

ADU HANDBOOK

City of Columbus

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This guidebook is intended as a brief summary of City of Columbus-specific requirements. Accessory Dwelling Units are governed by federal and state laws, in addition to local laws found in the City of Columbus Code. In the event of any omission or inconsistency in the guidebook, federal, state and local law will govern.



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ADU BASICS

What is an ADU?

An ADU (Accessory Dwelling Unit) is an additional dwelling unit that has a separate entrance and is smaller than the principal building or apartment building on the same lot.

ADUs in Columbus can range in size and configuration, so long as they do not exceed 65% of the net floor area of the principal building which it is associated with, or 1,000 square feet, whichever is greater.

If you are considering building an ADU, it must meet applicable building code requirements. See page 22 for additional information.

What is Required?

For safety, ADUs must meet the life safety requirements established in the building code and fire code utilized by the State of Ohio and City of Columbus.

ADUs must have permanent utility connections. Tiny-homes and mobile homes do not qualify as ADUs.

ADUs must contain the following:

- Kitchen
- Living & sleeping areas
- Space for sanitation
- Utility connections
- Proper ventilation
- Exit routes that meet life safety requirements
- In some cases, a sprinkler system.

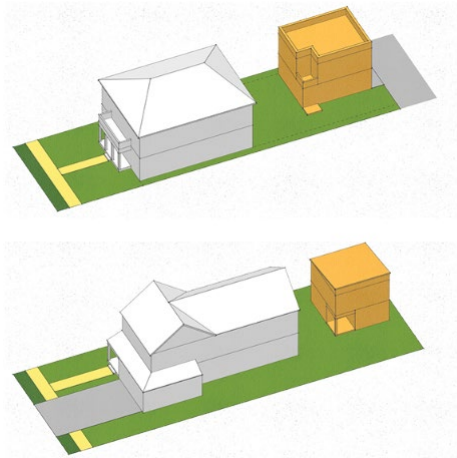


A traditional ADU located above a garage.



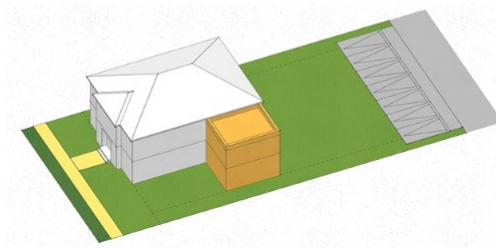
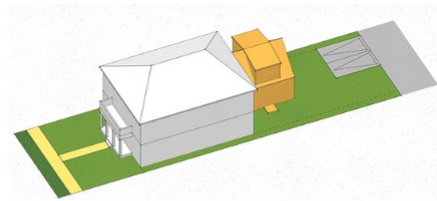
A contemporary, standalone ADU.

ADU TYPES



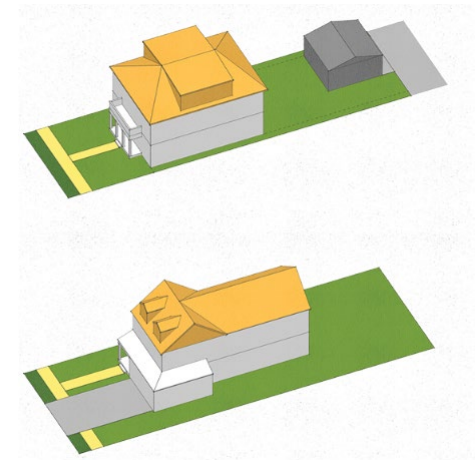
Detached ADUs

Detached ADUs are one- or two-story structures physically separated from the primary building on the lot. They may be standalone or attached to a detached garage, either on the side or on top.



Attached ADUs

Attached ADUs are new structures attached to the primary building, either along the side or back, with an entrance that is separate from the primary unit. An attached ADU may be attached on the first or second floor, and may contain a garage.



Internal ADUs

Internal ADUs are entirely contained within an existing building. Internal ADUs may require the reorganization of the primary building, or the conversion of a building wing, basement, or attic. In cases where the principal building is shorter than the maximum allowed height, an additional story may be an option.

BENEFITS

Personal

- **House a loved one**

You may choose to build an ADU to house a loved one, such as a young adult who seeks more independence, or an aging parent who wants to downsize while maintaining privacy.

- **Generate additional income**

Renting out your ADU, long-term or short-term, can help cover your housing expenses. Reference [Chapter 598](#) and [Chapter 4515](#) of the Columbus City Codes for short-term rental permit and rental registry requirements, respectively.

- **Run a home occupation**

Your ADU can be designed with a home occupation in mind, so long as you meet the requirements laid out in [Section 3332.37](#) of the zoning code. Only the person who lives in the ADU can have a home occupation.

Community

- ADUs offer an effective way to expand market-rate and affordable rental housing,
- They allow neighborhoods to grow without significant changes to their established character,
- They add to the variety of available housing options,
- They create flexible living options for homeowners to support seniors or children,
- They can generate supplemental income that can improve long-term housing stability,
- They fit on most residential lots and are suitable in most neighborhoods.



A detached, two-story ADU built above a garage.



A single-story ADU with no garage component.

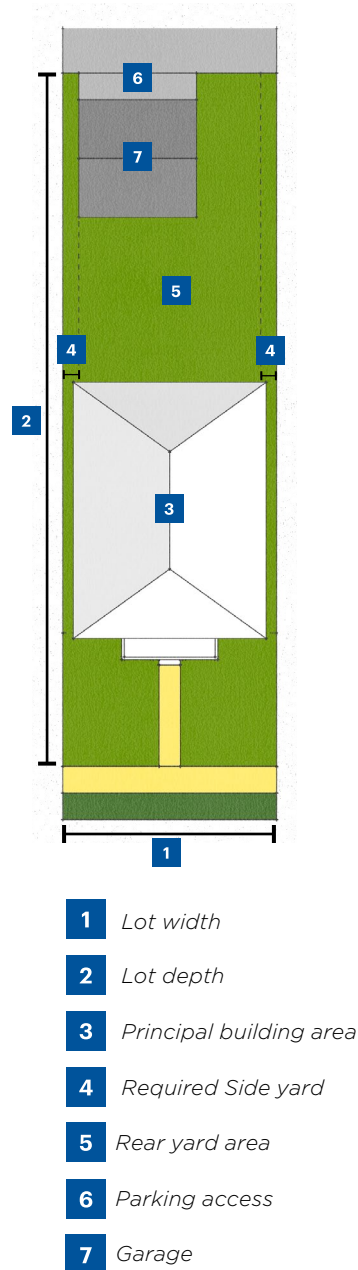
GETTING STARTED

Property Size Standards

City of Columbus ADU standards rely on the size of the principal building and the rear yard to limit the scale of an ADU. These key measurements are shown on the accompanying diagram.

