



ASSOCIATION OF BAY AREA GOVERNMENTS
METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION



Technical Assistance
for Local Planning
HOUSING

Putting It All Together: Getting ADUs Built

The ABAG Regional Housing Technical Assistance (RHTA) Program convened an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Work Group in 2024-25, offering five webinars for jurisdictions looking to encourage ADU development and comply with state ADU laws. This memo builds on the information shared through the Work Group sessions and provides an overview of opportunities to improve ADU policies, processes and public information while meeting the requirements of state laws. ADUs can be a key piece of local housing strategies, filling unmet needs in the housing market and empowering homeowners to help house their neighbors.

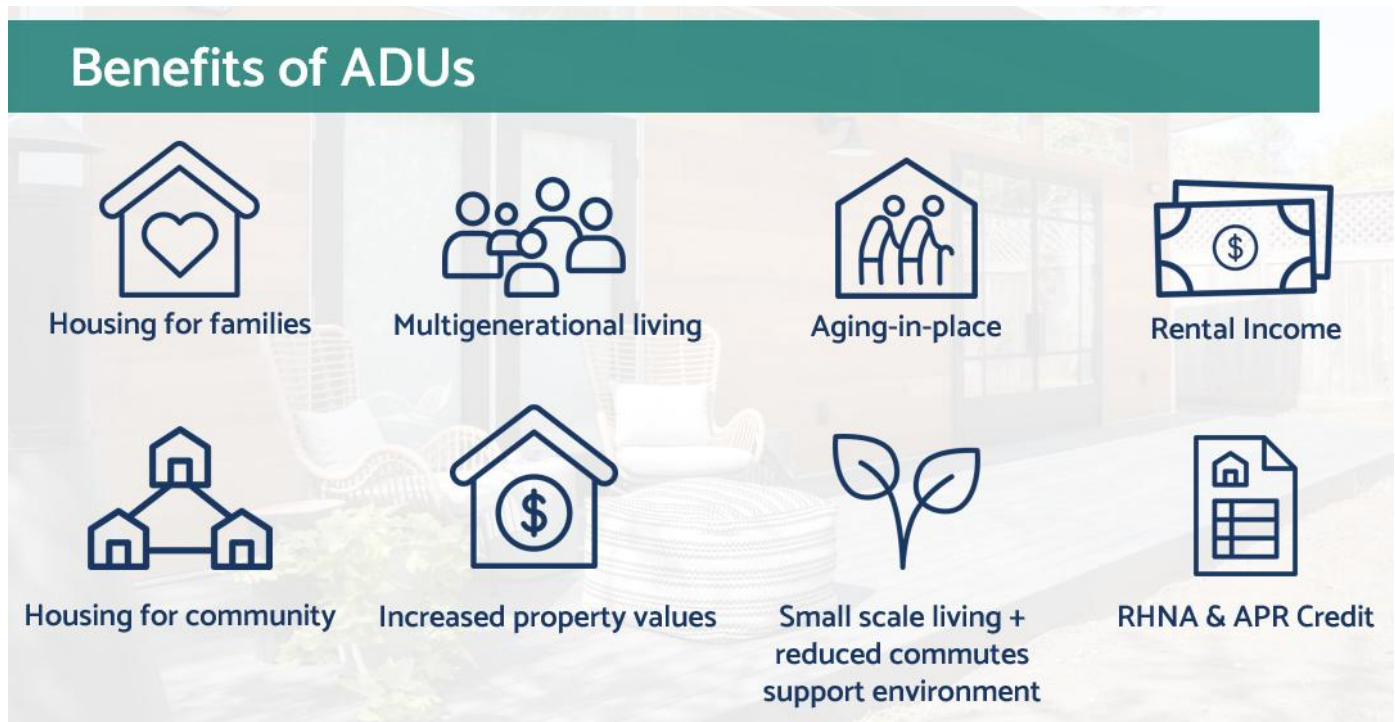


Figure 1: Webinar slide showing possible benefits of ADUs

Work Group Resources

Work Group session materials including recordings and slide decks can be found on the [ABAG Regional Housing Technical Assistance \(RHTA\) Accessory Dwelling Unit \(ADU\) Work Group webpage](#).

