



DC Accessory Dwelling Unit | Case Study

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I'm a zoning specialist at Code Studio



I'm a DC homeowner



...and I built a backyard ADU!



What's an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)?

- **A secondary living unit** with a separate entrance/exit on a 'single family' zoned parcel
- ADU **placement, size, occupancy, parking requirements, etc. vary across jurisdictions**, and usually exclude 'tiny homes' on wheels
- **Typical ADU Locations:**
 - Within an existing single family house (i.e. **converted basement**)
 - Within or above an existing secondary structure (i.e. **converted garage**)
 - Within a new detached structure (i.e. **backyard apartment/ cottage**)

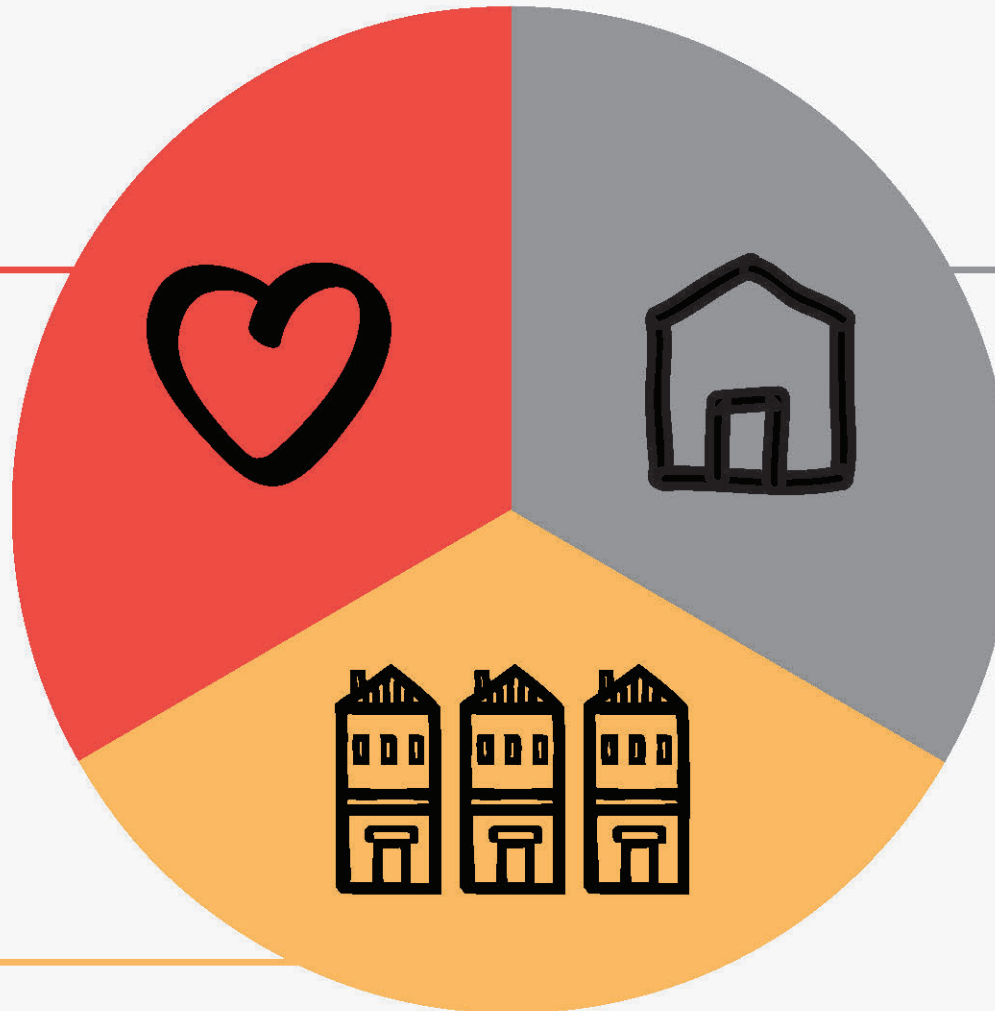


Why did I build an ADU?

