



The City of  
Worcester

# What's New with ADUs?

May 10, 2025

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W O R C E S T E R

# **Presentation Overview**

**1 - What are ADUs**

**2 – Why are ADUs Important?**

**3 - Quick History of ADUs in Worcester & MA**

**4 - Proposed Zoning Changes for Worcester**

**5 – Other Permitting Considerations for ADUs**

**6 - Q&A**

## Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

### Proposed Zoning Definition:

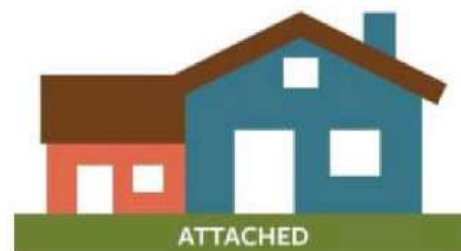
*“A self-contained housing unit, inclusive of sleeping, cooking and sanitary facilities on the same lot as a Principal Dwelling, subject to otherwise applicable dimensional and parking requirements, that maintains a separate entrance, either directly from the outside or through an entry hall or corridor shared with the Principal Dwelling, sufficient to meet the requirements of the Building Code and Fire Code for safe egress.”*

# Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

A small residential dwelling unit located on the same lot as another dwelling unit.

Also known as...

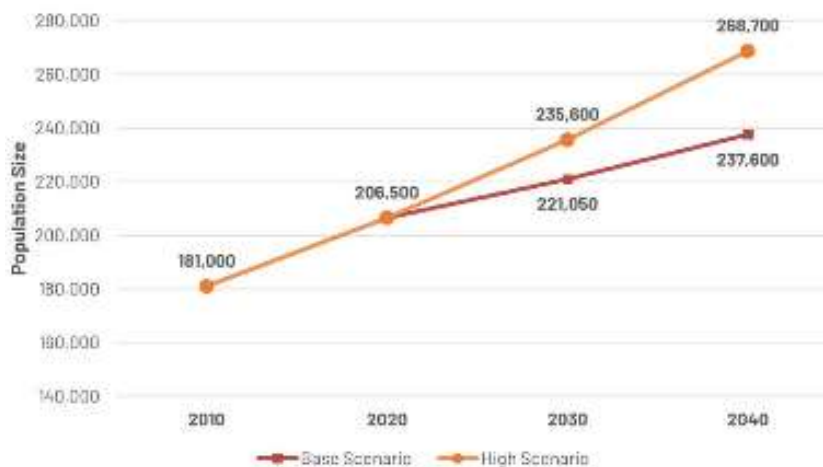
- In-law apartments
- Accessory apartments
- Tiny houses
- Granny flats



▲ Accessory dwelling units (or ADUs) come in many shapes and styles.

Image credit: AARP.org/ADUs

# Why do we need ADUs?



Growth Type	2030	2040
People	+29,100	+62,200
Multi-family Units	+7,100 - 9,400	+15,100 - 20,100

## Some Worcester Context:

From 2010 to 2020 Worcester grew by 14% (>25,000 people), surpassing historic peak populations.

Worcester Now | Next projects that by 2040, Worcester could need 20,000 new multi-family units if the City continues to grow at its current rate.

- Where will our new residents go?
- How do we keep Worcester affordable?

Housing prices continue to rise.  
Vacancy rates are low.  
Homelessness is high.



# What benefits do ADUs provide?

- ADU rental income can offset property maintenance and repairs
- Adds smaller rental units to the housing inventory to meet the needs of smaller households, adding diverse housing opportunities
- ADUs offer a lower-cost housing opportunity to help long-term residents stay in their neighborhoods
- ADUs provide more options for older adults and persons with medical needs or disabilities and their care givers enabling caregivers to live close by and folks can downsize to new accessible living while remaining in the community
- Compact growth efficiently uses of our existing land use, structures and infrastructure, which can be more sustainable and economical than building a single-family home on a new lot

# History of ADUs in Worcester

January 9, 2024

## Adopted ADU Zoning

Worcester City Council ordained a zoning amendment to enable ADUs by-right in all zoning districts with some dimensional limitations, requiring owner-occupancy of one of the units on the ADU lot.

