

Building an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) or Junior ADU (JADU) in East Palo Alto



Invest in your family and community and build an ADU

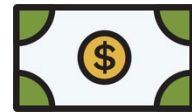
From space for your loved ones to building your retirement through renting, an ADU will grow with you and your family over time.



HOUSING FAMILY like adult children, parents, or loved ones with special needs.



A HOME AS YOU AGE for caregivers or aging adults who want to downsize.



RENTAL INCOME for retirement, savings, or a rainy day.



PROPERTY VALUE and future sales price increase with a new ADU.



SAFETY and an extra set of eyes on the property day-to-day or when you're away.



HOUSING COMMUNITY from workers to young families looking for a local home.



City of East Palo Alto

Planning & Housing Divisions | 1960 Tate Street, East Palo Alto, CA 94303

Phone: 650-853-3189 | Fax: 650-853-3179

E-mail: planning@cityofepa.org | housing@cityofepa.org | Website: www.cityofepa.org/planning

What is an Accessory Dwelling Unit?

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) come in many shapes and sizes but are always a self-contained home that is legally part of the same property.

BOTH JADUs AND ADUs must have their own entryway and be at least 150 square feet in size. Both must be rented for 30 days or more—no short-term rentals are allowed.

ADUs can be attached or detached and may be converted from existing structures and spaces or brand new construction. ADUs can be up to 1,000 square feet and must have their own bathroom and a full kitchen. Shared walls and floors must be rated for 1-hour fire resistance.

JUNIOR ADUs (JADUs) are a type of conversion no more than 500 square feet, located within the existing footprint of a home (including attached garage). JADUs can share a bathroom with the main home and need at least a sink, a counter, and smaller appliances. The owner must live in the main home or the JADU.

ADU Types



DETACHED

A new freestanding structure separate from the main home (site-built or prefab/manufactured)



ATTACHED

A new structure (may include converted space) sharing at least one wall with main home



MULTI-FAMILY

A detached, attached, or conversion ADU on a multi-family property (duplex, triplex, apartment building)



CONVERSION

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



JADU

A smaller conversion ADU within the main home or attached garage, up to 500 square feet with an efficiency or full kitchen



WHAT'S NOT AN ADU?

RVs, tiny homes on wheels, yurts, and storage structures are NOT considered accessory dwelling units.

JADUs and internal conversions usually cost less to build.

Construction Types



SITE-BUILT

Traditional construction, highly customizable and built on-site



PREFAB/MODULAR

Partially or mostly built in a factory, then shipped to your property and assembled or placed on a foundation

The ADU Process

We are here to help you through your ADU building process. Visit our [website](#) and contact the Planning Department at planning@cityofepa.org, or talk with staff in person at 1960 Tate Street, Mon/Tues/Thurs, 9am – 12pm and 1 – 4pm or Wed/Fri with a virtual appointment. Learn more about each step in the process on the following pages.



1 GET STARTED 1-3 MONTHS

- **Think about what you want** and your goals and concerns.
- **Look for inspiration** on the [SMC ADU Resource Center](#) and view floorplans and photos.
- **Make an informal sketch** of your property using our [exercises](#) to help.
- **Estimate costs** and possible rental income using our [ADU Calculator](#).



2 LEARN THE RULES 1-3 MONTHS

- **Learn about your property** and any restrictions with the [Symbium Build](#) tool.
- **Learn the rules** and what you can build (see step 2 below).
- **Meet with City staff** early on to understand any rules that might apply to your ADU.
- **Adjust your project budget** as needed and create a plan for financing your project.



3 DESIGN YOUR ADU 1-6 MONTHS

- **Consider using a pre-reviewed ADU plan** to save on design and review costs.
- **Hire your team** of an architect or designer and a licensed contractor, or a design/build team.
- **Create your initial design** and discuss it with City staff. Email [Planning](#) for an appointment.
- **Finalize your design** for permitting. Your architect, designer, or contractor should help.



