

March 2009



# Backyard Cottages

Director's Report



City of Seattle  
Department of Planning and Development  
Greg Nickels, Mayor • Diane Sugimura, Director



## What is a Backyard Cottage?



*Photo 1: Backyard cottage in Columbia City.*

As one homeowner describes it, a backyard cottage is a “mother-in-law unit with a little more breathing room.”

In other words, a backyard cottage is a small dwelling unit that is on the same lot as, but physically separate from, a single-family house.

Backyard cottages offer an additional housing type to Seattle that is desirable, quiet and affordable, and compatible with the character of single-family neighborhoods. For seniors, a backyard cottage offers a way to downsize while living next to their families and staying in the same neighborhood. Others may want flexibility for their extended families or friends, a place for their children, or an opportunity to invest in their property while providing affordable housing for small households.

*This report serves as the annual report to the City Council as required by Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) 23.44.041E.*



# Background

*The Department of Planning and Development (DPD) is proposing to amend the Land Use Code to allow backyard cottages in single-family zones throughout the city.*

## History of Accessory Dwelling Units in Seattle

Between 1900 and the 1950s, both types of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) — attached, inside the principal structure, and backyard cottages, which are detached — were commonly allowed under single-family provisions, in some cases as domestic servant quarters. Eventually, this type of housing fell out of favor, and accessory dwelling units were no longer allowed in single-family zones.

In response to widespread concern about the escalating cost and availability of housing, in 1993 the Washington State legislature required communities to develop legislation for ADUs. As a result, in 1994 Seattle adopted legislation to allow attached ADUs in all single-family zones.

When Seattle adopted provisions allowing attached ADUs (per the state mandate), concerns were raised about the potential for a large number being developed, and that the city's single-family zones were being "duplexed." These fears turned out to be unfounded. Attached ADUs are now seen as a low-impact, viable way to increase the supply of relatively affordable housing.

At the time attached ADU legislation was passed there was some support for backyard cottages as well, but legislation to allow them was not pursued. This was in large part due to concerns specific to backyard cottages, and their perceived effect on single-family neighborhood character.

In 1998, the City Council established the Demonstration Program for Innovative Housing Design to diversify Seattle's housing supply and provide alternatives to conventional detached houses, condominiums and apartments. The Demonstration Program tested innovative residential design concepts that allowed flexibility for development types not allowed under existing regulations, including:

- Backyard cottages.
- Cottage housing.
- Smaller, single-family houses on small lots.

The program used a competitive selection process and required all selected projects to go through Design Review. A brief summary of the projects completed under the Demonstration Program can be found in the report Evaluation of the 1998-2001 Demonstration Program for Innovative Housing Design, available on the City of Seattle's website [www.seattle.gov/dpd/BackyardCottages/RelatedDocuments/](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/BackyardCottages/RelatedDocuments/).



*Photo 2: Backyard cottage in Capitol Hill, built as part of the 1998 Demonstration Program for Innovative Housing Design.*

On August 7, 2006, the City Council adopted Ordinance 122190 allowing backyard cottages in southeast Seattle (south of Interstate-90 and east of Interstate-5). Due in part to the positive experience with backyard cottage construction in the southeast, DPD now proposes to allow backyard cottages throughout the city's single-family zones.

Seventeen permits for backyard cottages have been issued in the southeast, scattered throughout the area's neighborhoods. By comparison, there have been 921 attached ADU permits issued (citywide) since 1994. Map A illustrates the distribution of permits for both attached ADUs and backyard cottages.

A number of jurisdictions in the Puget Sound region allow both attached ADUs and backyard cottages in their single-family zones. They include Clyde Hill, Issaquah, Kirkland, Mercer Island, Newcastle, Redmond, parts of unincorporated King County, Woodinville, and Yarrow Point. The experience of these jurisdictions shows that attached ADUs and backyard cottages, together, tend to be produced at similar annual rates, and typically don't exceed more than 1% of the total parcels on which they are allowed to be built on.