August 6, 2024

## Affordable Homes Act Enacted

[Chapter 150, Section 8 of the Acts of 2024](#)  
signed into law to allow ADUs up to 900 SF by-right in single-family zoning districts.

February 2, 2025

## State Zoning Laws Changed

Local laws throughout Massachusetts that are inconsistent with the new state law and regulations (MGL Ch. 40A & [760 CMR 7I](#)) became unenforceable. Communities must reconcile or develop new regulations consistent with the new state law.

Expected in Fall of 2025

## Adopt ADU Zoning Amendment

The City Administration has proposed a Zoning Amendment to reconcile Worcester's ADU regulations with the State's new laws and regulations. Worcester's proposed amendment is on the May 13, 2025 City Council agenda for referral to the Planning Board for a public hearing on June 11, 2025. A subsequent hearing will occur at the Economic Development Committee over the summer before final consideration to adopt by City Council.

# ADUs in MA

## Affordable Homes Act Enacted

### [Chapter 150, Section 8 of the Acts of 2024](#)

signed into law to allow ADUs up to 900 SF by-right in single-family zoning districts.

SECTION 8. Section 3 of said chapter 40A, as so appearing, is hereby amended by adding the following paragraph:-

No zoning ordinance or by-law shall prohibit, unreasonably restrict or require a special permit or other discretionary zoning approval for the use of land or structures for a single accessory dwelling unit, or the rental thereof, in a single-family residential zoning district; provided, that the use of land or structures for such accessory dwelling unit under this paragraph may be subject to reasonable regulations, including, but not limited to, 310 CMR 15.000 et seq., if applicable, site plan review, regulations concerning dimensional setbacks and the bulk and height of structures and may be subject to restrictions and prohibitions on short-term rental, as defined in section 1 of chapter 64G. The use of land or structures for an accessory dwelling unit under this paragraph shall not require owner occupancy of either the accessory dwelling unit or the principal dwelling; provided, that not more than 1 additional parking space shall be required for an accessory dwelling unit; and provided further, that no additional parking space shall be required for an accessory dwelling located not more than 0.5 miles from a commuter rail station, subway station, ferry terminal or bus station. For more than 1 accessory dwelling unit, or rental thereof, in a single-family residential zoning district there shall be a special permit for the use of land or structures for an accessory dwelling unit. The executive office of housing and livable communities may issue guidelines or promulgate regulations to administer this paragraph.



## Examples of Existing & Proposed ADUs in Worcester



### In 16 Months of ADUs...

- 32 ADUs planned for
- 4 ADUs required Special Permits (100% approved)
- 31 Building Permits applied for
- 2 ADUs completed (occupied)



# Proposed Zoning Requirements for ADUs

## How big can by ADU be?

≤ 900 (or Special Permission (SP) required for larger)

## How many ADUs can I add?

1 ADU unit per lot; there must be 1 existing or proposed (in parallel with the ADU) “principal dwelling” unit; the ADU must stay on the lot with the other dwelling.

