached units are connected to the primary structure, and detached units are separate (for example, above a detached garage). The attached and detached units, which are visible on the exterior of the house, are typically designed to blend in with the primary structure and neighborhood architecture.

“ADUs provide benefits for both society and individuals. As infill development, they make efficient and ‘green’ use of existing infrastructure and help increase densities to levels at which transit becomes viable — yet with lower costs and quicker permitting processes than for larger, multi-family building types. Because ADUs tend to be relatively small and their amenities modest, they provide more affordable housing options (at less than one-third of the cost of comparable units in multi-family buildings). Oftentimes, these units are the only rental housing available in older, predominantly single-family neighborhoods, making it possible for people from all walks of life to live in the area. Yet, they also significantly improve the value of the property, in essence constituting an asset-building strategy for homeowners.”

- UC Berkeley College of Environmental Design

PURPOSE

Arlington adopted a relatively restrictive ADU ordinance in 2008, after a robust community process. Since that time, the adopted ordinance has proven to be less successful than anticipated at enabling ADUs, with only 19 units developed in 9 years. Many more homeowners have expressed interest in developing ADUs, but have faced a daunting series of restrictions and requirements.

In adopting Arlington’s Affordable Housing Master Plan (AHMP) in September 2015, the County Board directed staff to “develop zoning ordinance proposals that advance the

AHMP’s goals, including adjustments to the existing accessory dwelling unit ordinance.” Since that time, Housing, Planning and Zoning staff have worked together to identify barriers to development of ADUs, and intend to engage community members in developing recommendations for revisions to Arlington’s ADU ordinance.

STAKEHOLDERS

The County Board-appointed Housing Commission will be the lead community engagement stakeholder, with a standing ADU subcommittee meeting regularly to advise staff on issues and recommendations. The subcommittee has invited participation from other stakeholder organizations. Members of the working group are:

- Alice Hogan, Housing Commission (Chair)
- Larry Withers, Housing Commission
- Eric Brescia, Housing Commission
- Holly Bray, Housing Commission
- Patricia Sullivan, Commission on Aging
- Martha Villanigro-Santiago, Commission on Aging
- Ken Aughenbaugh, Civic Federation

The staff team supporting the ADU Ordinance Review is:

- Joel Franklin, Housing (Lead)
- Jennifer Daniels, Housing
- Arlova Vonhm, Zoning
- Debbie Albert, Planning
- Justin Falango, Planning
- Gary Greene, Inspection Services

Other identified stakeholders include the following, and will be reached through a variety of strategies, including meetings, resident survey, social media, and a community forum:

- Civic associations
- Homeowners associations
- Housing advocates
- Developers
- Low and moderate income residents
- Aging/senior residents.

PROCESS

The ADU Ordinance Review began in September 2016, with a staff review of the existing ordinance, current challenges and potential solutions. Arlington’s Affordable Housing Month activities in September 2016 included community education on ADUs, including a tour and a feature in the County’s “Housing News and Notes” e-newsletter. In October 2016, ADUs were included in a “Missing Middle” design gallery, in collaboration with the Alliance for Housing Solutions.

Beginning in early 2017, a community process will be initiated to develop solutions and solicit community feedback. Proposed process and timeline is below.

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