

Accessory Dwelling Units

A potential solution to our housing crisis?



“We estimate the potential size of the market for secondary units as 31% of the [single family residential] properties...”

— Karen Chapple, UC Berkeley

A Worsening Crisis

The Bay Area faces an unprecedented housing crisis that impacts every family, worker, and company in our region. Despite more coordinated regional planning, and goals to “build in” and reduce our greenhouse gas footprint, our system of approving and building housing is failing to meet demand. The inability of our traditional delivery system to build enough housing has resulted in increased competition for fewer available homes, rising prices, overcrowding, and community dislocation.

Innovative approaches are needed if we are to solve this problem and preserve our diverse communities, our economy, and our environment.

The expansion of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) provides invisible density affordable by

design, in existing neighborhoods for low and middle income renters, small families, and seniors. Infill in existing neighborhoods served by schools and infrastructure creates low carbon homes aligned with State climate change goals. According to a recent UC Berkeley study, ADUs rent for significantly less than new market rate apartments making them an important source of more affordable housing.

Homeowners who need room for changing families or income to manage economic difficulties often add illegal second units which could be made safe and legal with code changes. Owners living in “too much house” could rent a portion of their property as a home instead of a temporary overnight rental if it were legal.

The average cost of one unit of affordable housing is \$500,000 in the Bay Area. An accessory dwelling unit can range anywhere between \$10,000 for a second unit in an existing bedroom to \$300,000 for a backyard cottage.

Second units can help seniors age in place, promote intergenerational living, and offer small homes for teachers, public servants, and young people priced out of California cities.

Second units use less energy and water than a typical house. A number of cities are encouraging second units around transit hubs to promote healthy green homes.

With simple policy changes at the State and local level we can vastly increase room for Californians in existing neighborhoods. With approximately 1.5 million single family homes in the Bay Area, uptake of just 10% would increase the housing stock by 150,000 units!

Secondary Unit Supply Explodes in Vancouver

Vancouver, Canada allows ADU's with only a building permit and reduced development standards on every single family lot resulting in about 1000 new ADUs per year!

Share of Single-family Houses with ADUs



Sightline

Portland and Seattle encourage ADU's, but have more restrictive rules and processes than Vancouver resulting in many fewer units. Removing barriers such as parking, setbacks, lot coverage, discretionary review, and costly fees enable many more owners to add ADUs

Research Shows:

“Secondary units could accommodate a significant share of future population growth, as well as provide much of the affordable housing cities are required to build.”

– Yes in My Backyard, Karen Chapple, UC Berkeley