## How much Parking do I need?

None, but your ADU can't eliminate existing required parking without a SP

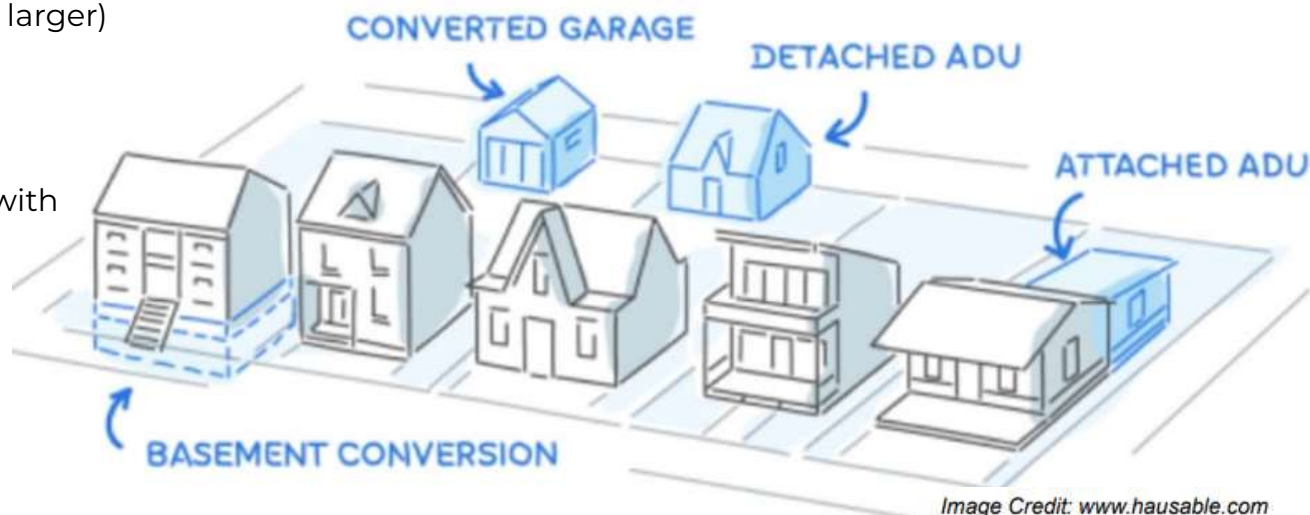
## Setbacks/height?

Not in the front-yard without a SP  
Varies by type and zoning district  
(can obtain a SP if they can't be met)

## What kind of ADU can you have?

Attached? Yes! By-right use in all zones.  
Detached? Yes! By-right use in all zones.  
Interior? Yes! By-right use in all zones.

AND No Site Plan Review is required



**Attached & Detached ADUs** – Must meet setbacks/height requirements for a primary structure OR a single-family structure OR and Accessory Structure in the zoning district the ADU is in (whatever is less). *Note: exceptions for A & M Zones and CCOD-Overlays until the zoning ordinance amendment is passed.*