## Public Process

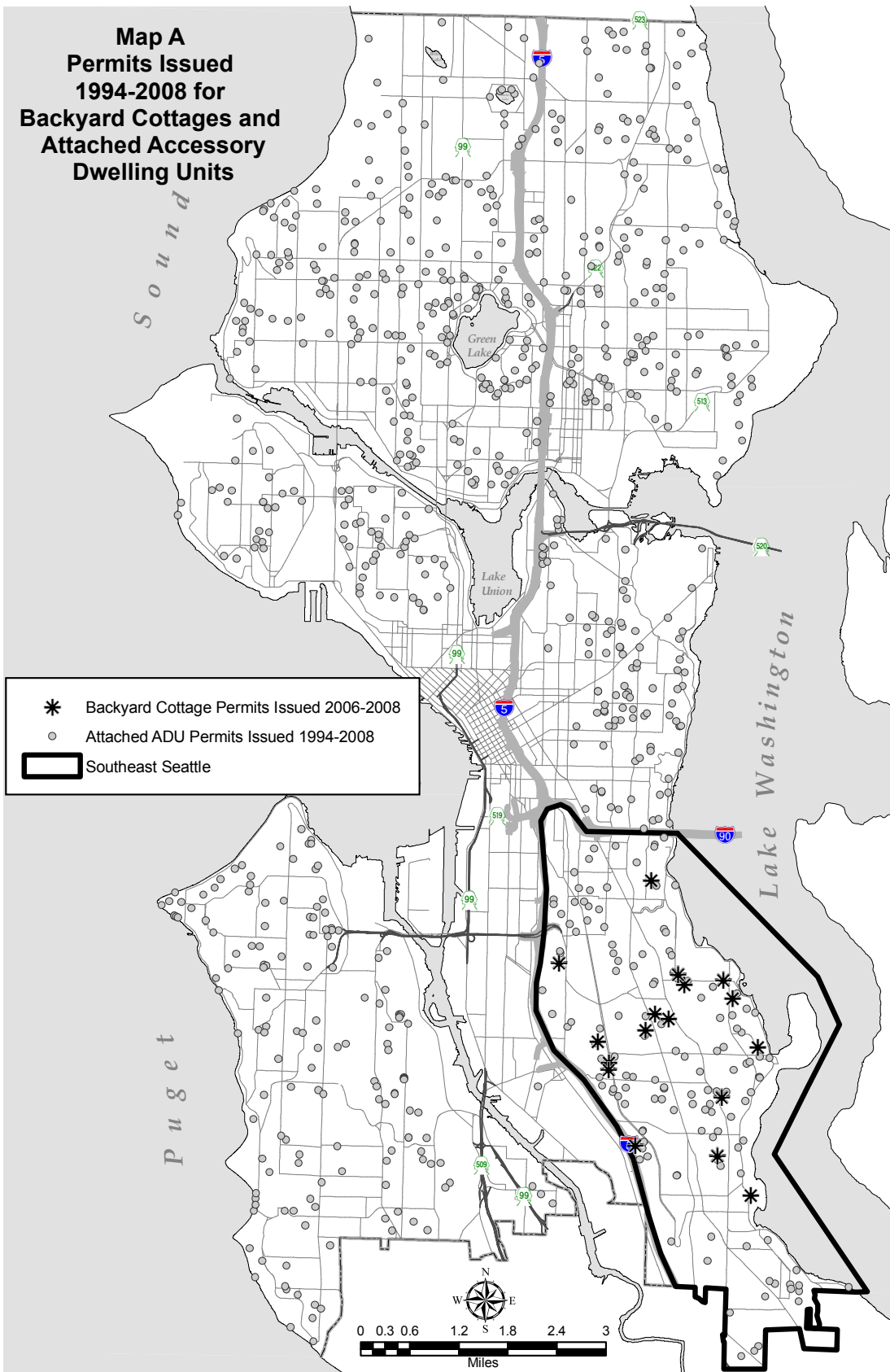
In developing provisions for backyard cottages, which were initially intended to apply citywide, significant measures have been taken to engage the community:

- In 2003, the Seattle Planning Commission held three focus groups representing the general public, those familiar with the innovative housing concepts under consideration, and the design and development community, to discuss the broad community and development issues surrounding backyard cottages.

- After the focus groups, the Planning Commission and DPD co-hosted a public forum to present the results of the focus groups and preliminary concepts for permitting backyard cottages. The forum included panel and small group discussions relating to backyard cottages and cottage housing (another form of innovative housing evaluated as part of the Demonstration Program for Innovative Housing).
- The information presented at the forum was posted online on the City's website. DPD included an online survey form that was also distributed at the forum and mailed to Seattle's neighborhood and community councils and other groups.
- DPD staff met with the Seattle Chapter of the American Institute of Architects to discuss proposed development concepts and standards.
- In 2005 DPD staff met with southeast Seattle community organizations to present the proposed development standards.
- In November 2008, DPD staff conducted a door-to-door survey of 118 neighbors living near existing backyard cottages in southeast Seattle. For more information regarding survey results, please see the "Analysis" section of this report.
- DPD staff met with community representatives from eight neighborhoods throughout the city to discuss expanding the backyard cottage policy.
- Over the years DPD staff has received numerous inquiries and statements of support for citywide backyard cottages from both individuals and community organizations.