The [Interactive Columbus Zoning Map](#) can help you find much of this information for your property.

1. Type in your address and press enter.
2. Using the **Zoning Report**, look under the **Zoning Information** heading to confirm your zoning district.
3. Measure your lot size using the Measure icon in the top-right corner.



Additional Information to Collect:

Online GIS or property survey:

- Parcel Identification Number (PIN)
- Zoning district
- Lot width and depth
- Lot area
- Existing rear yard area
- Principal building net floor area
- Number of dwelling units in the principal building
- Existing lot coverage (square footage of combined footprints of all existing & proposed structures)
- Parking access (alley or front drive)

Title 33 of Columbus City Codes:

- Number of required parking spaces
- Required side yard
- Number of ADUs allowed

Preliminary calculations:

- Maximum allowed ADU floor area

ZONING STANDARDS

To build an ADU, your property must be located within an eligible zoning district. ADUs are allowed in the following districts:

- All residential districts (R)
- All apartment residential districts (AR)
- All mixed-use zoning districts (MU)

ADUs are not allowed within a Planned Community District (PC) or a Planned Unit Development (PUD).

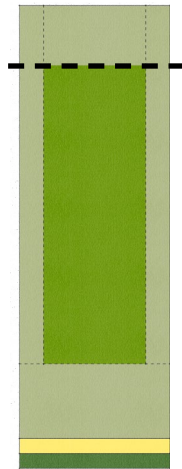
For more information on zoning districts that permit ADUs, as well as the full ADU zoning standards, refer to [Title 33 of the Columbus City Code](#).

City of Columbus ADU Zoning Standards Summary

- **Number of ADUs allowed:** See [Section 3332.25.B](#) to learn how many ADUs you may be allowed to build on your property.
- **Allowed floor area:** ADUs may be 1,000 square feet or 65% of the net floor area of the principal building, whichever is greater. The ADU must be smaller than the principal dwelling.
 - Principal building area x 0.65 = allowed floor area maximum.
 - ADU living area / principal building area = ADU-to-principal building percentage
- **ADU Height:** 25 feet maximum.
- **Required side yard:** Must meet the minimum required side yard of the underlying zoning district. See Section 3332.25 of Title 33 to learn about your required side yard.
- **Lot coverage:** The percentage of the lot occupied by the principal building plus the ADU may not exceed 65%.
 - Principal building footprint + ADU footprint / lot area = lot coverage
- **Percentage of rear yard:** The percentage of the backyard occupied by the ADU (if detached from the principal building) may not exceed 45% for one ADU, or 55% for two ADUs.
 - ADU building area / rear yard area = ADU rear yard coverage
- **Parking:** no additional parking is required for an ADU.

ADU Worksheet		Location	
This worksheet will help you explore how an ADU may fit on your lot and can support conversations with designers, builders, and city staff. It does not replace the site plan materials required for a Preliminary Zoning Review or building permit application. The worksheet includes space below to sketch the layout of your property with an ADU. 		1. Street address:	
		2. PIN number:	
		3. Draw an arrow within the circle that points in the direction of north on your property	
			
		Zoning	
		4. Zoning District:	
		5. ADUs allowed:	quantity
		6. Required side yards:	feet
		Lot	
		7. Lot width:	feet
8. Lot depth:	feet		
9. Lot area (#7x#8):	square feet		
10. Existing rear yard area:	square feet		
Building Information			
11. Principal building footprint:	square feet		
12. Principal building net floor area:	square feet		
13. ADU type:			
14. Allowed ADU floor area:	square feet		
15. ADU floor area:	square feet		
16. ADU footprint:	square feet		
17. ADU living area:	square feet		
18. ADU-to-principal building percentage (#14/#9):	%		
19. Unit count:	quantity		
20. Lot coverage:	%		
21. Percent of rear yard (detached & attached):	%		
Parking			
22. Required parking:	spaces		
23. Access:	Alley / Front Drive		

SITE DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS



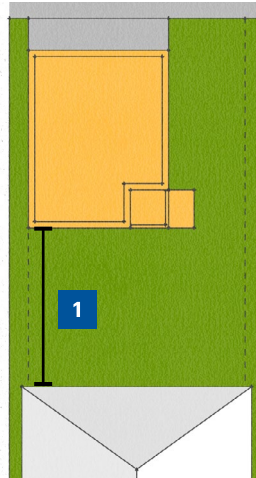
-- Easement line

Land not available for development

Land available for development

Easements

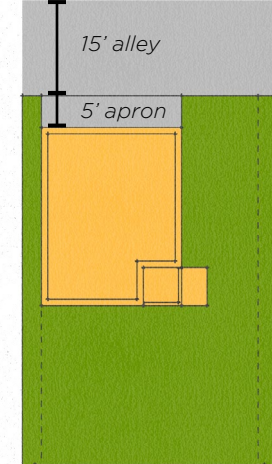
Before planning your ADU project, review a property survey to identify any easements or other legal limits on how your land may be used. Easements are often in place to provide access for utilities or public services and may be found through the Delaware, Fairfield, or Franklin County Recorder's Office.



1 Minimum distance from principal building = 10 feet.

Distance from a Principal Building

Your detached ADU must be at least 10 feet from the principal building under the RCO. If it is placed closer than 10 feet, the ADU must use fire-rated exterior walls and may have limited windows or openings on the sides facing the main structure.



15' wide alley +
5' deep parking apron =
20' car maneuvering area

Rear Setback

The distance of your ADU from the rear property line will depend on alley width, privacy concerns with adjoining properties, or easements. If your ADU provides parking, a minimum of 20 feet clearance for car maneuvering is required.