**Interior ADUs** – No physical expansion of the existing structure = generally no dimensional requirements

## Proposed Zoning Requirements for ADUs

## Use Provisions – [Zoning Ordinance](#) Requirements – Table 4.1

### By-right or “Y” (yes) in All Zoning Districts

**TABLE 4.1 - PERMITTED USES BY ZONING DISTRICTS –RESIDENTIAL USE**

	RS	RS	RL	RG	BO	BO	BL	BG	BG	BG	BG	ML	ML	ML	MG	MG	MG	IP	IN	IN	A
19. Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y

Y – Yes; N – No;  
SP – Special Permit

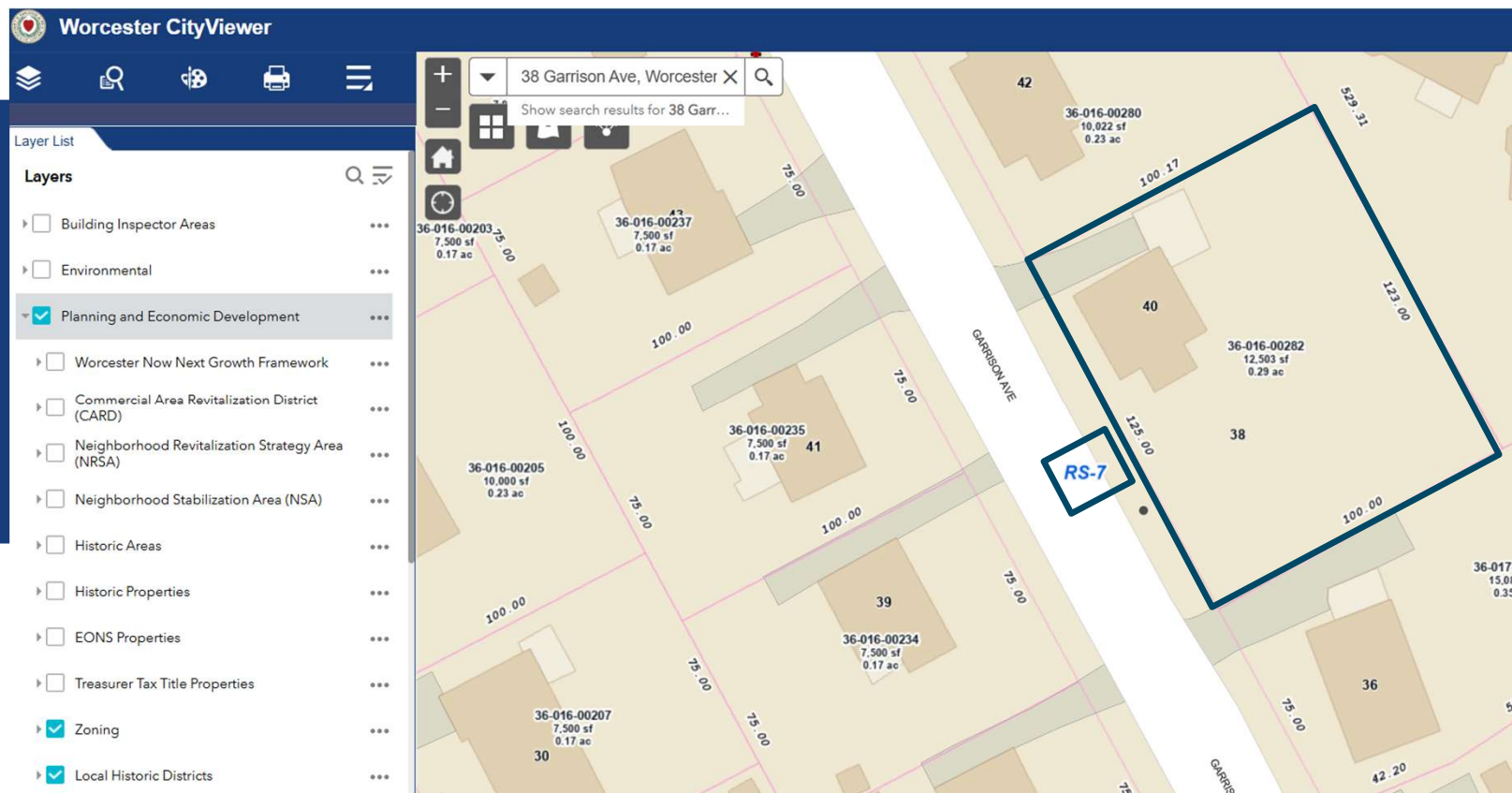
# Proposed Zoning Requirements for ADUs

Do I identify my property's Zoning District?

City's Property Viewer:  
[Worcester Atlas](#)

Call:  
508-799-1400 x 31440

E-mail:  
[Planning@WorcesterMa.gov](mailto:Planning@WorcesterMa.gov)



# Proposed Zoning Requirements for ADUs

TABLE 4.2 -PERMITTED DIMENSIONS BY DISTRICT

## Setback & Height Requirements - [Zoning Ordinance](#) Table 4.2

Primary structure OR  
A single-family detached OR  
Accessory structure (5' side- and  
rear-yard) in the zoning district the  
ADU is in...