**Map A  
Permits Issued  
1994-2008 for  
Backyard Cottages and  
Attached Accessory  
Dwelling Units**



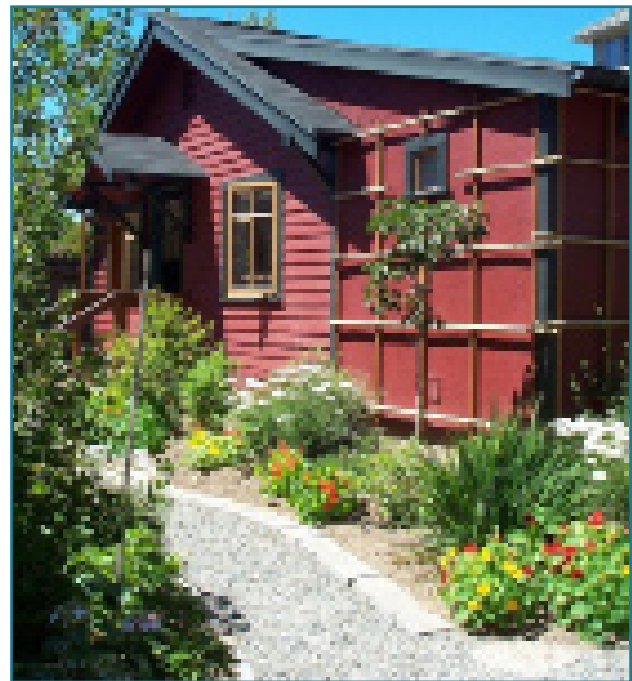
## Benefits of Backyard Cottages

Backyard cottages are a housing option comparable to a small single-family house; a home with no shared walls, a yard, and a location in a single-family residential neighborhood. In many instances backyard cottages may be more affordable due to their smaller size, and no additional land cost. As with any change to the Land Use Code, the potential benefits must be weighed against the potential effects. The potential benefits of backyard cottages include:

1. More flexibility for a homeowner by allowing them to live in their main home or in the backyard cottage.
2. Financial benefit to the homeowner that further enhances their property investment.
3. An additional housing option that is in demand, and does not increase allowed density since attached ADUs are already permitted in single-family zones.
4. Attractive and affordable housing for singles or couples, or for older citizens who may find the upkeep and costs of maintaining a single-family home and lot daunting.
5. Can often be designed more sensitively to surroundings than an addition to, or redevelopment of, an existing home.
6. Allows more people the opportunity to enjoy a single-family home without having to own a home.
7. Will not increase the permitted area of a lot that can be covered by structures because lot coverage limits would not change; both the house and the backyard cottage must fit within the current limits.

Construction of backyard cottages, like all accessory dwelling units, is dependent on factors such as Seattle's overall economic conditions and the strength of the local housing market. Several factors make it likely that fewer permit applications for backyard cottages can be expected than was experienced for attached ADUs:

- Not all lots are eligible for backyard cottages, while attached ADUs can theoretically be constructed within any single-family home.
- Not every homeowner will want to be a landlord or share their property with someone else.
- The complexity of developing of a backyard cottage.
- The increased costs of construction when building a separate structure.
- An annual maximum of 50 backyard cottages.



*Photo 3: Pre-existing, permitted backyard cottage in Ballard.*

# Backyard Cottages in Southeast Seattle

In November 2008, DPD staff conducted a neighborhood survey in southeast Seattle to gauge awareness of, and reaction to, backyard cottages. Staff interviewed 118 residents of single-family homes that were in the immediate vicinity of the 14 backyard cottages that have been built. Immediate vicinity was defined as lots located either on the same block as the backyard cottage (both sides of the street), or on the block behind the backyard cottage (sometimes across an alley).

Overall, the survey results indicate mostly positive reactions to backyard cottages. Ninety-six respondents felt that owners of single-family homes should be allowed to build a backyard cottage on their property. More than half the residents living near a backyard cottage weren't actually aware that one had been built. Most neighbors who knew about the backyard cottage felt it either had a positive impact or no impact on their neighborhood.

Among those aware of a backyard cottage in their neighborhood:

- 71% said that the backyard cottage in their neighborhood fit in with the surrounding homes.
- 84% noticed no impacts on parking or traffic directly related to the cottage (though some cottages had not yet been occupied).
- 83% were supportive or strongly supportive of backyard cottages.
- 54% would consider living in a backyard cottage.
- 89% believe single-family homeowners should be allowed to build a backyard cottage on their lot.

For a complete analysis of the survey results, please go to [www.seattle.gov/dpd/backyardcottages](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/backyardcottages).



## Columbia City

Lot: 5,156 sq. ft.

Backyard cottage: 800 sq. ft.

2 stories; 1 bed 1 bath

Alley access with onsite parking

Owner plans to rent

Cost to construct: \$80,865

*Photo 4: This is an example of a newly constructed, two-story backyard cottage on a lot with alley access. The traditional style fits in with the principal house that shares the lot.*





### Lakewood

Lot: 7,200 sq. ft.  
Backyard cottage: 800 sq. ft.  
2 stories; 1 bed, 1 bath  
Onsite parking  
Cost to construct: \$80,633

Photo 5: This two-story backyard cottage has a balcony overlooking the garden it shares with the principal house.