4 APPLY FOR PERMITS 1-6 MONTHS

- **Submit your ADU Preliminary Ministerial Review Clearance Form** with the required fees to [Planning](#) to confirm you can build an ADU.
- **Prepare your building permit application** and all [submittal requirements](#).
- **Submit your building permit application** by email or in person to Building. Pay initial fees. Complete applications are reviewed in 30 days.
- **Revise your application if needed.** Expect two weeks for review. Email [Building](#) for updates. Pay any remaining fees and pick up your building permit.



5 CONSTRUCT YOUR ADU 6-12 MONTHS

- **Ensure all funding is in place** before construction.
- **Monitor construction** (typically 6-12 months) by checking in regularly with contractors, making decisions about materials as needed, and ensuring inspections are moving along.
- **Schedule inspections** throughout construction. Email [Building](#) or call 650-853-3189. Your contractor will do this for you.



6 MOVE IN

Once your ADU has passed the final inspection it's ready for move-in!
Detached ADUs require a certificate of occupancy before move-in.

Financing your ADU

Your budget is one of the most important parts of your ADU project. Before you start planning, think about the overall costs of building an ADU. Talk to [EPACANDO](#) about your budget and to learn how you can save money. Use the [ADU Calculator](#) early on to estimate your costs and possible rental income to plan your budget. Regardless of how much you spend, an ADU is a great investment for your property and your family. The extra space provides flexibility over the years, and rental income and increased property value puts cash back in your pocket.

Grant and Loan Programs

CalHome ADU/JADU Loan The City offers income-eligible households a \$100,000 low-interest loan for ADU construction costs. Reach out to [EPACANDO](#) or call 650-473-9838 to see if funding is available.

CALHFA Grant The California Housing Finance Agency (Cal HFA) ADU Program provides grants of up to \$40,000 to qualified homeowners for the reimbursement of ADU pre-development costs, including impact fees. To qualify, a homeowner must be low or moderate income.

1 Get Started

Building an ADU can be overwhelming. Reach out to [EPACANDO](#) for project assistance early on and throughout the process.

The [ADU Resource Center](#) has resources that can help.

ADU GUIDEBOOK: A [step-by-step guide](#) and [real life inspiration](#) for building an ADU.

FLOORPLANS: Look at example [floorplans](#) including prefab ADUs.

ADU CALCULATOR: Get a [rough estimate](#) of costs, fees, and rents.



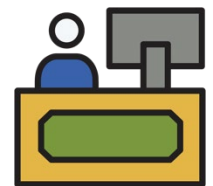
2 Learn the Rules

Learn what you can build on your property. City staff is here to help. Email [Planning](#), visit the [Permit Center](#) in person or make a virtual appointment.

JADU Rules and Regulations

JADUs are a special type of conversion located within an existing home, including attached garage.

- **JADU OWNER OCCUPANCY DEED RESTRICTION:** JADUs require a deed restriction to attest that the owner must live on site, either in the main home or the JADU. Owners must complete the [JADU Deed Restriction Form](#), notarize, and record with the San Mateo County Clerk-Recorder by emailing recorder@smcacre.gov. Email a copy to [Planning](#) or drop off a copy at 1960 Tate Street.



JADU Standards

Number & Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Size: Up to 500 square feet.• Number: Only one JADU is allowed per property.
Zones Allowed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allowed on lots zoned for a single-family home. Not allowed on two-family and multi-family properties or any property with multiple single-family homes.

Design Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowed but not required to have an interior access connection to the main home. If the JADU shares a bathroom with the main home interior access is required. If located within an existing home, may include an expansion of no more than 150 square feet beyond the existing structure to provide an entrance.
Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No new parking required for JADUs. If converting a garage to a JADU, replacement parking is required for the main home.

ADU Rules and Regulations

According to state law, you can build up to an 800 square foot ADU, as long as rear and side setbacks are at least 4 feet and it is not above 17 feet tall. No room behind or next to your main home? You can build it in your front yard.