*Whatever is most permissive.*

DISTRICT	USE	LOT		YARD SETBACKS			HEIGHT	
		AREA (Minimum SF)	FRONTAGE (Minimum linear ft.)	FRONT	SIDE¹	REAR		
				Minimum depth (linear ft.)			Maximum in stories²	Maximum in ft.
RS-10	Single-family detached	10,000	80	25	10	20	2+	35
	Limited Residential Hospice House	40,000	80					
	Other permitted	10,000	80	25	20	50		
RS-7	Single-family detached	7,000	65	20	8	20		
	Limited Residential Hospice House	30,000	65	25	10	20	2+	35
	Other permitted	7,000	65	25	20	50		
RL-7	Single-family detached	7,000	65	20	8	20	2+	35
	Single-family semi-detached	4,000 per du	35 per du					
	Single-family, attached	3,000 per du	25 per du					
	Two-family dwelling	8,000	70					
	Three-family dwelling	9,000	75				3+	50

# Proposed Zoning Requirements for ADUs

## PERMITTED DIMENSIONS BY DISTRICT

**TABLE 4.2 - Continued**

DISTRICT	USE	LOT		YARD SETBACKS			HEIGHT	
				FRONT	SIDE <sup>1</sup>	REAR		
		AREA (Minimum SF)	FRONTAGE (Minimum linear ft.)	Minimum depth (linear ft.)			Maximum in stories <sup>2</sup>	Maximum in ft.
RL-7 Cont.	Multi-family dwelling, low rise - first unit	7,000	65	20	10	20	NA	NA
	MFD, additional unit, low rise	2,000 per du	plus 5' per du to total of 140'	NA	NA	NA	3+	50
	Limited Residential Hospice House	20,000	65	25	10	20	3+	50
	Other residential permitted	7,000		20	10	20		45
	Other non-residential	7,000		20	20	20		
RG-5	Single-family detached	5,000	50	15	8	15	2+	35
	Single-family semi-detached	3,000 per du	30 per du					
	Single-family, attached	2,200 per du	20 per du					
	Two-family dwelling	6,000	55	15	8	8	3+	50
	Three-family dwelling	7,000	60					
	Multi-family dwelling, first unit	5,000	50	15	10	15	NA	NA
	MFD, additional unit, low rise	1,000 per du	plus 5' per du to total of 125'	NA	NA	NA	3+	50
	MFD additional unit, high rise	750 per du	plus 5' per du to total of 100'				8+	90

### Setback & Height – [Zoning Ordinance](#) Requirements – Table 4.2

Primary structure OR  
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Accessory structure (5' side- and  
rear-yard) in the zoning district the  
ADU is in...

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# Proposed Zoning Requirements for ADUs

## Who can live in an ADU?

- Can be **rented to anyone** (not just family members!)
- Can't be a lodging house (4+ unrelated individuals)
- The owner need not live on the property

*Note: except that in a A & M zones & the CCOD, requires owner occupancy until the proposed Zoning Amendment is passed*

## Other Requirements or restrictions for ADUs?

- Must obtain an **Occupancy Certificate** from Inspectional Services (meet fire & building codes)
- Can't be rented for less than a month (ADUs **can not be short-term rentals**)
- Adding an ADU to a property will not change that property's zoning classification; however, the property will **need to meet the building and fire code requirements** to comply with the increased number of dwelling units (e.g., 3rd unit (or more) will triggers sprinklers and there may be Fire Code setback requirements that drive citing, etc.)
- Rental Registry requirement if the ADU is rented

## When do I need Special Permission?

If a proposed ADU cannot meet the zoning dimensional requirements, it may be permitted via a [Special Permit](#) from the [Planning Board](#)

### If an ADU needs Special Permission...

- No guarantee (discretionary approval)
- Application to the Planning Board
- Neighbors noticed by mail
- Attend a public hearing
- Subject to appeal
- ±3 month process

### If an ADU needs only a Building Permit...

- You first need to submit an address request via OpenGov (Street Number Change of Address - SNCA)
- You will need **professionally surveyed plot plan & architectural plans** to demonstrate building, fire, & zoning code compliance (e.g., setbacks, egress, location, size, etc.)