I wanted my
retired dad
close by

I wanted to
build equity
in my home

I wanted to
combat DC's
housing crisis



Was I inspired by my profession? **Definitely!**
...and DC's by-right ADU zoning? **Of course!**

But also...



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Accessory Dwelling Units



Living Big In A Tiny House

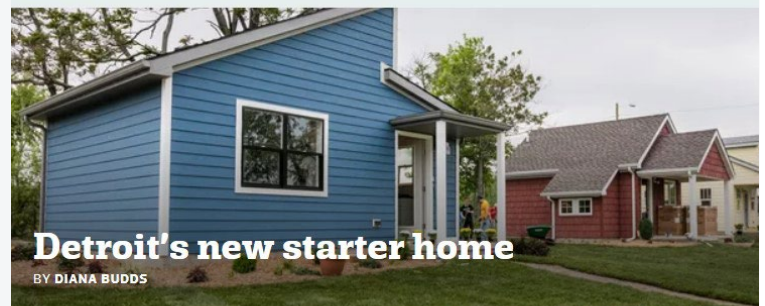


3.49M subscribers



Tiny Town, USA

Curbed visits four cities to uncover why the next big thing in American homes is small



PROPERTY LINES

Why tiny ADUs may be a big answer to the urban housing crisis

10

How accessory dwelling units, set to expand on the West Coast, present a small but mighty solution to affordability

By **Patrick Sisson** | Jan 16, 2018, 12:34pm EST

So my family was on board with this plan?



Dennis (my dad)

Jack (my husband)

Now “DC Department of Buildings”
Then I made visits to ~~DCRA~~... (2018)



[illegible]

Made **MORE** visits to DOB...



Luckily, after

- 5 months of reviews
- 3 permit revision rounds
- Adding fire sprinklers
- Providing a soil erosion plan
- Additional permits from 2 other agencies
- Lots of permit fees

...I got my permit! (May 2019)



Before Construction



Construction (May 2019 - December 2019)



Construction (May 2019 - December 2019)



Construction (May 2019 - December 2019)



Construction (May 2019 - December 2019)



Construction (May 2019 - December 2019)



Complete interior



Complete exterior



My takeaways/insights

01. ADUs work best in **competitive/expensive** single family real estate markets

02. ADUs are well suited for **young adults, singles, retirees, and multi-generational living** arrangements

Limited ADU experience in the DC region (*at that time*)

03. Many building permit reviewers had **never reviewed an ADU application before**

04. Most local contractors had **never built a detached new construction ADU before**

Ongoing Hurdles...



Financing

- Can easily become cost prohibitive, especially considering utility connections, professional fees, etc.



Permitting

- The process can easily become unpredictable and time consuming, especially for homeowners without building experience

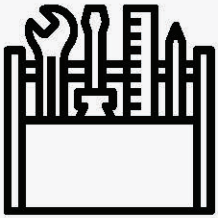


Unclear Marketing

- What's an ADU? Is it just a tiny house?
- They can also be in basements?
- Why can't I buy one like I would buy a car or RV?
- What's the difference between an ADU and a guest house?
- Can I Airbnb an ADU?

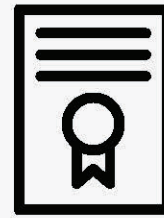
Conclusions for Virginia Jurisdictions

Definitely:



01 | **Allow by-right ADUs**

- While not a fix-all solution, ADUs are one of many tools in the affordable housing toolkit



02 | **Simplify permitting**

- ADUs shouldn't be held to the same permitting standards as traditional single family houses

Consider:



03 | **Pre-approved designs**

- Open-sourced, simple, community-approved plans to provide more predictability to applicants



04 | **Developer-built ADUs**

- Allow developers to build by-right ADUs within new development projects and as part of house flips

Zoning Considerations...



The California Approach *(Statewide Legislation)*

- Moves the yes/no debate to the state-level
- Facilitates more productive “form” discussions locally
- Opportunities for more equitable applications



The Charlottesville Approach *(Moving away from ADUs as “accessory”)*

- An ADU is just another unit (allowed by-right)
- Rules mostly regulates “form”