ADU Standards	
Zones Allowed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowed in all residential and mixed-use zones with limited exceptions, such as traffic flow, water, sewer, or public safety.
Minimum ADU Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 150 square feet
Maximum ADU Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detached ADUs: 1,000 square feet. Attached ADUs (or contained within a primary dwelling): 50% of the primary dwelling.
Maximum ADU Height	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attached ADUs: up to 25 feet or the maximum allowed by the underlying zoning, whichever is lower (allows for ADUs built above an attached garage). Detached ADUs within a ½ mile walking distance from a major transit stop: up to 18 feet plus an additional 2 feet to accommodate a roof pitch that is aligned with the primary house (allows for two-story ADUs). ADUs on Two-Family and Multi-Family properties with existing/proposed multi-story dwellings: up to 18 feet. All other ADUs: 17 feet.
Setbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Construction: 4 feet side/rear setbacks. Converted Structures: Same setbacks as the existing structure. Setbacks must comply with any recorded easements or setback restrictions. If an 800 square foot ADU does not fit in the rear or side yard, the ADU may be allowed in the front yard.
Lot or Location Restrictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These restrictions cannot prevent you from building an 800 square foot ADU: Open Space: 50% of the remaining rear yard or 500 square feet of open space is required, whichever is less (with no permanent hardscape). Site Coverage and Floor Area Ratio: subject to the rules for your zoning district.
Number of ADUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On Single-Family Properties: One ADU is permitted per lot, as long as the lot meets size and location requirements. On Two-family and Multi-Family Properties: Up to two detached ADUs allowed. Can convert up to 25% of non-living space to ADUs. For example, if a building has 4,000 square feet of office, 1,000 square feet can be converted into one or more ADUs. Example: one ADU is allowed in an existing multiple-family dwelling structure with seven or fewer units; two ADUs are allowed in an existing multi-family dwelling structure with eight to eleven units, etc.
Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally additional off-street parking is not required for ADUs. Talk to Planning staff to confirm parking requirements for your property and project. If converting a garage to an ADU, replacement parking is not required. Second driveways are allowed for single-family corner lots.

Important Rules

- **GARAGE CONVERSIONS:** Homeowners can convert legally built structures (garage, barn, art studio) into an ADU. JADUs can be converted from an attached garage (but not detached). If you demolish your garage or other enclosed structure and build an ADU in its place, the ADU can be in the same footprint if it's the same size and height of the structure it's replacing. Demolition permits for an existing detached garage can be processed at the same time as the ADU. Garage conversion ADUs will require moisture barriers and other design elements to meet building codes.
- **RENTING ADUs:** Short-term rentals (less than 30 days) are prohibited for both ADUs and JADUs.
- **SELLING ADUs:** Selling ADUs and JADUs separate from the main home is generally not allowed.
- **OWNER OCCUPANCY:** If there is a JADU on the property, owners are required to live either in the JADU or the main home.
- **HOMEOWNER AND NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS (HOA):** Cannot prohibit or unreasonably restrict ADUs, although they may require certain standards. May not prohibit renting an ADU.
- **UNPERMITTED ADUs:** If you constructed an ADU without a building permit, you may want to consider legalizing it. Doing so can reduce liability and risks to occupants, increase property value, and provide peace of mind. Reach out to [EPACANDO](#) for assistance and talk to [Planning](#) and/or [Building](#) to learn more. No fines or enforcement will result from reaching out. Owners can request a delay of citations for unpermitted ADUs, as long as there are no safety issues, until 2030. An unpermitted Pre-2018 ADU can be legalized, even if it is in violation of building standards, state ADU Code, or local ADU ordinances, unless the ADU is deemed substandard (per Section 17920.3 of the Health and Safety Code) or there is a health and safety hazard.

Utilities and Special Circumstances

- **UTILITIES:** ADUs converted from existing space and JADUs do not require connection fees or capacity charges, unless the ADU or JADU is built alongside a new single-family home. For information about capacity charges for all other ADUs, contact [Building](#). Even when new connections are not required, homeowners may be required to upsize service and/or meters to meet capacity requirements. New electric and gas connections or electrical upgrades can add time and cost. Reach out to your utility providers early in the process to find out about connection fees and timelines.
- **SOILS REPORT:** A soils report is required for all new construction per California Building Code Section 1803.2. ADUs may complete the [Soils Report Waiver Request](#).
- **FIRE SAFETY:** Common walls between dwelling units must have one-hour fire resistive construction in accordance with CRC R302.4. Fire sprinklers are only required for ADUs if required for the main house. Talk to City staff and Menlo Fire to see if modifications are required.
- **ENERGY CODE:** New, detached ADUs must comply with the California Energy Code requirement to provide solar energy systems. Solar is not required for ADUs under 500 square feet or if the solar would generate less than 1.8 kilo watts.
- **FLOOD OR HAZARD ZONES:** Hazard requirements depend on property elevation and location. Talk to staff early to find out if additional requirements are needed for your project.
- **HISTORIC PRESERVATION:** There may be additional standards for properties listed in the [city's historic resources inventory report](#). These standards do not apply to ADUs that are up to 800 square feet, 16 feet tall, and with four feet side and rear yard setbacks.