# Example ADU Under the New Regulations

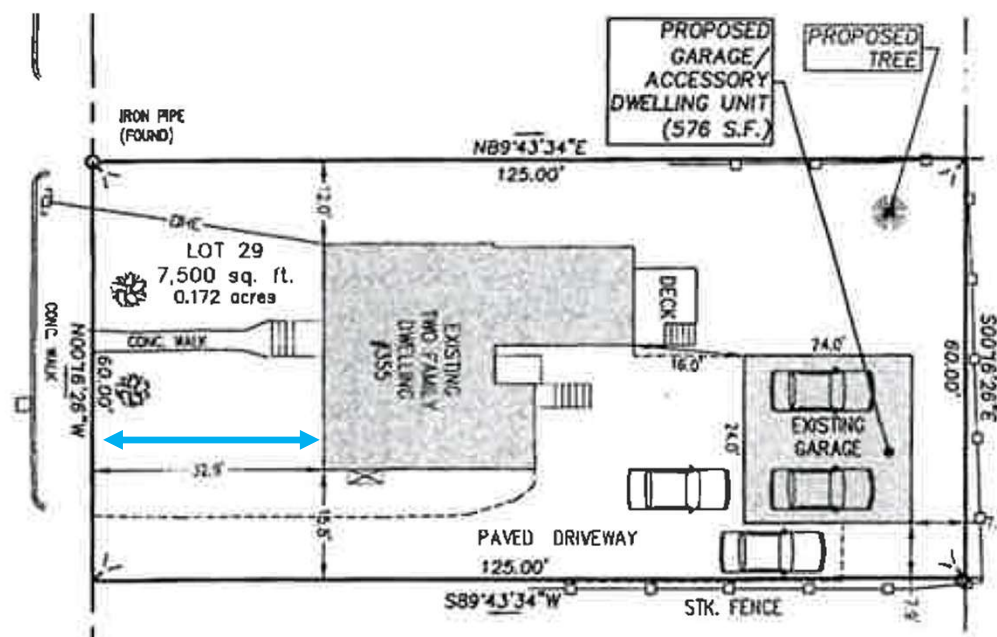
## RL-7 Zone

Primary structure is a 2-Family (20' front; 35' height); OR  
A single-family detached (same as single-family); OR  
Accessory structure (5' side- and rear-yard) in the zoning  
district the ADU is in...

*Whatever is most permissive.*

Not in the front-yard

BURNCOAT STREET



# Example ADU Under the New Regulations

TABLE 4.2 -PERMITTED DIMENSIONS BY DISTRICT

DISTRICT	USE	LOT		YARD SETBACKS			HEIGHT	
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Setback & Height –  
[Zoning Ordinance](#) Requirements –  
Table 4.2

Primary structure OR  
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Accessory structure (5' side- and  
rear-yard) in the zoning district the  
ADU is in...

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## Other Considerations for Planning Your ADU

**Water/Sewer** - DPW Permits are needed if upgrades to service or new utilities are proposed. New detached units will likely require a \$1,650/bedroom connection fee. If you have a septic system – contact Inspectional Services to see if it has capacity or may need to be replaced or expanded for a new unit. Keep in mind winter moratoriums (November 15 – April 1) where no work is allowed in public streets.

**Local Historic Districts** – Any exterior construction is subject to design review, before work can occur, by the Historical Commission (likely that a Certificate of Appropriateness is needed) (1-2 months);

**Historic Buildings** – Removal of any exterior material is subject to prior approval (Building Demolition Delay Waiver) by the Historical Commission and 1 year delay if denied (1-2 months).

**In a floodplain, in/within 100' of a wetlands/streams/ponds, or disturbing >5,000 SF near catchbasins**  
Earth disturbance or construction activity is subject to prior approval (Request for Determination of Applicability or Notice of Intent) from the Conservation Commission (1-2 months).

**Building & Fire Codes** - Worcester is a Specialized Stretch code community, with higher energy efficiency requirements than the state minimum, and is using the 10<sup>th</sup> edition code with Mass Amendments as of July 1, 2025 (1 month).