LOT WIDTH CONSIDERATIONS

The following pages feature lots with common widths and different ways ADUs could be placed upon them.

Using the list below, find the lot width category that best matches your property and then turn to that page to view sample ADU metrics and key considerations that could assist your decision-making process.

- **Extra Small Lots**

Less than 40 feet wide (page 11)

- **Small Lots**

40-49 feet wide (page 13)

- **Medium Lots**

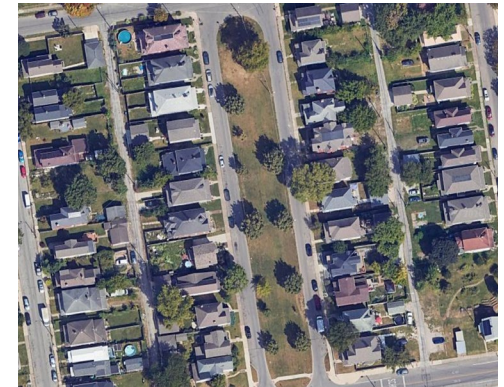
50-69 feet wide (page 15)

- **Large Lots**

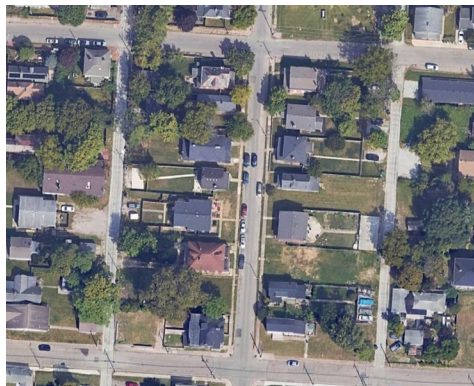
70 feet wide and greater (page 17)



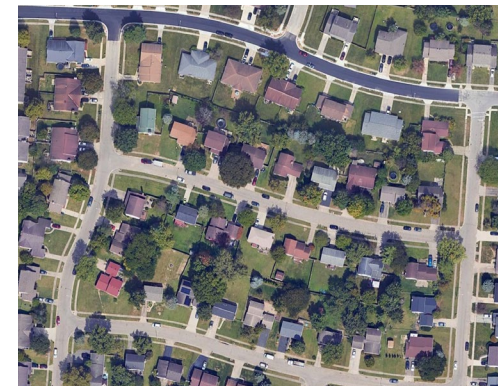
Extra small lots have greater site restraints and require careful planning to meet city requirements.



Small lots offer more flexibility than extra small lots, but still require careful planning.



Medium lots offer more flexibility for adding an ADU to your property than extra small and small lots.



Large lots can accommodate a variety of ADU scenarios with the greatest flexibility for placement.

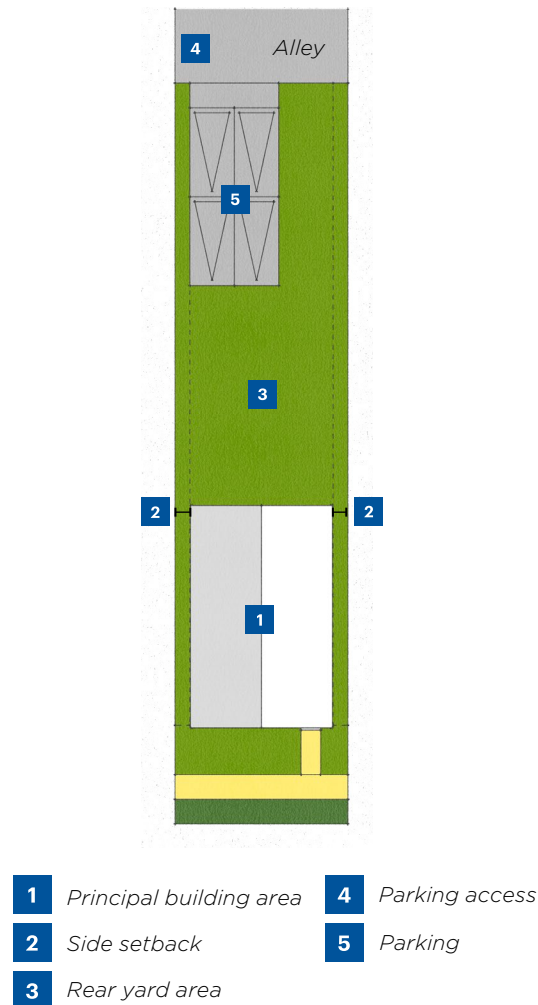
EXTRA SMALL LOT EXAMPLES

The diagram highlights the key information needed to understand your ADU possibilities based on the width of your lot and principal building.

The following page illustrates how the addition of different ADU types could impact your property and provides examples of the zoning data required to successfully complete a preliminary zoning review.

The Columbus City Code provides specific side setback requirements for lots less than 40 feet wide. Review [Section 3332.25](#) to learn more.

Lot conditions before ADU



Zoning Standards (without ADU)

Zoning

Zoning District	R-4
Number of ADUs Allowed	2
Required Side Yard	3 feet

Lot

Width	35 feet
Depth	140 feet
Area	4,900 square feet
Rear Yard	3,010 square feet

Principal Building

Net Floor Area	2,464 square feet
Number of Units	2
Existing Lot Coverage	25%

ADU

Maximum Allowed Floor Area	1,601 square feet
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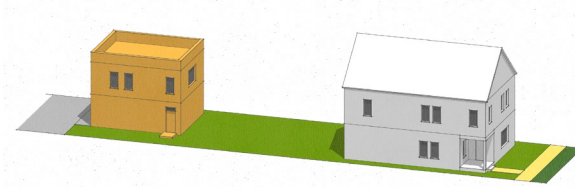
Parking

Parking	4*
Access	Alley

*Parking is not required for an ADU. Required parking is determined by the principal building, but the ADU must be sited to accommodate that parking.

