

ADU Glossary

Visit Mother Lode ADU online at motherlodeadu.org and see your County's ADU Guidebook at motherlodeadu.org/guidebook for a step-by-step guide to building your ADU, plus tools and exercises to help you through the ADU process.



MOTHER LODE ADU

Important ADU Vocabulary

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS (ADUS) come in many shapes and sizes but are always a self-contained home that is usually smaller than the main home and legally part of the same property. They must have a kitchen, bathroom, and place to sleep, and can range from 150 square foot studios to more than 1,000 square foot homes with multiple bedrooms.

Junior ADUs (JADUs) are a smaller type of conversion ADU up to 500 square feet within a home that have their own entryway. Unlike ADUs, they have the option to share a bathroom with the main home (if it's accessible from the JADU) and include just an efficiency kitchen (sink, smaller appliances, and counter). Another big difference is the owner must live in either the main home or the JADU, even if the property has an ADU too. Construction costs for JADUs are typically much lower.

Construction Types

Site-Built/Traditional means an ADU is built from scratch on your property.

Partially-fabricated (panelized, framing-kits) means some or parts of the ADU are built off site at a factory, and construction follows a traditional site-built pattern.

Prefabricated (modular, manufactured, factory-built) means the ADU is built and inspected for building code off site at a factory, then delivered and placed on your property by a crane or tow.

ADU Types



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 main home



CONVERSION Converted existing space in the main home or on the property (bedroom, basement, detached garage or workshop)



JADU A type of conversion up to 500 square feet within the main home (existing or proposed)



MULTI-FAMILY Any of the above (except JADU) that is part of a multi-family building, like a duplex, triplex or apartment building (existing or proposed)



NOT AN ADU RVs, tiny homes on wheels, yurts, storage structures, and residences built as guest quarters or short-term rentals are usually not considered ADUs

Planning Terms

Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) Every lot in California is assigned a unique APN to identify your property.

Building Code Standards ensuring buildings are built safely, established by the State and often amended by cities. Building codes include sections like plumbing, electrical, etc.

Deed Restrictions Conditions or rules that are added to a deed for a house.

Fire-Resistant/Fire-Rated Walls And Floors Walls and floors designed to restrict the spread of a fire, typically required for walls and floors shared between the main house and the ADU.

Lot Coverage The area of a property that is allowed to have buildings on it, generally expressed as a percentage of the total lot. Zoning code will specify whether there is a maximum lot coverage for your lot.

Lot Size Total square footage of the property

Mixed-Use Zoning allows multiple uses on a property, such as commercial on the first floor of a building and residential above.

Owner Occupancy A requirement that homeowners live on the property.

Setbacks The minimum distance a building must be located from property lines. A four-foot side setback means buildings must be at least four feet from the side property line.

Single-Family / Multifamily Single-family zoning refers to one home on a property. Multifamily zoning refers to more than one home located on a property (duplex, triplex, apartment building).

Zoning/Zoning Code Standards saying what can be built on a site, including rules about building height and others. Each lot is assigned to a zone. Your property may also be in a "special zone" or "overlay zone" that sets extra rules – like a Historic District, a Fire Hazard Area, Park Area, or other special planning zone.

Permits

Building Permit An official document confirming your project meets local code. This permit allows you to start construction.

Plan Review/Plan Check Multiple County departments reviewing your plans for code compliance and flagging any safety or other issues.

Public Hearings A public meeting where elected officials and the public can comment on a proposed project; uncommon for ADUs.

Soil Inspections A report by a county inspector or a private professional demonstrating that the soil on your property meets safety requirements for new construction.

Water/Septic Inspection and/or Calculations A report by a county inspector or a private professional demonstrating that the water and/or septic system on your property meets capacity and safety requirements for adding an additional residential unit.

Design & Construction

Architect A design professional licensed by the state. Architects are trained in design and construction management.

Conceptual/Schematic Drawings Initial drawings of your site and proposed structure, including floorplan and other structures and outside features (e.g., trees).

Construction Drawings Contain all the details needed for construction, in order to get a bid from a contractor or to start building.

Contractor A firm licensed by the state who specializes in construction and also manages the entire construction process.

Design/Build A company that designs your ADU, manages the process, and builds it. Most often they are run by a licensed contractor who has designers or architects and builders on staff.

Designer A design professional that either has architectural training but is not licensed, is self-taught, or falls somewhere in between.

Drafter Someone who does architectural drawings.

Elevation Drawing A drawing that shows a straight-on view, usually of an exterior wall.

Inspections A visit from trained professionals to ensure your structure is being built according to your permit application.

Refined Drawings Refined drawings of your site and proposed structure, including doors, windows, fixtures, and other detailed features.

Septic System and Well Professionals A company that maintains, installs, repairs, or expands the capacity of septic tanks, sewer lines, drains, and water wells.

Survey A professional examination/drawing of your property, including boundaries.

Financing & Fees

Hard Costs The direct costs of construction.

Soft Costs Non-construction costs: design services, permitting fees, and others.

Departmental Fees includes permits and reviews like building permit, plan check, and other department reviews, and covers the costs of processing and inspections. Fees can vary based on project and location, and are often a few thousand dollars, but can be more.

Deed Restriction Filing Fees cover County recording of your deed restriction.

Impact Fees help pay for infrastructure and services in your community and are often the largest fees charged for ADUs. They cannot be charged for ADUs under 750 square feet.

Fire District Fees support fire districts and cover the cost of maintaining fire safety. These fees may be paid directly to the fire District or to the County depending on where your property is located.

School District Fees support local schools through a per square foot development fee. Under state law, fees cannot be charged for ADUs under 500 square feet.

Utility Fees vary by the size and location of your ADU. Under state law, existing buildings do not require water fees, while new buildings can only be charged fees in proportion to the size of the ADU.