3 Design Your ADU

Although you can build an ADU as an owner-builder, we strongly recommend hiring a professional architect/designer and contractor to save money and time.

Working with a professional will keep overall costs down and is the key to getting your ADU approved quickly, managed efficiently, and built cost-effectively. Talk to [EPACANDO](#) for other ways to save money.

Pre-reviewed ADU Plans

Save time and money with a ready-made plan!

[Explore available ADU plans online](#)

HEART of San Mateo County provides designs for green, all-electric detached ADUs that can be downloaded by the public at no cost. Plans will still need to be customized to your property. Download the [handbook](#) to learn more about the process.



4 Apply for Permits

Meet with the City

City staff can help identify any issues before you submit your project application.

Reach out to the agencies that provide vital services like water, sewer, gas, and electricity to see if their requirements will impact your design, cost or timeline.

Review Process

The ADU permitting process can be complicated. Reach out to [EPACANDO](#) for help.

- **ADU PRELIMINARY MINISTERIAL REVIEW (PMR):** Fill out the [PMR Clearance form](#) to confirm you can build an ADU on your property. Submit in person at the Permit Center or email [Planning](#).
- **BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATION:** After the Preliminary Ministerial Review, submit your [building permit application](#) and all [submittal requirements](#) by email to [Building](#).
- **PLAN CHECK:** Building, Planning, and Public Works review your construction plans. Outside reviewers may include Fire, Sanitary District, and School District. Expect 30 days for the first review and two weeks for resubmittals. Contact [Building](#) for updates.



ADU Project Fees

An overview of permitting, development impact, and utility fees

ADUs can be charged a variety of fees from the [City](#), State, and other agencies. Some fees are based on the details of the project while others are fixed. Development impact fees help pay for community infrastructure like parks but are not charged for ADUs under 750 square feet or attached ADUs. Surprisingly, the City does not control many of the most expensive fees, like school and water fees. Speak with [Planning](#) and utility service providers for more info.

Permit, Impact and Utility Fees	
ADU PRELIMINARY MINISTERIAL REVIEW APPLICATION FEE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$648 for typical review unless you have a complicated site or project (Fiscal Year 23-24). • Fees are updated annually. Check here for updates.
AVERAGE BUILDING PERMIT/PLAN CHECK FEES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$4,000 for a \$100,000 ADU • \$6,000 for a \$300,000 ADU
OTHER CITY DEPARTMENT FEES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Works and other agency fees may be required. Talk to Building for more info.
DEVELOPMENT IMPACT FEES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No city impact fees for ADUs under 750 square feet or attached ADUs. Other ADUs pay Parks and Trail and Stormwater fees.
RAVENSWOOD SCHOOL FEES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$4.08/square foot. Fees are updated annually. Check here for updates. • No school fees for ADUs less than 500 square feet.
FIRE DISTRICT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire: \$230.27 for plan review and inspection. For more information on the fee, check here.
UTILITY AND CONNECTION FEES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact your utility providers for more information. See Contact Information below.

5 Build Your ADU

Hiring your Contractor

The [California Department of Consumer Affairs](#) can help you find a contractor. They have resources on hiring, checking license status, negotiating a clear contract, and resolving disputes. Before you hire your contractor, make sure to check their license and insurance. You can verify their license by calling the Contractors' State License Board at 800-321-2752 or checking their [website](#). Your contractor will complete skilled construction work and manage the construction process, like hiring subcontractors, coordinating construction and inspections, and troubleshooting delays and changes.



Building Inspections

Your ADU will be inspected through each phase of construction to ensure it is being built according to the permitted plans and CA Building Standards Code. Contact building@cityofepa.org or call 650-853-3189 to schedule building inspections.