EXTRA SMALL LOT EXAMPLES

Detached ADU

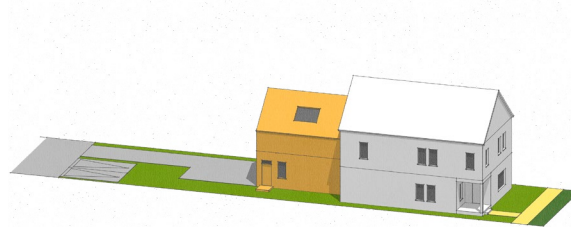


Zoning Standards (with Detached ADU)

Number of ADUs	1
Living Area	616 square feet
ADU-to-Principal Building Percentage	30%
ADU Height	2 stories / 22 feet
ADU Rear Yard Coverage	20%
Total Lot Coverage	38%
Parking	Two spaces below the ADU
Parking Access	Alley

Key Consideration: A single-unit principal building requires two parking spaces, while a two-unit principal building requires four spaces or a BZA variance. If the base zoning district requires more than two parking spaces, a detached ADU may pose site design challenges because of limited lot area.

Attached ADU

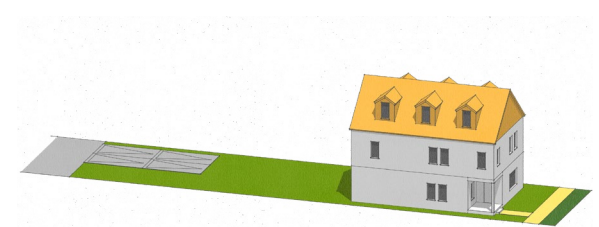


Zoning Standards (with Attached ADU)

Number of ADUs	1
Living Area	616 square feet
ADU-to-Principal Building Percentage	25%
ADU Height	2 stories / 25 feet
ADU Rear Yard Coverage	Not applicable
Total Lot Coverage	35%
Parking	Two surface spaces at rear property line, two spaces below the ADU
Parking Access	Alley

Key Consideration: Attached ADUs will likely have to be placed on the back of the principal building because of the narrow lot width.

Internal ADU



Zoning Standards (with Internal ADU)

Number of ADUs	1
Living Area	1,232 square feet
ADU-to-Principal Building Percentage	50%
ADU Height	Not applicable
ADU Rear Yard Coverage	Not applicable
Total Lot Coverage	38%
Parking	Four stacked surface spaces at the rear of the lot
Parking Access	Alley

Key Consideration: If the internal ADU is on an upper floor, a secondary exterior stair may be required to meet exit path requirements.

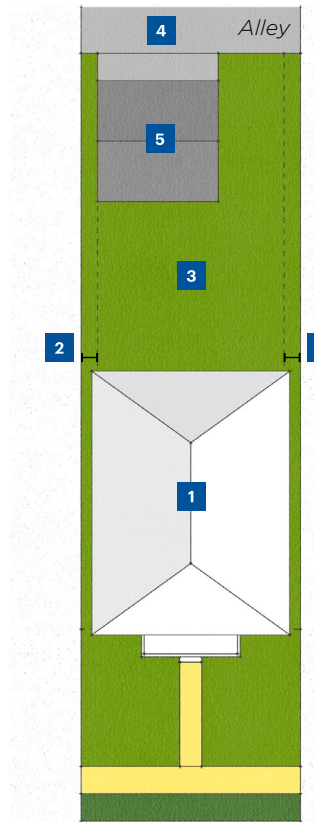
SMALL LOT EXAMPLES

The accompanying diagram highlights key information required to understand your ADU possibilities based on the size of your lot and principal building.

The subsequent page illustrates how the addition of an ADU impacts your property, and provides examples of zoning data required for a successful completion of the preliminary zoning review.

The Columbus City Code provides specific side setback requirements for lots less than 40 feet wide. Review [Section 3332.25](#) to learn more.

Lot conditions before ADU



- 1 Principal building area
- 2 Side setback
- 3 Rear yard area
- 4 Parking access
- 5 Garage

Zoning Standards (without ADU)

Zoning

Zoning District	R-2
Number of ADUs Allowed	1
Required Side Yard	3 feet

Lot

Width	40 feet
Depth	140 feet
Area	5,600 square feet
Rear Yard	2,160 square feet

Principal Building

Net Floor Area	3,128 square feet
Number of Units	2
Existing Lot Coverage	37%

ADU

Maximum Allowed Floor Area	2,033 square feet
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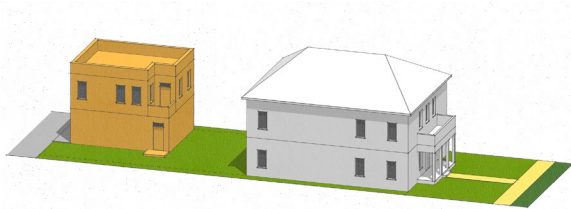
Parking

Parking	2*
Access	Alley

*Parking is not required for an ADU. Required parking is determined by the principal building, but the ADU must be sited to accommodate that parking.

SMALL LOT EXAMPLES

Detached ADU

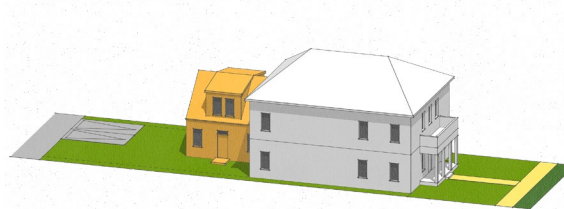


Zoning Standards (with Detached ADU)

Number of ADUs	1
Living Area	748 square feet
ADU-to-Principal Building Percentage	24%
ADU Height	2 stories / 22 feet
ADU Rear Yard Coverage	29%
Total Lot Coverage	39%
Parking	Two spaces located below the ADU
Parking Access	Alley

Key Consideration: If more than two parking spaces are required by the base zoning district, a detached ADU will present site design challenges because of the restricted lot area.

Attached ADU

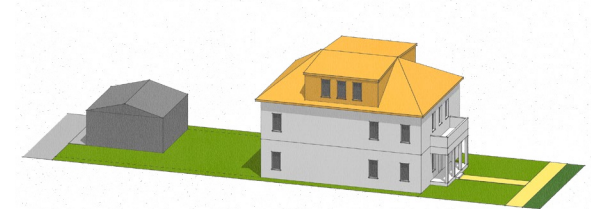


Zoning Standards (with Attached ADU)

Number of ADUs	1
Living Area	726 square feet
ADU-to-Principal Building Percentage	29%
ADU Height	1.5 stories / 20 feet
ADU Rear Yard Coverage	Not applicable
Total Lot Coverage	37%
Parking	Two spaces at rear property line
Parking Access	Alley

Key Consideration: Attached ADUs will likely have to be placed on the back of the principal building because of the narrow lot width.