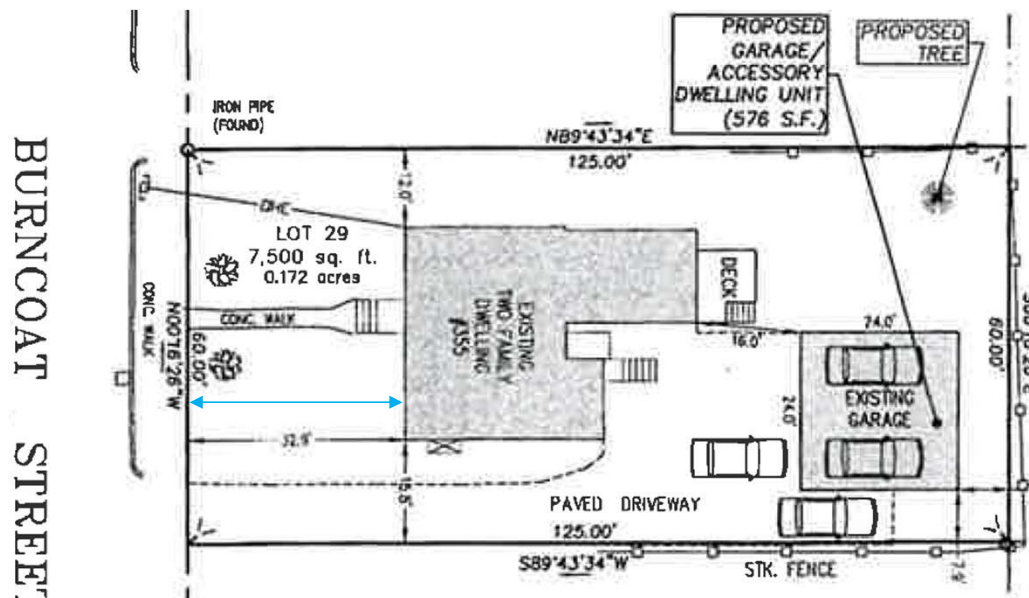
**Electric & Gas** – Contact National Grid (& Eversource) early!

## Other Considerations for Planning Your ADU

**Professional Services** (to draw plans that meet the relevant zoning, building, and fire codes, oversee and construct the project): Check the credentials of your professionals at [Mass.gov - Professional Licenses & Permits](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/professional-licenses-and-permits) under "Building & Trades". Ask your contractors for a valid "Certificate of Insurance". (multiple months)

**Assessment/Taxes** - Will likely increase. Assessor's use classification will change (increase) by 1 unit (e.g., single-family to two-family, two-family to three-family, etc.). If a three-family, multi-family, or other mixed-use property adds an ADU they will need to return the Income & Expense Form 38D annually to the City.

**Financing** – Contact local banks about available financing. Some local banks have products specific to ADUs which allow you to consider income from the ADU and avoid refinancing.



Note: The City is exploring opportunities to provide future financial and/or technical assistance, but does not currently have resources available.

## Permit Checklist

There's no perfect timeline or process for *every* project, but think about this order of operations.

- ☐ Engage a Design Professional(s) to prepare land survey & architectural plans and identify a contractor
- ☐ Talk to City Staff and utility providers about your project to confirm what permits will be needed based on a preliminary concept. Then refine your plans with your design professionals.
- ☐ Obtain any land use permits, if applicable ([planning@worcesterma.gov](mailto:planning@worcesterma.gov)) :
  - a) Planning Board
  - b) Conservation Commission
  - c) Historic Commission
- ☐ Financing
- ☐ Street Number
- ☐ Utility & Building Permits ([inspections@worcesterma.gov](mailto:inspections@worcesterma.gov) & [dpwpermits@worcesterma.gov](mailto:dpwpermits@worcesterma.gov))
- ☐ Obtain a Certificate of Occupancy
- ☐ Rental Registry Registration



### **Can I subdivide my ADU onto it's own lot?**

No. By definition ADUs are accessory and therefore must remain on the same lot with the other residential unit(s) on the property; they can't be subdivided off.