### Seward Park

Lot: 11,475 sq. ft.  
Backyard cottage: 721 sq. ft.  
1 story with daylight basement;  
2 bedrooms, 2.5 baths  
Onsite parking  
Intended for family  
Cost to construct: \$142,336

Photo 6: This modern styled structure has a low profile as it is built into the gently sloping lot.

# Proposal

## General Provisions

Lots in single-family zones would be permitted no more than one accessory dwelling unit, either attached or detached. One of the dwelling units would need to be occupied for six or more months of each calendar year as the property owner's principal residence. The total number of people occupying both the principal and accessory dwelling unit would not be permitted to exceed eight (which is allowed as a household in general), unless all people occupying both units are related.

Current provisions for attached ADUs require that the property owner reside in either the primary residence or in the ADU. One off-street parking space must be available for the attached ADU, and all attached ADUs are limited to a maximum of 1,000 square feet in size. Some limited exceptions are allowed for both of these standards.

A maximum of 50 backyard cottages will be allowed per year. There is no annual maximum for attached ADUs.

## Development Standards

Development standards for backyard cottages encourage units on wider, larger lots with alley access. Additional regulations would help "fit" backyard cottages on smaller and narrower lots to help ensure that their height, bulk, and scale are appropriate and proportional to the size of the lot.

For instance, the allowed height is based on the size of a lot (see Table A), and the gross floor area for a backyard cottage is limited to 800 square feet. Together, these standards are meant to control the scale of a new backyard

cottage. Proposed development standards also include the following:

- A minimum eligible lot area requirement ensures lots are the appropriate size to accommodate a backyard cottage.
- Maximum height limits would be based on lot width to minimize shadowing of existing homes and other visual impacts.
- A gross floor area limit to ensure backyard cottages are appropriate in size.
- Setbacks that maintain space between backyard cottages and surrounding lots.
- Parking requirements to minimize on-street parking impacts.
- Consistent with existing ADU provisions, owner occupancy requirements encourage owners to invest in their neighborhood and property upkeep.
- Conversion of existing structures would minimize construction impacts and help maintain neighborhood character.



*Photo 7: Backyard cottage in Green Lake, developed under the Demonstration Program for Innovative Housing.*



# Analysis

The most often cited concerns about impacts from backyard cottage construction are addressed in this section of the report. These are the issues generally perceived to most affect existing single-family neighborhoods. The proposed development standards for backyard cottages have been written to directly address and minimize these potential impacts.

The experience in southeast Seattle has shown that the initial fears about the impacts of backyard cottages were largely unfounded, particularly in regards to the number of units anticipated and parking concerns. As Map A shows, the 17 permitted backyard cottages are widely dispersed through southeast Seattle; they are not concentrated in any particular neighborhood. Permit data indicates that all projects have provided onsite parking and no parking waivers have been issued.

## Number of Citywide Permitted Backyard Cottages

Increasing the density in existing single-family zones is a commonly raised concern. However, because attached ADUs are already allowed throughout the city, the allowed density is one single-family dwelling unit plus one accessory unit. The citywide backyard cottage proposal would not change the allowed density; property owners would be allowed to choose between an attached ADU or a backyard cottage. They would not be permitted to have both.

Permit data for backyard cottages in southeast Seattle, as well as data for attached ADUs, were used as a basis for projecting potential citywide backyard cottage activity. According to the analysis, the City can expect to issue between 102-124 new ADUs permits (including both attached ADUs and backyard cottages) per year, distributed among



Photo 8: Backyard cottage in Seward Park.

123,610 single-family parcels. The number of lots eligible for a backyard cottage is reduced to 101,563 when factoring in existing ADU permits, lots that are below the minimum lot size eligibility requirement and lots within a Shoreline District, where they are prohibited (but attached ADUs are not).

By extrapolating the average number of backyard cottage permits in southeast Seattle, the City could expect approximately 52 backyard cottage permits to be issued yearly, citywide—or construction on approximately 0.05 percent of eligible lots. By comparison, DPD issues between 550-650 permits for new single-family units each year (0.44-0.52 percent of single-family lots).

An annual limit, or cap, of 50 backyard cottages per calendar year is proposed. Fifty is close to the number of estimated units citywide (52 units/year), and is based on the experience with backyard cottage permits in the southeast. A cap would provide for a predictable rate of development. Once a permit application has been accepted as complete by DPD, it would count toward the annual limit.



## Traffic and Parking

At the neighborhood level, backyard cottages are not anticipated to produce more cars on the street because attached ADUs are already allowed in single-family dwellings. Backyard cottages help to address regional traffic congestion in the Puget Sound area by creating more housing choices in Seattle that are nearer to jobs, transit, and goods and services.