Internal ADU



Zoning Standards (with Internal ADU)

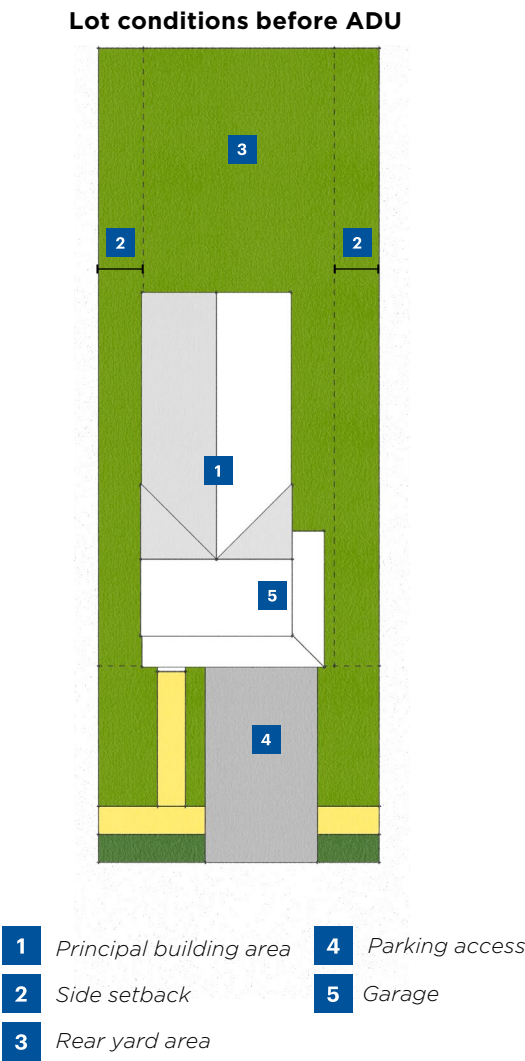
Number of ADUs	1
Living Area	1,564 square feet
ADU-to-Principal Building Percentage	50%
ADU Height	Not applicable
ADU Rear Yard Coverage	Not applicable
Total Lot Coverage	28%
Parking	Two garage parking spaces at the rear of the lot
Parking Access	Alley

Key Consideration: If the internal ADU is on an upper floor, a secondary exterior stair may be required to meet exit path requirements.

MEDIUM LOT EXAMPLES

The accompanying diagram highlights key information required to understand your ADU possibilities based on the size of your lot and principal building.

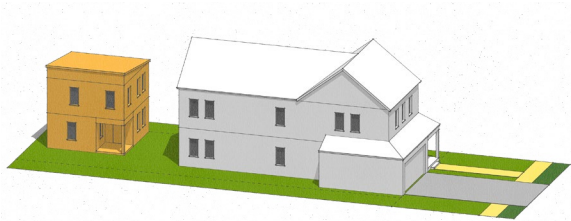
The subsequent page illustrates how the addition of an ADU impacts your property, and provides examples of zoning data required for a successful completion of the preliminary zoning review.



Zoning Standards (without ADU)	
Zoning	
Zoning District	R-3
Number of ADUs Allowed	1
Required Side Yard	5 feet minimum on one side, but 10 feet total between the two sides
Lot	
Width	50 feet
Depth	135 feet
Area	6,750 square feet
Rear Yard	2,200 square feet
Principal Building	
Net Floor Area	2,360 square feet
Number of Units	1
Existing Lot Coverage	21%
ADU	
Maximum Allowed Floor Area	1,534 square feet
Parking	
Parking	2*
Access	Front Drive
*Parking is not required for an ADU. Required parking is determined by the principal building, but the ADU must be sited to accommodate that parking.	

MEDIUM LOT EXAMPLES

Detached ADU



Zoning Standards (with Detached ADU)

Number of ADUs	1
Living Area	968 square feet
ADU-to-Principal Building Percentage	41%
ADU Height	2 stories / 23 feet
ADU Rear Yard Coverage	22%
Total Lot Coverage	29%
Parking	Two garage parking spaces located on the front facade
Parking Access	Front drive

Key Consideration: A detached ADU may be without ground floor parking in scenarios where parking for the principal building is located in a front garage.

Attached ADU

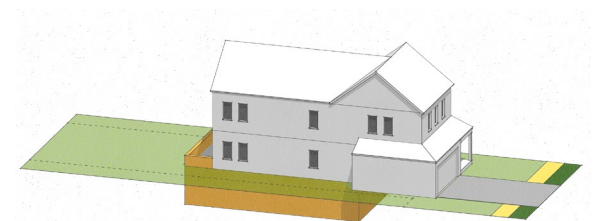


Zoning Standards (with Attached ADU)

Number of ADUs	1
Living Area	968 square feet
ADU-to-Principal Building Percentage	39%
ADU Height	2 stories / 24 feet
ADU Rear Yard Coverage	Not applicable
Total Lot Coverage	27%
Parking	Two garage parking spaces located on the front facade
Parking Access	Front drive

Key Consideration: Side setbacks may limit the possibility of attaching an ADU on the side of a principal building on lots 50 feet wide or less.

