

September 1, 2021

Commission on Equitable Housing and Development

Re: ADU Code Amendment

Dear Mayor Regina Romero and Council,

Since February of 2021, the Commission on Equitable Housing and Development has been meeting to begin creating strategies for the creation of affordable housing in Tucson. Early on, the ADU code amendment was presented to the Commission, and many of the commissioners were in support. The integration of accessory dwelling structures is acknowledged as one small step in providing additional housing options for community members in need of attainable housing. Although many of the housing professionals generally agree that the cost of construction will create some challenges for wide adoption, there is general consensus that the strategy makes sense when framed as a solution for intergenerational households, households with disabled individuals, households with elders and small households, including youth, single parents and young adults. Another way to think about this type of housing is as a “missing middle” housing solution, and a very viable workforce or middle-income housing option. Considering that nearly 75% of Tucson is zoned for single family use, this code amendment could have the potential to double the housing stock over time.

ADUs are re-emerging in cities and towns across the country as an affordable and flexible housing option that meets the needs of older adults and young families alike. They’re environmentally friendly, respectful of a neighborhood’s pace and style, and make good use of existing infrastructure and often the housing stock too. Motivated by the principles below, we look forward to collaborating on an update to Tucson’s rules for ADUs.

Planning ahead for demographic shifts

It’s time to address the mismatch between the types of homes encouraged by our codes and the needs of real people and households who live in Tucson. According to the MAP Housing Market Study, the majority of the housing stock in Tucson are single family detached structures consisting of 3 bedrooms. However, the national and regional trends show that household sizes are decreasing over time. ADUs are a discreet way to meet demand for smaller homes and smaller households within the existing fabric of our residential neighborhoods.

Affordability

The United States is in the midst of an historic housing shortage that is unfolding here in Tucson as well, with affordable rental housing and starter homes increasingly hard to come by. We desperately need more accessible & affordable housing choices, as an increasing number of Tucson residents don’t need and can’t afford the typically sized home. Due to their smaller size and the fact that they share a lot with the primary home, ADUs are typically less expensive to rent than any other home in a neighborhood. They’re naturally affordable. Moreover, people who own ADUs often don’t charge market rent for them. In one study, 15-20% of ADUs were rented for little or nothing – likely to friends

or family who would otherwise be competing in the rental market. ADUs strengthen communities! This is the kind of housing we need more of, not less, as we struggle with rising housing costs.

Taking care of one another

ADUs are often created for friends or family members as a way to help each other out and stay close, while also providing personal space (and separate kitchens). This arrangement can work well when someone has a mental illness or a disability that allows for independent living, so long as support is available now and then. It can also be helpful for an aging relative, as a welcome alternative to a move to a senior housing facility. There is a greater appreciation for intergenerational family living today, especially in BIPOC and immigrant communities in Tucson. Finally, ADUs can serve as safety nets for friends or family members in need – where sharing a roof and kitchen would be too close for comfort.

Walkable neighborhoods

We know from surveys by AARP and others that a majority of Americans prefer to live in walkable neighborhoods that offer a mix of housing and transportation options and are close to jobs, schools, shopping, entertainment and parks. These preferences — coupled with the rapid aging of the United States' population overall and decrease in households with children — will continue to boost the demand for smaller homes in more compact neighborhoods.

Neighborhood Context

Historically Tucson offered a wide array of housing types and residential neighborhood characteristics – from detached homes to Sonoran row-houses (with or without alleys) and Casita Clusters to large rural lots. Over time, however, a lot of the smaller, “missing middle” housing types have disappeared, and ADU's are one way to begin to discreetly add density within the existing neighborhood fabric and restore a housing typology that is well known to many. One size doesn't fit all, and the good news is that different sorts of ADUs can fit within each of these varied contexts. To make sure this happens, Tucson Planning and Development Services staff have conducted an extensive public process that provides clear and objective standards on size, height, location, design and use of ADUs.

Location & Equity

We don't just need smarter, less expensive housing choices in a few parts of Tucson. We need them in *all* of our varied neighborhoods. Indeed, the removal of exclusionary zoning regulations - which rely on minimum lot sizes and encourage large new homes - is essential to building a more equitable city. The best way to provide less expensive housing is to scatter a little bit in every neighborhood. That can happen naturally and incrementally with ADUs, if the code allows for it.

We appreciate elected officials taking initial steps to legalize ADUs in portions of our city, and look forward to an ADU ordinance to contribute positively to Tucson's affordable housing, climate, and equity goals. We look forward to a more equitable Tucson where there are affordable housing options in all of our neighborhoods and where opportunities abound to live close to family and friends. ADUs should be a part of that future. We look forward to working with you to bring more equity and a higher quality of life to this city we call home.

Sincerely,

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