One additional off-street parking space per dwelling unit will continue to be required for new accessory dwelling units, whether detached or incorporated into the existing dwelling unit. No changes to current provisions have been proposed; exceptions for smaller lots and steep slopes will continue to apply in neighborhoods with on-street parking availability. To date, no parking waivers have been issued for backyard cottages.

## Privacy

Perceptual impacts, such as a decrease in privacy, can be more difficult to address than physical ones. However, development standards have been crafted to minimize privacy impacts by taking into account lot size, lot width, and alleys. Backyard cottages are not allowed in required front yards, where they could detract from the character of single-family neighborhoods. Where backyard cottages face a street from a side or rear lot area, only one entrance may be located on each street-facing façade. Entrances may not be located on façades facing the nearest side lot line, or the rear lot line, unless either lot line abuts an alley or other public right-of-way.

## Quality of Design

Development standards have been crafted to help ensure a proper fit of a backyard cottage within an existing lot and neighborhood. Experience gained from the Demonstration Program for Innovative Housing Design and in southeast Seattle reinforces the notion that one size does not necessarily fit all, and that proper fit can make backyard cottages successful. A combination of standards written to carefully control height and scale relative to lot sizes, and the Seattle Planning Commission's Design Guide (see the Design Guidance section of this report) will help applicants through the process and encourage architectural design that fits in with existing neighborhoods.

## Height

Height limits are based on lot widths to minimize shadows and privacy impacts on existing homes. To ensure that backyard cottages are smaller relative to the height allowed for single-family structures (30 feet plus an additional 5 feet for a pitched roof), a maximum height of 16 feet (or up to 23 feet with a pitched roof), is proposed for lots more than 40 feet in width. This maximum height limit allows for units above garages on wider lots.

On lots between 30 and 40 feet wide, allowed heights are proportional to their width, either 14 or 15 feet, or up to 21 or 22 feet including a pitched roof. Lots less than 30 feet in width are allowed to have backyard cottages, but they must conform to existing height limits for accessory structures (12 feet or up to 15 feet with a pitched roof), and must be a minimum of 4,000 square feet.

## Bulk and Scale

The bulk and scale of a backyard cottage relative to its surroundings are some of the most important factors to help a project successfully fit into a neighborhood. The minimum lot size and the gross floor area limit were developed to help ensure that the size of a backyard cottage is appropriate to the size of the lot, and blends with single-family neighborhood character. Backyard cottages are limited to 800 square feet of above-grade floor area, including attached garages and storage areas. The minimum lot size for a backyard cottage is 4,000 square feet.

## Setbacks

Setbacks maintain space between backyard cottages and surrounding lots. Backyard cottages would not be allowed in the front yard area of a lot. The minimum side yard setback would be 5 feet to the property line; 10 feet on reversed corner lots. A backyard cottage must be set back 5 feet from a rear property line unless it is adjacent to an alley, in which case it may be located at the rear lot line. If the backyard cottage includes a garage with vehicle entrance that faces the alley, the garage portion of the structure may not be located closer than 12 feet of the centerline of the alley.

## Converting Existing Structures

Converting existing accessory structures, such as detached garages, can result in fewer construction impacts and help maintain neighborhood character. Converting existing structures that do not comply with development standards for backyard cottages would be allowed for



*Photo 9: Interior shot of a backyard cottage in Columbia City.*

structures built prior to June 1, 1999, so long as the nonconformity is not increased and minimum Housing and Building Code standards are met.

Many single-family lots have small garages in a back corner at the end of a driveway. These provisions would allow them to be converted, and even added on to, although the height of the structure within the required setbacks could not be higher than what is allowed for accessory structures (12 feet with an additional three feet for a pitched roof). Any conversions that include an addition would not be allowed to exceed floor area, lot coverage, and rear yard lot coverage standards.

## Clarification of Standards

In addition to allowing backyard cottages city-wide, changes to the Land Use Code and the Housing and Building Maintenance Code are proposed. These changes will clarify provisions related to all accessory dwelling units, includ-

ing landlord-tenant just cause eviction requirements, the recording of covenants concerning owner occupancy requirements, and the penalties for unauthorized dwelling units in single-family zones.

**22.206.160 C — Just Cause Eviction:**

Seattle’s code states that if you are renting an ADU or a backyard cottage, the owner’s desire to terminate your tenancy is considered sufficient basis for termination and no other “just cause” is required. Proposed changes would clarify that the just cause eviction exception for accessory dwelling units applies whether it is the principal home or the accessory dwelling unit that is rented.

**23.44.041 — Accessory Dwelling Units:**

Minor terminology changes are proposed and the owner occupancy requirements are re-written to clarify that owners must occupy either the accessory dwelling unit or the principal home as their permanent residence for six months or more out of each calendar year. The proposed changes also clarify that owners must sign, and DPD must record, a restrictive covenant that runs with the land and is binding on future owners. This will better inform citizens who purchase property with an accessory dwelling unit of the owner occupancy requirements, and eliminates the need for subsequent owners to file owner occupancy certificates with the City. A provision has been added for release of a recorded covenant upon removal of an accessory dwelling unit.