Internal ADU



Zoning Standards (with Internal ADU)

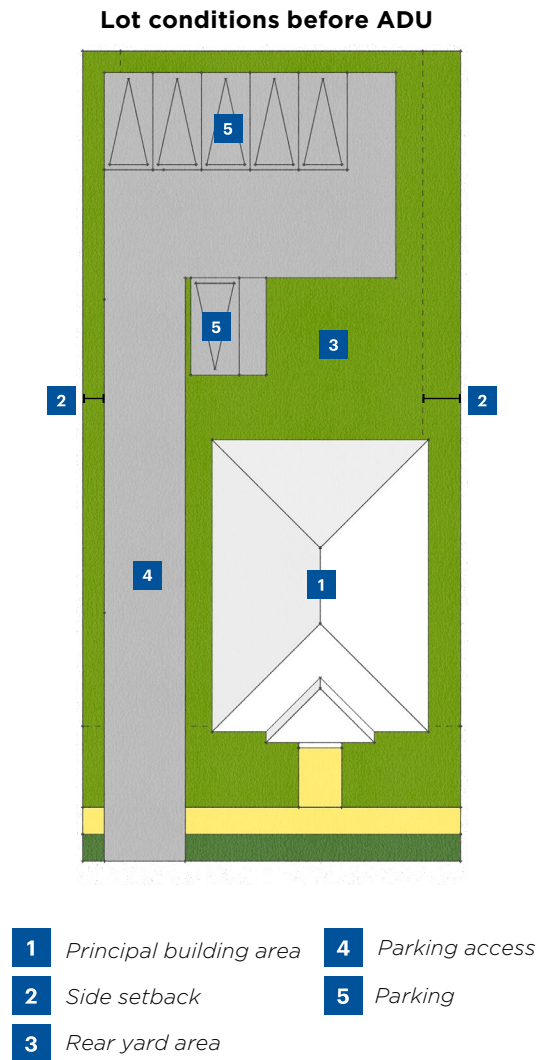
Number of ADUs	1
Living Area	1,352 square feet
ADU-to-Principal Building Percentage	50%
ADU Height	Not applicable
ADU Rear Yard Coverage	Not applicable
Total Lot Coverage	23%
Parking	Two garage parking spaces located on the front facade
Parking Access	Front drive

Key Consideration: Basements may also be converted into internal ADUs if ceiling height and stair width meet the RCO requirements.

LARGE LOT EXAMPLES

The diagram at right highlights key information required to understand your ADU possibilities based on the size of your lot and principal building.

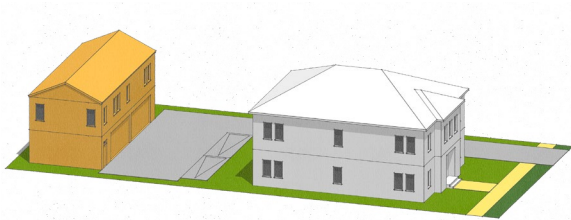
The subsequent page illustrates how the addition of an ADU impacts your property, and provides examples of zoning data required for a successful completion of the preliminary zoning review.



Zoning Standards (without ADU)	
Zoning	
Zoning District	ARLD
Number of ADUs Allowed	1
Required Side Yard	5 feet minimum on one side, but 14 feet total between the two sides
Lot	
Width	70 feet
Depth	140 feet
Area	9,800 square feet
Rear Yard	5,110 square feet
Principal Building	
Net Floor Area	3,952 square feet
Number of Units	4
Existing Lot Coverage	20%
ADU	
Maximum Allowed Floor Area	2,568 square feet
Parking	
Parking	6*
Access	Front Drive
*Parking is not required for an ADU. Required parking is determined by the principal building, but the ADU must be sited to accommodate that parking.	

LARGE LOT EXAMPLES

Detached ADU

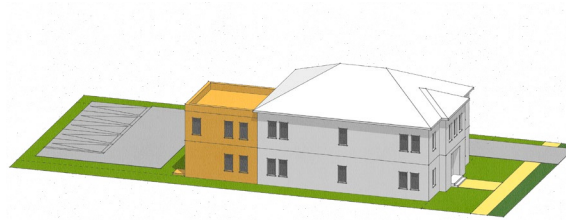


Zoning Standards (with Detached ADU)

Number of ADUs	1
Living Area	1,100 square feet
ADU-to-Principal Building Percentage	28%
ADU Height	2 stories / 22 feet
ADU Rear Yard Coverage	22%
Total Lot Coverage	31%
Parking	Four garage parking spaces and two surface parking spaces
Parking Access	Front drive

Key Consideration: If the principal dwelling contains multiple units, the detached ADU may have to contain parking to meet the parking requirements.

Attached ADU

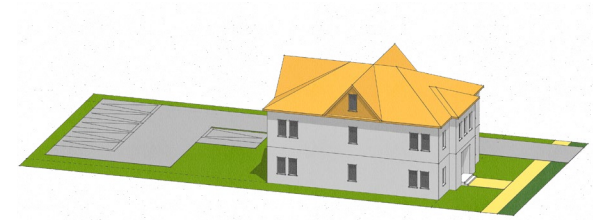


Zoning Standards (with Attached ADU)

Number of ADUs	1
Living Area	968 square feet
ADU-to-Principal Building Percentage	39%
ADU Height	2 stories / 22 feet
ADU Rear Yard Coverage	Not applicable
Total Lot Coverage	25%
Parking	Six surface parking spaces
Parking Access	Front drive

Key Consideration: An attached ADU may work on the back or side of the principal building on large lots, depending on the presence of a front drive and side yard requirements.

Internal ADU



Zoning Standards (with Internal ADU)

Number of ADUs	1
Living Area	1,254 square feet
ADU-to-Principal Building Percentage	32%
ADU Height	Not applicable
ADU Rear Yard Coverage	Not applicable
Total Lot Coverage	20%
Parking	Six surface parking spaces
Parking Access	Front drive

Key Consideration: An attic ADU may work well in buildings containing multiple dwelling units if the stairs meet OBC width requirements.

PRELIMINARY ZONING REVIEW

The City of Columbus recommends a preliminary zoning review before proceeding with your ADU project to determine whether a Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) variance is required.

- Visit the [Building and Zoning Services Documents and Forms](#) homepage to access the application
- You can complete the form online or print and complete by hand.
- The application fee is \$200
- City staff typically complete reviews within one week.

Given the technical requirements, it may be helpful to consult an architect or contractor at this stage.

Preliminary zoning review requirements:

- Completed application
- Detailed site plan oriented north on an 8.5"x11" or 11"x17" sheet of paper.
- Data table containing the following information:
 - Parcel number & street address
 - Lot square footage
 - Living area of proposed ADU
 - Number of units in the principal building & number of ADUs
 - Number of stories & overall building height
 - Overall lot coverage
 - ADU rear yard coverage
 - ADU-to-principal building percentage
 - Number of required parking spaces
 - Number of provided parking spaces
- Side yard requirements
- Key dimensions of property, parking area, and alley.
- Labeled surface types (asphalt, gravel, etc.)
- Tree requirements

WORKING WITH A CONTRACTOR

A licensed home improvement contractor can help translate your ADU plans into a finished project while coordinating labor, materials, scheduling, and construction sequencing. These contractors are particularly helpful when the work involves multiple trades or significant upgrades to an existing structure.