6 Move-In

Understand Rental Laws

You will need to understand all the laws related to being a landlord, especially around discrimination. Find out if your rental unit is [exempt](#) and about related [landlord requirements](#). For an overview of California laws, review [California Tenants: A Guide to Residential Tenants' and Landlords' Rights and Responsibilities](#), published by the California Department of Consumer Affairs.



Contact Information

City staff are here to help. If you need assistance or have any questions, please contact the Planning Division or visit our [website](#). To look up your property information, use the [Symbium Build](#) online tool.

Contact Information and Resources	
PLANNING & BUILDING	<p>Planning Division Website: www.cityofepa.org/planning Email: planning@cityofepa.org Phone: (650) 853-3189</p> <p>Building Division Website: www.cityofepa.org/building Email: building@cityofepa.org</p> <p>Urgent issues or existing projects call: 650-853-3189</p> <p>In person: 1960 Tate Street, East Palo Alto, CA 94303 Mon, Tues, Thurs 9am - 4pm (Closed 12pm - 1pm) Wed and Fri virtually by appointment only</p>
ADU WEBSITE	https://www.cityofepa.org/planning/page/accessory-dwelling-units-adus
EPACANDO	<p>ADU Project Assistance epacando.org/candoadu</p>
WATER SERVICE PROVIDERS	<p>VEOLIA WATER Phone: 650-322-2083; Email: epawater@veolia.com</p> <p>PALO ALTO PARK WATER MUTUAL Phone: 650-322-690; Email: info@papmwc.org</p> <p>O’CONNOR TRACT WATER CORPORATION Phone: 650-321-2723; Email: connorwater@gmail.com</p>
SANITARY DISTRICTS	<p>EAST PALO ALTO SANITARY DISTRICT Phone: 650-352-9021; Email: dyoung@epasd.com</p> <p>WEST BAY SANITARY DISTRICT Phone: 650-321-0384; Email: www.westbaysanitary.org</p>
ELECTRICITY & GAS	<p>PG&E Phone: 1-800-743-5000; Email: www.pge.com</p>
TRASH	<p>RECOLOGY Phone: 650-595-3900; Email: www.recology.com</p>

ADU Resources and Forms

East Palo Alto ADU Webpage www.cityofepa.org/planning/page/accessory-dwelling-units-adus

- ADU Plans Gallery
- East Palo Alto ADU Worksheet
- Preliminary Ministerial Review Clearance For ADUs (previously Zoning Clearance)

Building Permit Application Form

www.cityofepa.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/building_amp_code_enforcement_services/page/86/building_permit_application.pdf

Soils Report Waiver Request

www.cityofepa.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/building_amp_code_enforcement_services/page/8991/epa_soils_report_waiver.pdf

City of East Palo Alto Comprehensive Fee Schedule www.cityofepa.org/finance/page/comprehensive-fee-schedule

Ravenswood School District Fees

www.seq.org/DEPARTMENTS/Administrative-Services/Maintenance--Operations/School-Impact--Developer-Fees/index.html

Menlo Park Fire Protection District Fees

www.menlofire.gov/media/News/January%2023/Proposed%20Fee%20Schedule%202023.pdf

ADU Resource Center San Mateo County website – www.smcadu.org

- ADU Guidebook: www.smcadu.org/guidebook

HEART of San Mateo County GLADUR pre-reviewed ADU plans and Handbook

www.heartofsmc.org/programs/adu-center/

San Mateo County Assessor's Office Accessory Dwelling Units webpage

www.smcacre.org/post/accessory-dwelling-unit

City of East Palo Alto CalHOME ADU/JADU Loan Program

www.cityofepa.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/planning/page/12701/2023_calhome_flyer.pdf

California HFA ADU Grant Program www.calhfa.ca.gov/homebuyer/programs/adu.htm

Home for All Second Unit Toolkit www.homeforallsmc.org/toolkits/second-units

Hello Housing Bright in Your Backyard ADU Pilot Program www.helloadu.org

San Mateo County Housing Leadership Council website www.hlcsmc.org

Symbium Build Property Lookup Tool www.symbium.com