



Backyard Cottages

Backyard Cottages Preliminary Survey Findings from Owners

Affordability in housing is one of the biggest issues we face in Seattle today. The City of Seattle has identified the need for more housing at prices accessible to people at all levels of income, both for homeowners and renters.

- 1. Backyard cottages, or Detached Accessory Dwelling Units (DADUs,) have the potential to provide a significant amount of affordable housing.**

If just 5% of eligible lots in the city build DADUs it would create about 4,000 housing units.

- 2. Backyard cottage owners love the extra space for personal use as well as the added financial boost.**

In a recent survey of backyard cottage owners conducted by DPD, backyard cottage owners extol the additional space, which is ideal for family members, hosting guests, to use as a working space, and/or create long-term rental income.

- 3. There are relatively few backyard cottages in Seattle right now. The Seattle City Council is exploring a menu of options to make it easier for homeowners to build more of them.**

DADUs have been allowed citywide since 2010. Since then, about 159 have been built. There are a menu of options that would make it easier to create more of them, such as changing regulations, creating preapproved permits and plans and implementing a waiver for permitting fees.



SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL



**SEATTLE DEPARTMENT of
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT**

What is a Backyard Cottage?

A Backyard Cottage is a small residential structure sharing the same lot as a house, but self-contained and physically separate from the primary house. In the Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) zoning provision, Backyard Cottages are referred to as "Accessory Dwelling Units, detached." They are also sometimes referred to as detached accessory dwelling units, granny flats, mother-in-law apartments, and carriage houses. Backyard cottages generally include a living room, sleeping area,

kitchen, and bathroom and have a lockable entrance door. On some lots, a backyard cottage may be located in a side yard.

Backyard Cottages At a Glance

Year allowed citywide:
DADUs - 2010

Current quantity in Seattle:
DADUs - 159 (as of 12/14)

The average Seattle DADU:
Construction cost - \$55,000
Building permit cost - \$1,950
Size - 632 sqft
Lot size - 6,770 sqft
Structure height - 18.25 ft
Alley access: 42%



Backyard Cottage in Ballard

Personal Stories

"My backyard cottage is for my Mom, who at 80 years old needs to be close but is not ready for assisted living."

"Our original intent was a glorified garage with electrical and plumbing, as a short-term place for friends to stay. The permitting process forced us to expand the project into a more traditional living space. Now that it is a full blown space (kitchen with range, washer/dryer, loft etc.) we love the rental (long-term tenant) income."

"My neighbors really like the cottage and often stop by to say so, or ask how they might build one... One reason it worked well for me is that I already have a very small house (650sf) and adding the cottage does not overwhelm the space."

"I was looking for two houses on one lot when I bought this house. I needed the second income as a single woman."



Backyard Cottages: Benefits for Homeowners

In March 2015, DPD sent surveys to owners of all 159 backyard cottages in Seattle, with 37% responding. The most popular reasons for building a backyard cottage were:

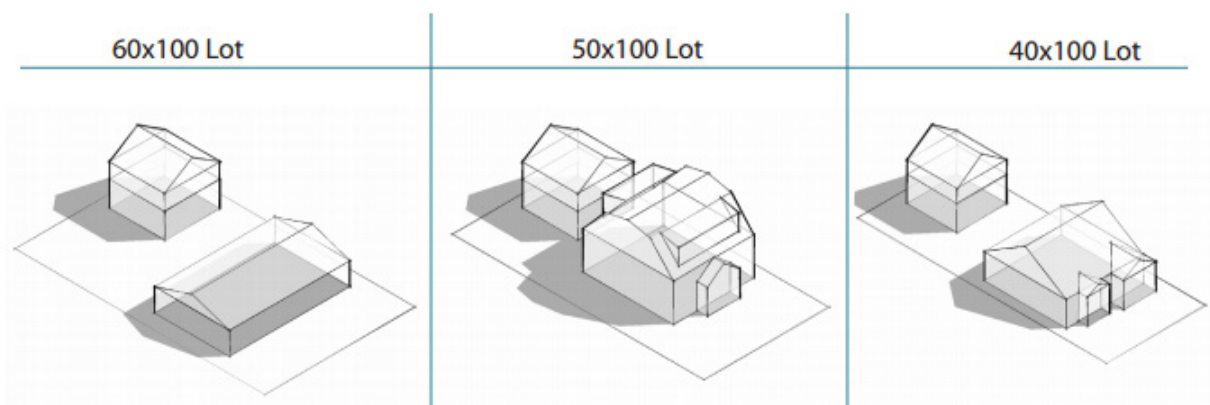
- 1. Housing for family members or extended family members**
(77% said it was important)
- 2. Accommodation for occasional house guests or visitors**
(68% said it was important)
- 3. Additional usable space such as studio, office, or activity space**
(63% said it was important)
- 4. Long-term rental income**
(60% said it was important)



Backyard Cottages: Barriers

In the same survey, the following were cited as the largest barriers to creating backyard cottages:

- 1. Development regulations such as setbacks, height limits and lot coverage limits**
(70% said it was a barrier)
- 2. The basic cost of construction (aside from permits and design fees)**
(65% said it was a barrier)
- 3. The cost of utility connections**
(54% said it was a barrier)
- 4. The requirement of an on-site parking space**
(52% said it was a barrier)



Examples of site configurations for backyard cottages

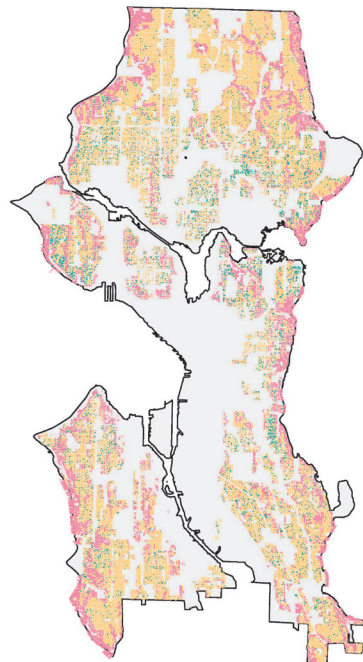


Backyard Cottages: Scalable, Flexible & Affordable

“If just 5% of eligible lots in the city build backyard cottages it would provide about 4,000 housing units.”

Because of their small scale, Backyard Cottages can create attractive and affordable rental opportunities for Seattle residents with relative little impact on other residents. They can provide greater financial flexibility for homeowners by letting them collect rent for a portion of their existing property or help accommodate larger or multigenerational families. Backyard Cottages also offer a new housing type to Seattle that is desirable, and at a smaller scale with other homes in single-family neighborhoods.

Backyard Cottages provide a surprising number of benefits to communities, homeowners, and renters. Although much of the attention given to Backyard Cottages revolves around their potential for increasing the supply of affordable housing opportunities, Backyard Cottages may also help to address other social issues, particularly those relating to housing options for the growing elderly population.



Seattle currently has 127,312 single family lots. Of those, 78,318 are estimated to be eligible for backyard cottages.

About 0.25% of those have DADUs today. An increase to 5%, a net gain of 4.75%, it would provide about 4,000 housing units.

The map to the left highlights lots in yellow that are estimated to be eligible to build backyard cottages.

- Constrained: Lot Coverage
- Constrained: Environmental
- 'Eligible'

Contact

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Next Steps

There are a menu of potential options to explore, including but not limited to:

- Remove code barriers to make it easier to construct additional backyard cottages, such as adjusting the parking requirement, ownership requirement, and others.
- Create preapproved permits and plans to lower construction costs, including a call to architects to create great modular designs.
- Implement a clemency program.
- Conduct outreach to homeowners.