

Seattle Permits

— part of a multi-departmental City of Seattle series on getting a permit

Establishing a Detached Accessory Dwelling Unit (DADU)

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This Tip explains how to establish a Detached Accessory Dwelling Unit (DADU), also known as a backyard cottage, or mother-in-law unit.

DADUs are not permitted on lots in shoreline districts.

Please see Tip 116A, *Establishing an Attached Accessory Dwelling Unit (AADU)*, for rules and information about AADUs.

You will need to pay a King County capacity charge when you construct a DADU. You will get your capacity charge bill from King County about three months or more after we report your sewer connection. King County will send you a bill every 3 months for 15 years, or until the balance of your property's account is paid. You may pay the remaining balance in one lump sum at a discount any time during that 15-year period.

For more information, or to contact the King County Wastewater Division directly, go to www.kingcounty.gov/services/environment/wastewater/capacity-charge/faq.aspx.

What is a DADU?

A DADU is a type of accessory dwelling unit consisting of a room or set of rooms designed and established by permit to be a separate dwelling unit. DADUs share a lot with a single-family home in SF5000, SF7200, and SF9600 zones, any principal unit in an RSL zone, or with a single-family home, rowhouse or townhouse in a lowrise zone.

DADUs include living, sleeping, kitchen and bathroom facilities and have a lockable entrance door.

What are the requirements to establish a DADU?

In all eligible zones, you can establish a DADU only if the following criteria are met:

- The DADU must meet all the Seattle residential, building, stormwater, side sewer, mechanical, electrical, and energy code requirements that apply to single-family dwellings.
- If converting a structure to a DADU, you must fully comply with the Seattle Energy Code.
- A DADU is not an accessory structure for the application of the Seattle residential and building codes.
- In rooms that were built as sleeping rooms or that were converted or established by permit as sleeping rooms after Aug. 10, 1972, there must be at least one operable window or exterior door approved for emergency escape and rescue openings. You must be able to open the window or door from the inside. All emergency escape windows must have an unobstructed opening of at least 5.7 square feet (openings that are at-grade and on the floor are allowed to be 5 square feet). The window's usable opening must be at least 24 inches tall and at least 20 inches wide. The escape window must have a finished sill that is not more than 44 inches above the floor. You can measure the sill height from the top of a constructed step that extends the width of the window, as long as the riser is no more than 8 inches and the tread is no less than 9 inches.
- The DADU must have heating controls separate from those in the primary dwelling unit. Electrical circuit breakers, fuses, and a heat source may be located in the dwelling unit that they serve, or be located in common areas accessible to all residents.
- You are required to have smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms.

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In single-family and lowrise zones, you can establish a DADU only if these additional criteria are met:

- If there is one accessory dwelling unit (1 AADU or 1 DADU), the total number of residents in both the primary dwelling unit and the accessory dwelling units cannot exceed eight people, unless all residents of both units are related to each other. For SF zoned lots with two accessory dwelling units (2 AADUs or 1 AADU and 1 DADU), the total number of unrelated residents cannot exceed 12 people.
- Parking is not required for any accessory dwelling unit. However, you cannot remove any existing, required off-street parking space(s) to build a DADU, unless you replace the parking space(s) somewhere else on the lot, in conformance with the Code.

In single-family zones, you can establish a DADU only if these additional criteria are met:

- The lot is at least 3,200 square feet.
- The DADU cannot exceed 1,000 gross square feet, excluding garage areas, storage areas accessed from the exterior, porches and covered decks less than 25 square feet in area, and gross floor area below grade. Up to 35 square feet can be exempt if designed for bicycle parking.
- Accessory structures, including DADUs, cannot exceed 40 percent of the required rear yard area. However, a DADU may cover an additional 20 percent of the required rear yard in order to protect trees, provided that the DADU 1) does not remove any exceptional trees and 2) does not remove any trees over 2 feet in diameters as measured 4.5 feet above the ground.
- In SF5000, SF7200 and SF9600 zones, lots may have up to two accessory dwelling units (either 2 AADUs or 1 AADU and 1 DADU). The second unit must meet the criteria of SMC subsection 23.44.041.A.2 to either 1) meet green building standards or 2) be an affordable unit reserved for income-eligible households.
- The entrances to the DADU may face the nearest side lot line or the rear lot line if they are 10 feet from the property line unless there is an alley abutting on that side of the lot.
- Other development standards for DADUs in single-family zones can be found in SMC subsection 23.44.041.C.

In lowrise zones, you can establish a DADU for row-houses and townhouses when:

- The DADU is no more than 650 square feet
- Each principal unit may have no more than one accessory dwelling unit (1 AADU or 1 DADU)

- The floor area of the DADU is no more than 40 percent of the total floor area on the lot that is used for residential purposes, excluding garages, storage sheds, and other non-habitable spaces.
- Exterior stairs to a DADU may not be more than 4 feet tall, except if the stairs serve a unit above a garage.
- Other requirements for accessory dwelling units in lowrise zones can be found in SMC subsection 23.45.545.I.

Are there any exceptions to these requirements?

Development Standards—Except for front yard requirements in single family zones, the SDCI Director may allow exceptions to development standards for DADUs to allow conversion of existing structures. Table A SMC 23.44.041.Footnote 1 and SMC Subsection 23.44,041.C.2 describes the wide range of standards that may be excepted from for a conversion.

Plan to have internet service to the DADU?

If you want to have an internet service connection to your DADU, contact your internet service provider (ISP) early in your planning process. This provides time for ISP permitting and construction coordination and avoids possible delays in having connectivity once the cottage is complete. For more information see Seattle IT Tip 6000, [ENSURING BROADBAND SERVICE ACCESS FOR MULTIPLE-DWELLING-UNIT \(MDU\) DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS](#).