**23.44.041 — Backyard Cottage Standards:**

Clarifies that a five-foot setback from a property line is now required for all new detached accessory dwelling units. This was Council’s original intent and the existing code language is not clear.

**23.90.018 and 23.90.019 — Enforcement:**

Civil enforcement proceedings and penalties for unauthorized accessory dwelling units are proposed to be clarified to apply a civil penalty for unauthorized dwelling units. There is no proposed increase in the civil penalty, but a provision for reduction of the penalty has been dropped, so that the way penalties are assessed is consistent with other types of Land Use Code violations.



Photo 10: Backyard cottage in Rainier Beach.



The following table, excerpted and summarized from the Land Use Code, outlines the standards currently in place for southeast Seattle, and proposed for the remainder of the city’s single-family zones.

<b>Table A: Development Standards</b>				
<b>Minimum Lot Size</b>	4,000 square feet			
<b>Minimum Lot Width</b>	25 feet			
<b>Minimum Lot Depth</b>	70 feet <sup>1</sup>			
<b>Maximum Total Lot Coverage (Including Main Structure)</b>	Lots less than 5,000 sq. ft: 1,000 sq. ft + 15% of lot area			
	Lots 5,000 sq. ft. or more: 35% of lot area			
<b>Maximum Rear Yard Coverage</b>	40% of the area required for the rear yard.			
<b>Maximum Gross Floor Area</b>	800 square feet, including garage or storage area. <sup>2</sup>			
<b>Front Yard</b>	A detached accessory dwelling unit may not be located within the required front yard.			
<b>Minimum Side Yard</b>	5 feet <sup>3</sup>			
<b>Minimum Rear Yard</b>	A detached accessory dwelling unit may be located within a required rear yard when it is not within 5 feet of any lot line, except where a lot line is abutting an alley, in which case a detached accessory dwelling unit may be located at the lot line. <sup>4</sup>			
<b>Location of Entry</b>	Entrances to detached accessory dwelling units may not be located on facades facing the nearest side lot line or the rear lot line unless the nearest side lot line or rear lot line abuts an alley or other public right-of-way.			
<b>Maximum Height Limits<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>Lot Width (feet)</b>			
	<b>Less than 30</b>	<b>30-35</b>	<b>36-40</b>	<b>Greater than 40</b>
<b>Maximum Base Height (feet)</b>	12	14	15	16
<b>Maximum Roof Pitch Height (feet)</b>	15	21	22	23
<b>Maximum Shed or Butterfly Roof Pitch Height (feet)</b>	15	18	19	20

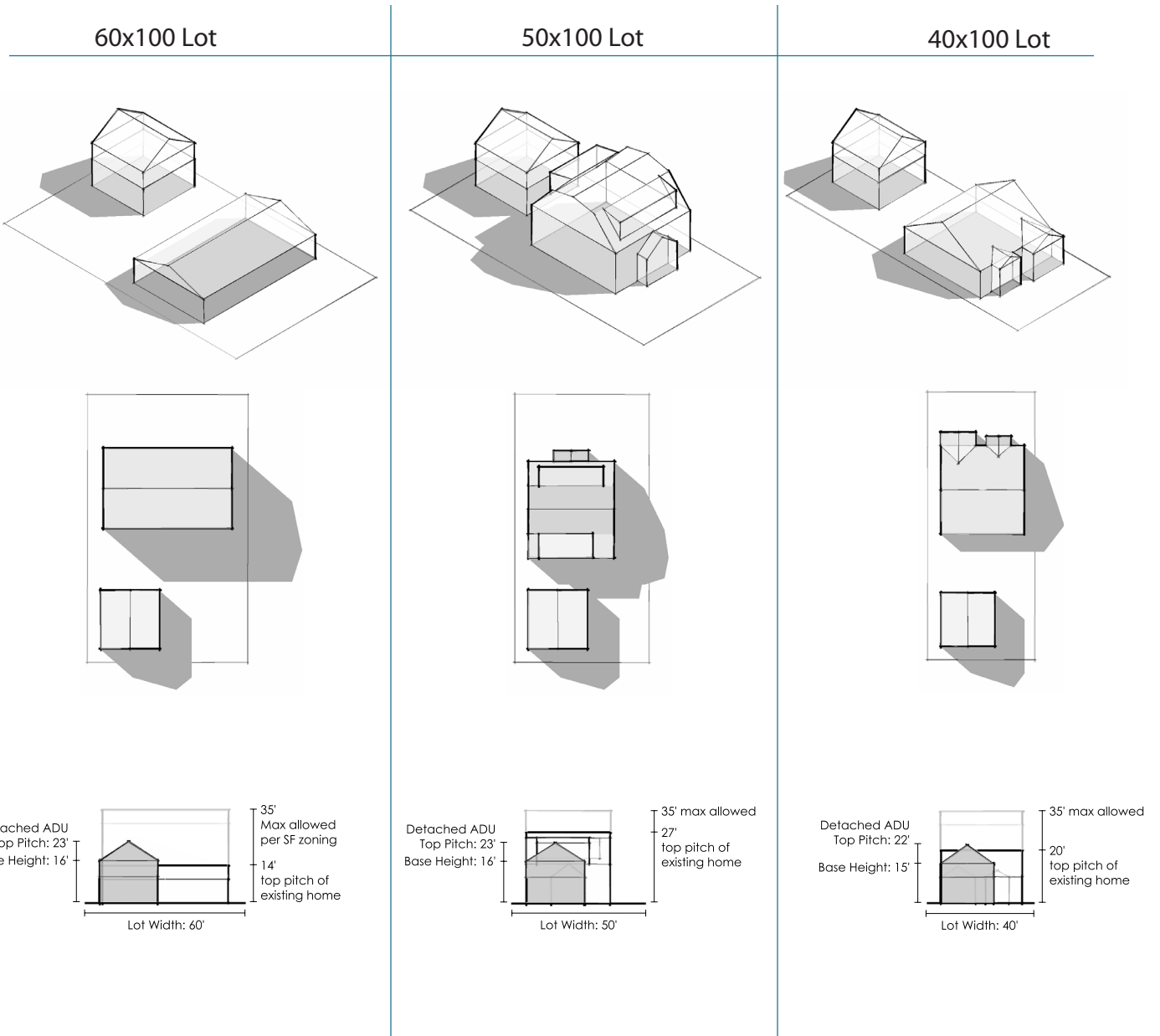
Footnotes:

Exceptions to the standards contained in the chart are permitted pursuant to 23.44.041B2, when converting existing nonconforming structures.

1. For lots that do not meet the lot depth requirement, but have a greater width than depth and an area greater than 5,000 square feet, a detached accessory dwelling unit is permitted, provided the detached accessory dwelling unit is not located in a required yard.
2. Areas below grade are exempt from the calculation of gross floor area.
3. In the case of a reversed corner lot, the key lot of which is in a single-family zone, the width of the side yard on the street of the reversed corner lot shall be not less than ten feet.
4. When the rear lot line is adjacent to an alley and a detached accessory dwelling unit includes a garage with a vehicle entrance that faces the alley, the garage portion of the structure may not be located within 12 feet of the centerline of the alley.
5. Features such as chimneys, antennas, and flagpoles may extend up to four feet above the maximum allowed height. The additional height for sloped lots permitted by 23.44.012B does not apply to backyard cottages.

# Backyard Cottage Development Scenarios

These diagrams illustrate how the proposed development standards for backyard cottages could work on a variety of lot sizes in Seattle.



# Neighborhood and Comprehensive Plan Goals

This proposal advances several of the City’s Comprehensive Plan goals and policies in the Land Use, Housing, and Neighborhood Plan elements. Many neighborhood plans contain goals and policies that encourage innovative and affordable housing types, while maintaining the character of existing single-family neighborhoods. Some plans, like the following four examples, specifically call for ADUs or cottages:

## Greenwood/Phinney

G/PR-PI I Support the development of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) as a means to accommodate planned housing growth.

## University Community Urban Center

UC-PI5 Employ a variety of housing types and development strategies to effectively provide for identified needs, including existing housing preservation, code enforcement, accessory units, new ground-related housing, and mixed-use midrise residential development.

## Wallingford

W-PI4 Encourage the development of Accessory Dwelling Units in the community as a housing affordability strategy.

## Westwood

W/HP-P2I Encourage quality design in townhouses, cottage houses, and accessory dwelling units.

## Comprehensive Plan Land Use Goals:

**LUG2** Foster neighborhoods in which current and future residents and business owners will

want to live, shop, work and locate their businesses. Provide for a range of housing types and commercial and industrial spaces in order to accommodate a broad range of families and individuals, income groups, and businesses.

**LUG10** Provide for different intensities of single-family areas to reflect differences in the existing and desired character of single-family areas across the city. Allow development that is generally consistent with the levels of infrastructure development and environmental conditions in each area. Include opportunities for low-cost subsidized housing in single-family areas.

## Comprehensive Plan goals for Single Family Areas:

**LUG8** Preserve and protect low-density, single-family neighborhoods that provide opportunities for home-ownership, that are attractive to households with children and other residents, that provide residents with privacy and open spaces immediately accessible to residents, and where the amount of impervious surface can be limited.

**LUG9** Preserve the character of single-family residential areas and discourage the demolition of single-family residences and displacement of residents, in a way that encourages rehabilitation and provides housing opportunities throughout the city. The character of single-family areas includes use, development, and density characteristics.