For further guidance on state ADU law and local ADU programs, see the guides on ADU Amnesty, Affordability, Pre-Approved Plans and Condoization on the [RHTA ADU Technical Assistance Guidance, Memos & State Law Resources webpage](#).

For help educating homeowners about ADUs, see the [RHTA ADU Technical Assistance Public Information Resources webpage](#).

Why Accessory Dwelling Units?

In 2023, ADUs represented 18% of all new housing units in California, up from 8% in 2018. ADUs also represent 36% of new low- and very low-income units and 32% of new moderate-income units in the state. As jurisdictions encourage development of new ADUs, property owners are increasingly building them to house their friends, families and neighbors.

Table 1: ADUs as Percent of Total New Units by Bay Area County

County	ADUs as Percent of Total New Units
Alameda	11 %
Contra Costa	17 %
Marin	35 %
Napa	24 %
San Francisco	10 %
San Mateo	23 %
Santa Clara	20 %
Solano	4 %
Sonoma	11 %

Barriers to Building ADUs

It is not uncommon for homeowners to encounter many challenges throughout the ADU process. Unexpected costs and delays are not just frustrating, they can result in abandoned projects. However, jurisdictions can use policies, processes, public information and targeted support to help. The rest of this memo summarizes opportunities for jurisdictions to make improvements, especially to support homeowners who are thinking about building or designing an ADU or are working through the permit process.

Barriers from the Homeowner Perspective

It is hard to:



Find Information &
Get Started



Learn the Rules &
What You Can Build



Apply & Get
Permits



Budget &
Finance



Manage
Construction



Manage
a Rental

Figure 2: Barriers from the Homeowner Perspective

Policy and Zoning: Relaxing and Simplifying Rules

Making changes to ADU policies and zoning can help homeowners understand what is allowed and move through the process faster and more easily.

Clear and Simple Rules

Jurisdictions can simplify zoning codes and other related policies to make it easier for homeowners to understand what they can build. Relaxing requirements beyond what is required by state law gives homeowners more options to meet their needs and fit within site constraints.

Objective	Actions	Examples
Identify and address the most common zoning barriers and simplify rules for easy understanding and compliance	- Update ADU ordinance for outdated or onerous rules - Simplify standards and language - Work with both planning and building staff to identify common issues - Gather feedback from past applicants and permit counter staff	East Palo Alto: Updated ADU ordinance to comply with state law. Simplified standards language. Added objective standards. Cupertino: Updated ADU Ordinance with simplified rules, resulting in an increase of 4-5 yearly permits to 30-40 yearly permits. Berkeley: Created a task force to improve the ADU ordinance.
Give homeowners more options to meet their needs within site constraints	- Be as flexible as possible with zoning rules - Look to neighboring and peer jurisdictions for creative ideas - Identify zoning regulations that can be relaxed for small units	Oakland: Eliminated survey requirements for ADUs more than 3' from property line or with a slope of less than 20%. San Francisco: Waiver available to remove parking space for an ADU. Inglewood (Los Angeles County): No height restriction or max number of bedrooms for ADUs.

Fee Reductions and Waivers

Jurisdictions can lower financial barriers to encourage new ADU development. Limited time fee waivers can encourage homeowners to initiate construction, while permanent fee reductions or waivers can make ADU development more accessible for everyone.

Objective	Actions	Examples
Incentivize immediate construction with “fire sale”-style cost reductions	- Assess fee schedule for pilot and/or ongoing opportunities - Offer limited time fee waivers or reductions	County of San Diego: A pilot ADU Fee Waiver Program incentivized new construction with a limited time opportunity.
Permanently lower costs for ADU construction	Implement permanent fee reductions or waivers	Cupertino: ADU garage conversion fees are 50% of regular ADU fees.

For further guidance on ADU affordability see RHTA’s memo on [ADU Affordability: From Planning to Implementation](#) which provides information about financial incentives, how to support low-income homeowners including guidance for how to implement an affordability program along with examples and case studies.