In some cases, a home improvement contractor may be able to produce the necessary drawings for you to apply for a building permit. If so, working with an architect will not be required.

A local home improvement contractor may also be familiar with regional building practices, weather-related construction timing, and common conditions found in older Columbus homes.

Reasons to work with a local contractor:

- Foundation work, framing, roofing, or structural modifications
- Plumbing, sewer, electrical, or HVAC installation and upgrades
- Garage or basement conversions requiring substantial reconstruction
- Utility connections or service capacity improvements
- Site work such as grading, drainage, driveways, or access paths
- Managing subcontractors and inspections
- Material ordering, lead times, and cost control
- Construction in tight urban lots or established neighborhoods

To find contractors in the Columbus area consider the following resource:

- [Columbus Citizens Access Portal - Licensed & Registered Contractors Search](#)

WORKING WITH AN ARCHITECT

Some ADU projects are straightforward, while others involve site constraints, design complexity, or utility and structural upgrades that benefit from professional expertise. While some property owners manage portions of a project on their own, working with experienced local professionals can save time, reduce uncertainty, and help avoid costly mistakes. An architect can help turn your ideas into a buildable plan that fits your property, budget, and long-term goals, particularly for projects with complex design issues, unusual site conditions, or small and constrained footprints. A local architect may also bring familiarity with Columbus neighborhoods, common lot patterns, climate considerations, and local review processes.

You may want to consult a local architect if your project includes:

- A detached ADU on a small, narrow, sloped, or irregular lot
- Converting a garage, basement, or attic into a code-compliant living space
- Preserving privacy between the ADU and neighboring homes
- Matching the character and scale of your existing home
- Managing natural light, access, parking, or outdoor space constraints
- Designing for aging in place or long-term accessibility
- Improving energy efficiency or sustainability features
- Navigating permitting drawings and construction documentation

To find architects in the Columbus area consider the following resources:

- [American Institute of Architects Ohio Firm Directory](#)
- [State of Ohio eLicense Professional Licensure](#)

BUILDING CODE CONSIDERATIONS

Residential Code of Ohio (RCO)

ADUs are subject to the requirements of the RCO. These requirements usually apply to ADUs in the following situations:

- Detached ADUs located behind single-unit houses or apartment buildings
- Attached ADUs associated with one-, two-, or three-unit dwellings
- Internal ADUs within single-unit or two-unit dwellings
- An ADU located over a garage will likely need fire separation

ORC Requirements Overview



Reduced fire-resistance requirements



Fire sprinkler systems may be required in certain situations



Single primary means of egress is permitted



ADA accessibility requirements may apply

Ohio Building Code (OBC)

Select ADU scenarios may trigger the requirements of the OBC. The following ADU scenarios using the OBC may apply:

- An ADU attached to a building containing four or more units.
- An ADU internal to a building containing four or more units.

OBC Requirements Overview



Increased fire-resistance requirements for stairs & walls



Fire sprinkler systems are required in most situations



Multiple means of egress and wider corridors are required



ADA accessibility requirements do apply

Why does it matter?

The RCO and OBC set forth life safety requirements for residential buildings.

The OBC and City of Columbus codes may have additional life safety requirements that can increase the complexity and cost of your ADU project. Some residential developers may be less familiar with these requirements.

DEVELOPMENT FEES & COSTS

When planning your ADU, expect various costs throughout your decision making process.

- **Soft costs** are the indirect, non-construction expenses required to plan, design, finance, and manage a building project. Some soft costs you will incur include city fees and the design of your ADU.
- **Hard costs** are the direct construction expenses associated with physically building your project. Hard costs include materials, site work, labor, and more.

Factors that can impact overall development cost:

- Site obstacles (large or mature trees, slopes) can require removal, grading, repair of infrastructure, or extra structural work, increasing labor and equipment costs.
- Utility issues (distance to lines, damaged sewer) may involve trenching, repairs, or system upgrades that add significant expense.
- Existing foundation condition (garage conversions) may require reinforcement or full replacement to meet code and safely support the converted space.
- Limited site access (tight lots, no alley access) can make construction and material delivery more difficult and expensive.

City Fees:

Learn about City fees and other costs associated with building an ADU by visiting the [Building and Zoning Services Webpage](#) and [City of Columbus Utility Rates, Fees, and Connection Charges](#) webpage.

Financing strategies:

Financing your ADU will be a core concern to get your project off the ground. Organizations like [Affordable Housing Alliance of Central Ohio - CONVERGENCE Columbus](#) have resources that can help you learn what financing opportunities are available to you.

BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATION

Once your ADU design and construction drawings are complete, your home improvement contractor must apply for a building permit before construction begins. This process confirms that the project meets safety standards, zoning requirements, and building codes, and requires coordination among you, your design team, and the City.

ADU building permits are reviewed by the City of Columbus Department of Building and Zoning Services. Visit the [BZS Documents and Forms](#) homepage to access the building permit affidavit form and application.

The construction of your ADU must begin within one year of approval or your building permit will expire. Once construction has begun, inactivity may not exceed six months.

What to expect when applying for a building permit:

1. Submit your building permit application online through the [City's Citizen Access Portal](#). A building permit application requires:
 - Permit application
 - Construction plans
 - Site plan
 - Contractor information
 - Application forms & fees
2. City staff will review your application for:
 - Zoning compliance (setbacks, height, lot coverage)
 - Building code compliance (structure, safety, egress)
 - Utility connections and service capacity
3. It is common to receive comments requiring clarification or revisions. You will need to respond and resubmit.
4. Once all comments are addressed and approvals are granted, the permit is issued and construction may begin.

PERMIT APPLICATION INSIGHTS

A successful permit process depends on coordination between the following:

Property Owner

- Initiates the project and hires professionals (if needed),
- Ensures all required information is submitted,
- Pays application and permit fees,
- Makes final decisions on design and scope.