## Comprehensive Plan Housing Goals:

**HG1** Accommodate 47,000 additional households over the 20 years covered by the Comprehensive Plan.

**HG4** Achieve a mix of housing types attractive and affordable to a diversity of ages, incomes, household types, household sizes, live/work situations and cultural backgrounds.

**HG16** Achieve a distribution of household incomes in urban centers and urban villages similar to the distribution of incomes found citywide.

The proposal also supports the 2005-2008 Housing Consolidated Plan strategies by assisting homeowners with accessory dwelling units, helping to produce affordable rental housing, and encouraging private affordable rental housing.

## Urban Village Element Goals:

**UVG2** Respect Seattle's human scale, history, aesthetics, natural environment, and sense of community identity as the city changes.

**UVG9** Use limited land resources more efficiently and pursue a development pattern that is more economically sound, by encouraging infill development on vacant and underutilized sites, particularly within urban villages.

**UVG16** Encourage development of ground-related housing, which is attractive to many residents including families with children, including townhouses, duplexes, triplexes, ground-related apartments, small cottages, accessory units, and single-family homes.



*Photo 11: Backyard cottage above an existing garage in Genesee.*

# Design Guidance

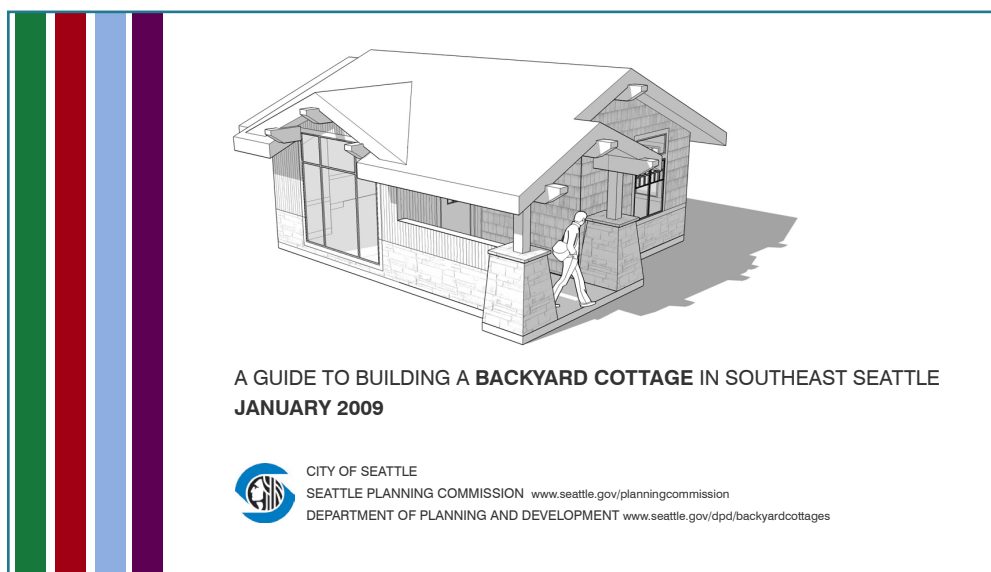
Greater ADU development, including backyard cottages, is a home ownership strategy identified in the Seattle Planning Commission's housing strategy issued in February, 2008: *Affordable Housing Action Agenda*, located at: [www.seattle.gov/planningcommission](http://www.seattle.gov/planningcommission).

To help homeowners decide whether developing a backyard cottage is right for them, the Seattle Planning Commission, in conjunction with DPD has developed *A Guide to Building a Backyard Cottage in Southeast Seattle*. The guide includes important design considerations to help promote attractive structures that are compatible with the houses that share their lots and the neighborhood as a whole. Topics include:

- Site Planning.
- Designing your backyard cottage, including design features such as green building and universal design<sup>1</sup>.
- Permitting your backyard cottage.

- Tips for working with building professionals.
- Estimating costs for building a backyard cottage.
- Renting your backyard cottage.

The Seattle Planning Commission has played an important role in developing backyard cottage policy. The idea to produce a design guide grew out of a suggestion from a public focus group for the *2003 Seattle Housing Choices Report*, which recognized the need to offer a design tool for the general public to use. Once legislation has passed allowing backyard cottages citywide, the guide will be updated to cover all of Seattle. The guide will be available on-line, at DPD's Public Resource Center, and at local libraries and neighborhood service centers.



1. “Universal design” is term used to describe the concept of designing all products and the built environment to be aesthetic and usable to the greatest extent possible by everyone, regardless of their age, ability, or status in life. (The Center for Universal Design, [www.design.ncsu.edu](http://www.design.ncsu.edu))

# Notes



**For more information, contact Andrea Petzel at  
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*[www.seattle.gov/dpd/backyardcottages](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/backyardcottages)*