Review and Permitting: Coordinating Internal Processing

Despite intersecting often on projects, jurisdiction staff and departments may not always be on the same page about priorities and processes. Making the ADU permitting process smoother can reduce burden on staff, improve the experience for homeowners, and contribute to long-term trust and relationship-building with the community.

Leadership and Departmental Alignment

Jurisdictions can work internally to support alignment between decision makers and departments and clearly define and implement local ADU priorities.

Objective	Actions	Examples
Set clear goals and align across departments	- Remind decision makers how ADUs are being used to meet Housing Element commitments - Assess policies and processes to understand barriers and set objectives to address them - Work with local stakeholders to understand where to target improvements	East Palo Alto: Conducted an internal audit to evaluate barriers and opportunities. Community Advisory Group and Technical Working Group collaborate with City staff. Sonoma County: Issued an ADU mission statement with measurable outcomes. Martinez: City Council provided leadership directing staff to adopt ADU condoization.
Speed up and simplify the plan review process for staff and reduce back-and-forth communications between departments	- Develop coordinated process for plan review - Establish roundtable reviews for ADU applications	San José: The ADU Ally coordinates cross-department plan review, weekly meetings and expedited review. San Francisco: Roundtable reviews of ADU applications across departments.

Staff Training and Resources

Jurisdictions can make strategic goals, policy and internal processes clear to staff by offering training and resources such as process summaries and process checklists.

Objective	Actions	Examples
Ensure staff know and can execute ADU process	- Develop reference materials such as summaries, checklists and flow charts - Promote staff awareness of ADU goals, policy and process - Designate an ADU point person to coordinate internal plan review, develop resources and provide training	San José: ADU Ally coordinates cross-department plan review, schedules and holds weekly meetings.
Solidify shared understanding across departments	Hold multi-departmental staff trainings on strategic goals, policy and internal processes	San Diego: Holds regular training for both planning and building staff.

Application and Permit Support

Jurisdictions can create new touchpoints for applicants throughout the permit process to improve clarity for homeowners and help staff identify issues before they come up.

Objective	Actions	Examples
Create ongoing opportunities for homeowners to ask questions	Host and advertise ADU office hours	San José: Holds “ADU Tuesdays”, designated hours for applicants to get staff guidance.
Ensure applicants understand rules and process	- Offer free or low-cost pre-application meetings - Provide clear and accessible guidance	San José: ADU Project Process Webpage includes plan review and permit process information on the city website as well as an ADU Universal Checklist and ADU Service webpage .

Objective	Actions	Examples
Minimize application resubmissions and encourage complete applications the first time they're submitted	- Designate an ADU coordinator to manage the application process and review among departments - Offer expedited or even same day permitting for some projects	San José: ADU Ally supports applicants and reviews concepts to ensure complete applications are received the first time. City of Napa: Offers "Express Review" for JADUs. Campbell: Offers ADU Express Plan Check for ADUs that meet criteria.
Ease pressure on staff time and resources	Offer an online portal for application processing	Los Angeles: Uses ePlanLA to speed processing.

Public Information: Supporting Homeowners

Good public information can help answer frequently asked questions that would otherwise have to be answered by staff. Produce easy-to-find, clear and concise public information materials to educate, inspire and support homeowners through the ADU development process, from thinking about building all the way to move-in.

Public Information and Ongoing Outreach

Jurisdictions can create clear, concise and easy-to-find public information to help homeowners understand the rules and know what to expect. It is important to design an engagement plan and budget for outreach at the beginning.

Objective	Actions	Examples
An easy to find ADU webpage, with clear and concise information	- Work with IT/web team and public information team to create an easily navigable webpage with a "library" of handouts - Create a system for regular updates to the webpage - Create a short, user-friendly URL that redirects to the ADU webpage	Albany ADU Webpage Oakland ADU Webpage San Leandro ADU Webpage RHTA Templates and Resources: Template Language for ADU Public Information & Websites