Home Improvement Contractor

- Provides input on constructibility and cost,
- Assist with permit application and documentation,
- Must be registered with the City before permit issuance,
- Coordinates inspections during construction.

Architect (if involved)

- Prepares construction drawings and site plans,
- Ensures plans meet zoning and building code requirements,
- Responds to city review comments and revises plans,
- Coordinates design changes with the owner.

City of Columbus Department of Building and Zoning Services,

- Reviews applications for compliance,
- Issues comments and certificate of plan approval,
- Grants permits once requirements are met.
- Conducts inspections to ensure safe and compliant construction.

Additional Permits

- In most cases, additional permits for electrical, mechanical, plumbing, and utilities will be required.

Common application issues include:

- Incomplete or unclear construction drawings,
- Failure to comply with zoning requirements,
- Inadequate sewer, water, or electrical capacity,
- Overlooking zoning overlays or historic district requirements,
- Design changes after permit approval.

CONSTRUCTION EXPECTATIONS

Once your permit has been issued, construction of your ADU can begin. This phase typically involves several months of coordinated work, inspections, and utility connections.

Most ADU construction projects move through these stages:

1. Pre-construction: Temporary fencing, access planning, material staging, and protection of the existing home
2. Site Work and Foundation: Excavation, grading, concrete footings, slab, crawlspace, or basement work
3. Framing: Walls, roof framing, windows, doors, siding, and weatherproofing
4. Utility Installation: Plumbing lines, electrical wiring, HVAC systems, sewer and water connections
5. Interior Build-Out: Insulation, drywall, cabinets, flooring, fixtures, painting, appliances
6. Final Work: Exterior grading, walkways, landscaping restoration, cleanup, punch-list items

Well-planned projects can encounter challenges. Common issues include:

- Weather delays
- Hidden existing conditions
- Unknown utility lines
- Poor soil conditions
- Deteriorated garages or foundations
- Outdated electrical service
- Material lead times
- Windows, doors, HVAC equipment, cabinets, and electrical gear can sometimes delay progress
- Owner-requested changes after construction begins often increase cost and extend schedule
- Inspection delays

KEY TERMS

Building Coverage The portion of a lot or property that is occupied by buildings or structures, usually expressed as a percentage, but does not include pavement or walkways.

Building Footprint The width and depth dimensions of a building including porches, stoops, or wings.

Building Height The vertical distance measured in a straight line from the finished grade or, the highest of, the finished grade line to the:

- Highest point of a flat roof.
- Midpoint between the lowest edge of the highest eaves and the highest ridge of a pitched roof.
- Midpoint of a sloped roof.

Where a building is on a corner lot and there is more than one grade level the measurements shall be taken through the center of the

facade on the street having the lowest elevation.

Mechanical systems and equipment for heating, ventilating, and air conditioning or other utility hardware on the roof of a building are not included in the overall building height.

Building line (setback) Means a clearance line limiting the approach to a lot line of a building exclusive of open porches, steps, terraces, walkways. Also called setback line.

Easement A legal limitation on how you can use some or all of your land. Typically, utility companies will bury electrical wires or sewer mains underground. Zoning does not administer or enforce easements.

Egress A continuous and unobstructed path of travel from one point within a building to a public way (outside).

Lot A parcel of land designed to be occupied by a dwelling or multiple dwelling units and the accessory buildings.

Lot Coverage The portion of a property's total area that is covered or occupied by buildings, structures, or any other constructed elements, and including porches, sheds, and steps.

Net Floor Area The total horizontal enclosed area of all the floors below the roof and within the outer surface of the walls of a building or structure, mezzanines, interior balconies, and upper stories or levels in a multistory building unless otherwise stipulated.

Survey Mapping the boundary, topographic, and/or utility features of a site completed by a professional surveyor.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Where do I submit a permit online?

Building Permits can be submitted online via the [City of Columbus Citizen's Access Portal](#).

Who can I contact with questions about submitting a building permit online?

Contact Permit Intake at:
BZS-Intake@columbus.gov

Who can I contact with questions about plan sheet submittal requirements for a building permit?

Contact Building Plan Review at:
buildingplanreviewinfo@columbus.gov

Who can I contact for building code questions?

Contact Building Plan Review at:
buildingplanreviewinfo@columbus.gov

Who can I contact for zoning code questions?

Contact Zoning at:
zoninginfo@columbus.gov

How long does it take to get a building permit approved?

A building permit typically takes seven business days on average to get approved.

What is the website for online Building & Zoning Services documents?

Visit the [Building and Zoning Services Documents and Forms](#) homepage to access all relevant documents and forms.

Where can I find a list of general contractors that are registered with the city?

You can search for a registered general contractor using the [online search tool](#).

- Click under License Type for a list of contractors
- Search “General Contractor”

Where can I find the fee list?

Visit the [Building and Zoning Services Documents and Forms](#) homepage to access the list of associated fees.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Does my permit include inspections?

Our permits are issued with a set number of inspection trips. Each time an inspector visits the site, regardless of inspection type or result, a trip is taken. Once all trips are used, additional trip(s) need to be purchased before an inspection is scheduled.

How are inspections scheduled?

Inspections for the next day of business, or an upcoming business day of your choice, can be scheduled until midnight through our Citizen Access Portal or automated phone system.

- Online:
 - Visit our [Citizen's Access Portal](#)
 - Under the building section, click the Schedule an Inspection Link
 - This will redirect you to a search page. If you do not know the permit number, you can enter the address into the street number and street name fields
 - Click the search button at the bottom of the page
 - On the page that appears, click the red Schedule an Inspection button

- Follow the steps to schedule the inspection for the business day of your choice
- By phone: (614) 645-8235

What mechanical or trade permits will be required?

The plans you submit will include all structural and trade (mechanical, electric, and plumbing) work, but the trade permits will not be included when the building permit is issued. Instead, appropriately registered contractors with the City of Columbus will need to pull the trade permits after issuance of the building permit.

How do I apply for a mechanical or trade permit?

Trade contractors (mechanical, electrical, plumbing) are required to pull their own permits and identify all sub-contractors. Permits can be pulled through our Citizen Access Portal or in our office.

What happens if my building plans are not approved?

You will need to respond to the Correction Letter received and make corrections accordingly by submitting revised plans.