

The FAQs of Accessory Dwelling Units



The following information reflects the most recent proposal informed by the Planning Board's recommendations. Click to view the [Planning Board recommendations](#).

What is an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)?

An ADU is a smaller, independent home located on the same property as a single-family detached, attached, and semi-detached and dwelling. An ADU provides complete, independent living facilities for at least one person which includes at a minimum: a bathroom, a kitchen, and sleeping area.

How many ADU's can I have on my property?

A max of 1 ADU is permitted per lot.

If I have a two-family dwelling, does this mean I can construct 2 ADUs on my property?

ADU's are prohibited on developed lots with two-family dwellings.

What is the max size allowed for an ADU?

The maximum allowable size is calculated from the exterior footprint of the principal dwelling, and the accessory unit must not exceed 75% of that footprint.

Is the property owner required to live on site?

Yes. The Property Owner must reside either within the principal dwelling or within the ADU.

If I want an ADU but I live in the New Town district, is this possible?

Yes. The ADU would be subject to setbacks/lot coverage outlined in the Final Development Plan (FDP).

How will ADU's impact Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO)?

ADU's are not calculated as part of APFO because ADU's do not trigger the need for a site or subdivision plan which is when APFO is applied.

What does being exempt from APFO mean?

That it is not factored in/considered for road tests, schools, housing allocations, etc. Currently, our Accessory Apartments are also exempt from these calculations.

Does the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) require a permit to have an ADU?

Yes. A permit issued via DPZ will be required to have an ADU on your property.

Can I have more than 2 bedrooms in my ADU?

No. The proposed legislation retains a maximum number of 2 bedrooms within ADUs.

Are ADU's subject to Columbia's Preliminary Development Plan (PDP) density calculations?

No. The State legislation requires that ADU's not be restricted by local density requirements.

If I want a detached ADU but my residence is on well and septic, how can I connect the system?

You will need to work with the Health Department to see where the ADU can be located on the site and whether the existing system can handle the addition.

Can my HOA prohibit me from constructing an ADU on my property?

No. Under the new Maryland Law, HOA's may not prohibit an ADU.

What is the max number of people who can live in an ADU?

Under current county code, dwellings can host a max of 8 unrelated or 2 or more related persons occupying the dwelling— ADUs will be treated the same.

What can I use an ADU for? Can I rent it out to non-family members?

An ADU can be used for family members, a home office/gym, and rental income. ADU's can only be rented out to non-family member under a valid rental housing licenses issued by Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits (DILP).

Where can I have an ADU on my property? Does it need to be connected / attached to my house?

ADUs can be detached, attached or within a principal dwelling. A detached ADU would need to follow accessory structure side and rear setbacks for the zoning district, as well as height requirements. On a lot less than 10 acres, a detached ADU may only be located in front of the principal structure if it is within a detached structure that existed before March 31, 2026.

Can an ADU have a separate kitchen?

Yes. An ADU must have its own separate kitchen from the principal dwelling to receive a permit from DPZ.

Can I use my ADU to run my business?

Commercial uses are not permitted within ADUs.

When building an ADU, what fees have to be paid?

DPZ fees will vary depending on the scope of the project. It is best to consult with DPZ before initiating the project to understand the plan review process. Additionally, a separate construction fee is assessed by DILP with the building permit issuance.

Can I use my ADU as a short-term rental (i.e. Airbnb, Vrbo, etc.)?

No. This legislation retains the requirement that prohibits ADUs from being used as short-term rentals.

Still have questions about ADU's? We're here to help! Reach out to the Zoning Division at zoning@howardcountymd.gov or call 410-313-2350 for more information.