Objective	Actions	Examples
Offer readily available resources explaining the ADU process	• Create an at-a-glance summary of the ADU development process as well as relevant rules and the permit process • Use succinct language that is accessible and friendly for the average person and simplify checklists for readability • Post clear and easy-to-find links to resources on the ADU webpage	Martinez ADU Webpage Additional Resources section City of San Francisco ADU Supporting Info Vallejo ADU Handout (developed using the ADU Mini Guide for Homeowners Handout Template) RHTA Templates and Resources: • ADU Mini Guide for Homeowners Handout Template • Glossary and FAQ Handout Template
Plan for consistent outreach to connect with a broad audience of homeowners	• Work with public information officers to create regular posts to social media, newsletters and other communication platforms • Identify opportunities for ongoing outreach such as tabling at community events • Build outreach into work plan	RHTA Templates and Resources: • Template Language for ADU Public Information & Websites • Social Media Templates for ADU Info and Events • Building an ADU Template Slide Deck for Meetings • Graphics and Icons Image Library
Host events to educate homeowners about the ADU process and answer frequently asked questions	• Offer homeowner support services like webinars, fairs, tours, consults and a help line • Hold regular, ADU-specific events, such as a vendor fair, open house, or ADU tour	San Mateo County ADU Resource Center hosts webinars, offers feasibility consultations and help line to answer questions. Napa Sonoma ADU Center and ADU Marin host webinars and offer feasibility consultations and office hours with ADU experts.

Objective	Actions	Examples
Get information into the hands of hard-to-reach residents	- Partner with local organizations to expand the reach of public information - Invest in professional translation of homeowner tools and materials	East Palo Alto works in partnership with EPACANDO, a nonprofit that offers hands-on support with planning, building and renting an ADU. RHTA Templates and Resources: Spanish Glossary and FAQ Handout Template

See the [RHTA ADU Technical Assistance Public Information Resources webpage](#) for all public information templates.

Online Planning Tools

Jurisdictions can offer online tools to provide inspiration, help homeowners envision what an ADU can do for them and their community, and get homeowners to start designing an ADU.

Objective	Actions	Examples
Provide inspiration to homeowners to get them excited about building an ADU	- Include links to example floorplans or designs for inspiration - Find resident stories to include in public information and inspire action	ADU Marin Floorplans gallery provides real examples of ADUs and JADUs. Alameda County ADU Resource Center Local ADU Stories show personal interest stories about people and their ADUs.
Provide digital tools to help homeowners gather property information and identify key questions	Consider a GIS lookup tool and cost estimators	Santa Clara County ADU Website ADU Calculator estimates project costs. Alameda County ADU Resource Center Can I Build Tool helps homeowners understand how an ADU could fit on their property.
Showcase pre-approved and off-the-shelf plans	Create an easy-to-use pre-approved plans webpage with floorplans and photos of ADUs	Berkeley ADU Plans Gallery offers pre-approved and off-the-shelf plans for homeowners.

Regional Housing Technical Assistance Program Links

[ADU Work Group Session Materials Webpage](#)

- Session 1 – ADU Landscape 101: Where are we now?
- Session 2 – Zoning, Streamlining, Preapproving: Steps to Promote ADUs
- Session 3 – Hot Topics: Amnesty & Condoization
- Session 4 – Affordable ADUs: Fee Waivers, Loan Programs, Affordability and Financing
- Session 5 – Helping Homeowners Build: Putting it all Together

[ADU Technical Assistance Guidance, Memos & State Law Resources Webpage](#)

- [California ADU State Laws Summary & Checklist](#)
- [ADU Affordability from Planning to Implementation Memo](#)
- [Separate Conveyance of ADUs as Condominiums Memo](#)
- [Unpermitted ADU Template Application Checklist Template](#)
- [Program Guide: Amnesty for Unpermitted ADUs](#)
- ADU Model Ordinance (coming soon)

[ADU Technical Assistance Public Information Resources Webpage](#)

- [ADU Mini Guide for Homeowners Handout Template](#)
- [Glossary and FAQ Handout Template](#)
- [Spanish Glossary and FAQ Handout Template](#)
- [Template Language for ADU Public Information & Websites](#)
- [Building an ADU Template Slide Deck for Meetings](#)
- [Social Media Templates for ADU Info and Events](#)
- [Graphics and Icons Image Library](#)

[AB 1332 Pre-approved ADU Plans Information Sessions & Resources Webpage](#)