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ADU FACT SHEET

adding an **ADU** (Accessory Dwelling Unit)



Project for an Accessory Dwelling Unit in Oakland.

Adding an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)

Now is a GREAT time to add an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) to your property.

A few years ago, the state of California changed the law to make it easier to add secondary dwellings on residential properties. The high cost of housing in urban areas in California is endemic throughout the state. ADUs are seen as one way of helping to alleviate the housing crisis. In 2017 new rules went into effect making it even easier to add an ADU.

Now you can reap the benefits.

Imagine having a small rental apartment on your property that could give you some **income** for years to come. Maybe your **elderly parents** need to move in with you, but you – and they – would like some privacy with the proximity. Maybe you are planning for your own old age and think you may need a **live-in caregiver**, but don't want them in the spare bedroom. Maybe you need a **home office** that can double as a **guest house**.

All of these scenarios, and more, can be addressed with an ADU.

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What do they cost to build?

Probably more than you are expecting. The cost will vary based on the type of ADU (free-standing, addition, or basement conversion). Construction costs in the major metropolitan areas of California are higher than in other parts of the country. Construction costs run from about \$150 per square foot for a remodel to \$350 per square foot or more for a free-standing structure.

With rents in San Francisco currently averaging \$3000 per month for a 1 bedroom, and rents in other cities not much less, the income from even a small ADU can pay for that construction cost, in some cases, in only 4 or 5 years! After that short time, you could be pocketing upwards of \$36,000 a year in income – and that assumes rents don't go up.



Before the legalization



After the legalization

Can you add an ADU to your property?

In most cases, the answer is a qualified “yes”. All cities now allow ADUs, though there are still some restrictions about size and location. If you live within a half a mile of public transportation, you usually won't have to accommodate additional parking.

The biggest and most common restrictions for a free-standing structure will be

- the required **set backs**,
- the total amount of the property that is covered by buildings, called a **Floor Area Ratio** (usually about 40% is the maximum allowed, but it varies by city), and
- how much of the required **back yard can be covered** by an ADU.

These requirements will vary from city to city, and most cities will have other restrictions.

If you are in San Francisco and want to develop part of your lower level garage/basement into an ADU, there are other issues to be considered:

- **Exposure.** Does the location open out onto the street or onto a yard space at least 20x20?
- **Ceiling height.** The San Francisco building code requires a minimum of 7'-6”.

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- **Day light.** There are code requirements for minimum window sizes and locations to provide light and air.
- **Separate entrances.** You cannot enter through a garage.

There can be other challenges as well, but these are often the most challenging. There are solutions to all of these issues, but they may vary from property to property.

legalizing **IN-LAW UNITS**



Recently completed In-law Legalization. This project required adding a separate entrance, gutting and enlarging the bathroom, and providing larger windows.

Challenges With Legalizing In-law Units

San Francisco has an in-law legalization program which allows home owners to legalize their unwarranted in-laws built before January 1, 2013 without paying any penalties. The program offers two incentives: the plan check fee is waived. They also waive the fine for building without a permit.

Legalizing an un-permitted in-law unit requires bringing the unit into compliance with current building codes. There are four major challenges to legalizing most un-permitted in-law units in San Francisco.

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- **Ceiling height.** The building code requires a minimum of 7'-6".
- **Day light.** There are code requirements for minimum window sizes and locations to provide light and air.
- **Separate entrances.** You cannot enter through a garage.
- **Bathroom sizes.** The plumbing code has size, location, and clearance requirements.

There can be other challenges as well, but ceiling heights, day light, and entrances are often the most challenging. There are solutions to all of these issues, but they will vary from property to property. If you have adequate ceiling height, sufficient windows, and a separate entrance already, your legalization may be simple to accomplish.

What To Do **First?**

The first step, when considering adding an ADU or legalizing an existing one, is to evaluate the property in light of your jurisdiction's planning requirements and the building code requirements.

The best way to start that evaluation process is to research Accessory Dwellings and learn as much as you can about Accessory Dwellings and their design. One way to do that is take my online class, **ADUs And YOU**. This video based class is made up of over 15 different short videos totalling over 90 minutes of content.

The class provides insights about the potential uses of accessory dwellings, the real costs of construction, and the many various planning and building code restrictions which make designing an Accessory Dwelling a challenge.

When you complete the course, you will know more about Accessory Dwellings than most architects!

The class is given by David Locicero, a San Francisco Bay Area based architect who specializes in Accessory Dwellings. You will learn from an expert who has dealt with the challenges of building ADUs and helped his client reap the benefits.

Enroll in the course now, at MyAccessoryDwelling.com.

About David Locicero, architect

David is a San Francisco Bay Area based boutique architectural studio. David specializes in designing Accessory Dwellings (Granny Flats transforming, and is also skilled in transforming problem houses into dream homes. He is also provides, "Aging at home" solutions, Code, and accessibility consulting.

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