### **How do I resolve an Illegal unit?**

Illegal units (up to one unit) can be legalized by applying for a building permit and obtaining an occupancy certificate. This process may trigger review for other code requirements or identify zoning violations. ADUs have to comply with state (building, fire, and sanitary) codes and the applicable zoning requirements.

### **How do I recognize an Illegal unit?**

If the unit does not have an occupancy certificate it is not a "legal" ADU and would need to apply for a building permit, undergo review for code compliance, and have inspections to obtain an occupancy certificate.

## **FAQs**

### **What do I need to know about Utilities?**

Generally, ADUs in existing dwellings with utilities may rely on their existing water/sewer connections.

If you modify your existing utilities outside of your house you will need a permit from DPW&P Engineering.

ADUs in detached structures require a permit from DPW&P Engineering to make changes to the sewer outside. A plumbing permit is required to connect the water from the primary dwelling to the ADU.

Utility changes to allow ADUs - especially for detached structures may require interconnection with your existing utilities and that may dictate the location of your new utilities, so it's important to plan for this early in your design process.

## Questions?



**City of Worcester  
Planning & Regulatory Services Division (DPRS)**

City Hall, 455 Main Street, Room 404  
Worcester, MA 01608



**Phone**

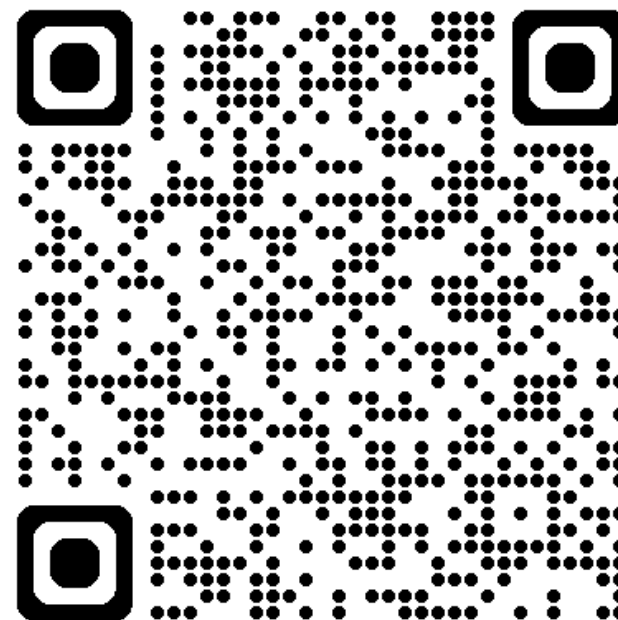
508-799-1400 ext. 31440



**Email**

[planning@worcesterma.gov](mailto:planning@worcesterma.gov)

Have questions later?  
Ask us online via the QR  
code below:



# Useful Links

- [Property Viewer \(GIS Maps\) - Worcester Atlas Viewer](#)
- [Zoning Ordinance](#)
- [Accessory Dwelling Units \(ADUs\) - Quick Guide | City of Worcester](#) (Note: Updates are in progress to reflect proposed zoning changes, facts relate to the zoning in place before changes to the state law)
- [Request an Address \(Street Numbering Change of Address Form\) - OpenGov](#) (all ADUs)
- [Apply for a Building Permit to Construct – OpenGov](#) (all ADUs)
- [Mass.gov Professional Licenses Look-up](#) (see under “Building & Trades”)
- Application for a [Special Permit](#) from the [Planning Board](#) (some ADUs - if dimensionally non-conforming)
- [Accessory Dwelling Unit \(ADU\) - FAQs | Mass.gov](#)
- [Septic System Guidance for ADUs](#) [Title V ADU FAQ](#)

**THANK YOU**

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