What are the process, cost and submittal requirements for establishing a unit?

You may visit us in person for coaching in our Applicant Services Center (ASC) if you need special assistance or have specific questions about your proposal.

Location:

Seattle Municipal Tower
20th floor
700 Fifth Ave.

Hours:

M-W-F: 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Tu and Th: 10:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Step 1: To begin the process to establish a DADU, you must first prepare a site plan and submit a Building & Land Use Pre-Application through the Seattle Services Portal at <https://cosaccela.seattle.gov/Portal/>. You will need to create an account.

Once we receive your application, we will confirm the legal description and address of your property and assign you a record number (in the format of XXXXXX-CN). We will notify you if your project requires a Pre-Application Site Visit.

Step 2: Schedule an intake appointment using your Seattle Services Portal account. The next available appointment may be 2-4 months out.

Step 3: Prepare your application drawings and other documents:

- Prepare the detailed site plan and floor plans (for both the main house and the DADU), and energy calculations.
- Prepare exterior elevation drawings if you are building a new structure or making changes to the building envelope.
- Prepare full structural plans, including framing plans, foundation plans, sections, etc., if you are building a new structure or an addition.
- Plans must clearly identify:
 - The number of ADUs proposed
 - Is AADU part of new or existing accessory structure
 - The size of the AADU
 - The total lot coverage for the site
 - Number of parking spaces provided for the ADUs (if any)
- Note that you will need to convert any paper plans and documents into digital files (pdfs).

Your plans must clearly identify where you are doing new work to create the DADU. For information on plan requirements, see Tip 103, *Site Plan Requirements*, Tip 106, *General Standards for Plans and Drawings*, Tip 303, *Applicant Responsibilities and Plan Requirements for Single Family and Two-Unit Dwelling Units*, and Tip 303A, *Common Seattle Residential Code Requirements*.

Step 4: Upload all of these documents (as digital files) to the record number given to your project. Be sure to hit the “Submit” button. Note that if they are all uploaded well ahead of your appointment, your appointment will likely be moved up.

After your intake appointment, you must pay your permit intake fee and a plan review fee based on the value of the work to be done.

After the initial fees are paid, we will review your permit application and plans to make sure they conform with City of Seattle codes. We will notify you if you need to make corrections and to inform you of our decisions on any waiver requests. Do not assume that your waiver request will be granted. If you need to make corrections, you will see the correction letters in your Portal. You will need to upload the corrected plans and any requested information.

As you build your accessory unit, you must schedule your required inspections online. When your project is complete, request a final inspection. We will issue your permit once we approve your plans. The permit and approved plans will be in your Seattle Services Portal, for you to download, print, and have available on the site.

There won't be a public comment period or an appeal opportunity to the Hearing Examiner or City Council.

You are responsible for complying with all applicable code and rule requirements, whether or not they are described in this Tip. As you build your DADU, you must request inspections either through your Portal or by calling us at (206) 684-8900. When your project is complete, contact your inspector and request a final inspection. Once we give you the final inspection approval, a tenant may occupy the accessory unit.

What other permits are required?

You will need a separate electrical permit from us for any electrical work. Generally, electrical circuits must be altered when you establish an DADU. Unless the property owner is performing all electrical work, the electrical contractor must apply for the electrical permit. Call (206) 684-5383 for electrical code information and assistance.

If you are doing any plumbing work, you will need a plumbing permit from the Seattle/King County Health Department. For information on plumbing permits, call (206) 263-9566 or visit www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/environmental-health/piping/plumbing/applications/permit-issuance.aspx.

If you are connecting to an existing side sewer, you might be required to get a side sewer permit. For more information about side sewers, call (206) 684-5362 or email sidesewerinfo@seattle.gov.

What happens when a lot with an accessory dwelling unit is sold?

If the new owner chooses to keep the DADU a permit is not required from SDCI.

If the new owner chooses to remove the DADU, the owner will have to get a permit to remove the features that make it a separate unit.

What if a unit is created without a permit?

If we receive a complaint about an illegal accessory dwelling unit, we may inspect the unit and send the owner a Notice of Violation. We will require the owner to legalize the unit or remove the features that make it a separate accessory unit. In addition, the owner may be subject to penalties as provided in Seattle Municipal Code Section 23.90.018, 23.90.019, and 23.90.020 of the Seattle Land Use Code. Tenants that are displaced when an illegal unit is removed may be entitled to relocation assistance paid by the owner. See SMC 22.206.160C.1.j.

How can you learn more about establishing an attached accessory dwelling unit?

Visit www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits/common-projects/accessory-dwelling-units to learn more or submit your question about establishing an accessory dwelling unit and similar items to our Building and Land Use Q&A tool at www.seattle.gov/sdci/Questions. We usually respond to questions in 1-2 days.

Additional Resources

For more information, see Tip 606, *Illegal Dwelling Units*; SDCI's Director's Rule 7-83, Determining the Existence of a Dwelling Unit for Purposes of Code Enforcement; and Director's Rule 10-95, Attached vs. Detached as Applied to Accessory Structures and Uses.

Access to Information

Links to electronic versions of SDCI Tips, Director's Rules, and the Seattle Municipal Code are available on the "Resources" and "Codes" pages of our website at www.seattle.gov/sdci. Paper copies of these documents, as well as additional regulations mentioned in this Tip, are available from our Public Resource Center, located on the 20th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower at 700 Fifth Ave. in downtown Seattle, (206) 684-8467.